



# Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 37 – ISSUE 2 MARCH-APRIL 2009

NEWSLETTER

## STILL SOME EXCITING FINDS

### CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DOWN A BIT

On January 3, 2009, fifty-one Thorn Creek Audubon Society volunteers took part in the Christmas Bird Count, a 100-year-old tradition that helps scientists determine the status of the birds in our environment. Thirty-three of those volunteers, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists, braved a cold, windy day in the field, while 17 more counted the number of birds they saw at their feeders.

When the final tally was compiled, the 51 birders saw a total of 7,330 birds representing 58 species. This was somewhat lower than the tally last year of 7,808 birds, although only one more species, a total of 59, was spotted in 2008. Several of the 13 teams reported a disappointing number of sightings, as did some of the feeder watchers.

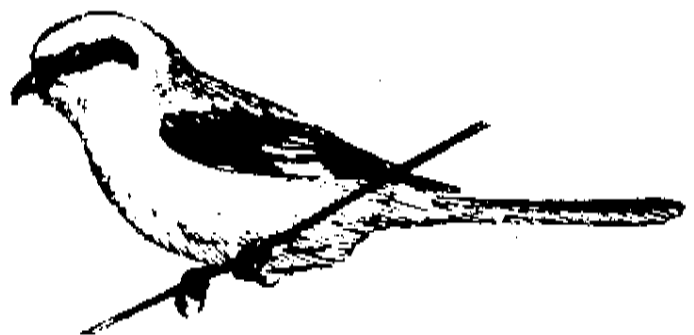
Marlys Oosting, a team leader who thought the count was down somewhat, believes weather conditions had something to do with it. "I think overall because of the cold snap and a lot of snow cover the birds might have left and gone a little farther south. They have to move on to find food. The count might be up farther south in Illinois" she said. Al Thomas also thought the birds were fewer because the cold weather and the snow cover made it difficult to find food.

In spite of disappointing numbers, some spotters had exciting finds. Jim Spiller said he and wife Terrie hadn't seen much of anything that day. "Then Terrie said, 'What's that bird?' and we saw a flock of eight White-winged Crossbills posing for us. That made our day."

Aura Duke spotted a Northern Shrike in an alley near Beecher. The "Butcher Bird" was perched high in a tree in an area where there were bird feeders, waiting for a chance to pick off a meal. She said a few other shrikes had been reported in the Crete-Beecher area this year, but they are not often seen here.

The largest number of birds seen were Canada Geese, 2,983 of them. Hawks were out in force, with 50 Red-tails, 14 Cooper's, 4 Sharp-shinned, and 1 Rough-legged, along with 8 Northern Harriers and 15 American Kestrels. One Merlin was also reported.

Each of the citizen-scientists who annually braves snow, wind or rain to take part in the Christmas Bird count makes a contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation action.



A Northern Shrike, an uncommon sighting here, was seen on the Christmas Bird Count.

**DON'T FORGET AUDUBON'S ANNUAL DINNER MARCH 31**

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## **SPRING PROGRAMS**

**Wednesday, March 4, 7 p.m.**

Park Forest Library  
**THE KANKAKEE SANDS**  
 Marianne Hahn

"It's hard to believe it's in Illinois," Hahn says of the sand ecosystem of Kankakee and Iroquois County in our state. In a PowerPoint presentation, she will describe the ecosystem, tell how the sand got there, and explain the unique flora and fauna that make the Kankakee Sands so special. Hahn is a past president of Thorn Creek Audubon Society and owns Sweet Fern Savanna Land and Water Reserve in Kankakee County. She is president of Friends of the Kankakee, an all-volunteer organization that is acquiring natural areas in the Kankakee Sands to assure their preservation.

**Tuesday, March 31, 6:30 p.m.**

**AUDUBON ANNUAL DINNER**  
**16 DAYS IN ALASKA OUR WAY**  
 Joe and Marlene Nowak  
**SEE STORY AND COUPON ON PAGE 3**

### **PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF PLACE**

Please note that the May program will NOT be held at the Park Forest Library. The library is doing remodeling and the room we use will not be available later this spring or next fall. Location for next fall's meetings will be announced in a future newsletter and on the website.

**Wednesday, May 6, 7 p.m.**

Freedom Hall, Johnson Room, upstairs  
**NATIVE TREES OF THE CALUMET REGION AND  
 THEIR BENEFITS TO WILDLIFE**

Jennifer and Bill Tobin, Master Gardeners  
 This will be a PowerPoint presentation about trees native specifically to the four counties of Cook and Lake in Illinois and Porter and

LaPorte in Indiana, along with the insects, birds and mammals that they feed and shelter. The 70 or so trees will include conifers, maples, oaks, birches, cherries, elms and many others.

Bill became a Master Gardener in 2001 under the aegis of Purdue University Extension Service in 2001, and Jennifer took University of Illinois Extension Master Gardener classes and was certified in 2002. Together they have worked on Habitat for Humanity landscaping projects and assisted with plantings at the Federal Court House in Hammond, Indiana. They are tour guides at the Lurie Garden in Chicago's Millennium Park and appeared in a how-to video produced by the *Daily Southtown* on vermicomposting accessible on the web.

Bill is a Chicagoland native and Jennifer is a transplant from Kent, "the Garden of England." Vicki Crosley will be the liaison with Cook County (South) Master Gardeners.

### **TCAS TO PARTICIPATE IN NATURE CENTER EARTH DAY**

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society will be participating in the Thorn Creek Nature Center's 2009 Earth Day Celebration on April 19. Theme for this year is "Renew the Earth," with a focus on habitat restoration. Dick Riner, Steward of Bartel Grasslands, will present an exhibit to explain the changes that have restored habitat for a number of rapidly declining ground-nesting birds, such as Bobolinks, Meadowlarks and Henslow Sparrows.

The celebration, set from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. at the Nature Center at 247 Monee Road, will include hikes and presentations on habitat restoration. As part of the event, the Nature Center is installing a butterfly garden, and the public is invited to help in the beginning stages, then return later to install more plants.

## "SEE ALASKA" VIA SLIDE SHOW AT TCAS ANNUAL DINNER

"Sixteen Days in Alaska Our Way" is the title of the slide program that Joe and Marlene Nowak will present at the Thorn Creek Audubon Society's annual dinner on March 31. The way Joe and Marlene and their friends chose to see Alaska was to rent a 30-foot RV to see and photograph the state.

They visited Anchorage, Denali National Preserve, Seward and Homer. They also took a nine-hour cruise where they saw Humpback Whales, Puffins, Auks and other birds. A cow moose and her calf will also be featured on many of the beautiful slides Joe and Marlene will show us.

The Nowaks have a nature photography business in South Holland and will have a display of photographs for sale.

As in the past the dinner will be held at Faith United Protestant Church of Park Forest at 6:30 p.m. It is open to everyone, with tickets at \$15 for adults and \$10 for students. The deadline for receiving ticket orders is March 27. Tickets can be ordered by using the coupon below or by calling Charles Habecker, program chair (708) 747-6061 or Judy Gleitsman (708) 747-1745. Tickets will also be sold at the March 4 Audubon meeting at the Park Forest library.

Come and enjoy an excellent program, good food, and being with friends. The annual dinner is being held the last day in March because the church could not be booked for April 1; the dinner serves as the April meeting.

*Charles Habecker*

### NEW TCAS MEMBERS ALWAYS WELCOME

New members are always welcome in the Thorn Creek Audubon Society. Membership in the local chapter is \$15 a year; membership in the National Audubon Society is \$20 yearly. National Audubon Society members receive *Audubon* magazine and the Thorn Creek Audubon newsletter. Those who join the local chapter receive only the newsletter. A portion of dues paid to National Audubon return to the local chapter; all dues paid by local chapter members only stay in the local area.

For membership information or to join call membership chair Sue Putnam at 747-1986.

Any members receiving two newsletters are asked to call and tell Sue.

## THORN CREEK AUDUBON SOCIETY ANNUAL DINNER

TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2009, 6:30 P.M.

FAITH UNITED PROTESTANT CHURCH, PARK FOREST, ILLINOIS

Number of adults attending at \$15 per person \_\_\_\_\_

Number of students and children attending at \$10 each \_\_\_\_\_

Total amount enclosed \_\_\_\_\_

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City-State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

The deadline for receiving ticket orders is March 27. Make your checks payable to Thorn Creek Audubon Society and mail to Charles Habecker at 2811 Western Ave., Park Forest, IL 60466, or to Judy Gleitsman, 402 Waterford Court, C 1, Olympia Fields, IL 60461. You may also call Habecker at 747-6061, or Gleitsman at 748-1745. Tickets will also be sold at the March 4 Audubon meeting.

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## SPRING BIRD COUNT SET FOR MAY 9

The Spring Bird Count is an important source of data in the study of avian populations, migration patterns, and trends in North America. Plans are underway for TCAS' participation in this statewide event. Volunteers are needed, some willing to hike while counting birds outdoors and others tallying the birds at feeders. Compared with the Christmas count, which covers a circle 14 miles in diameter, the spring count encompasses a much larger area, since it is tabulated by counties. Parties will be assigned to cover specific territories in eastern Will County, the rest of the county being canvassed by members of Will County Audubon in the Joliet region.

A potluck supper will be held at 6 p.m. Monday, May 11 at the Environmental Learning Center in Mokena, after which the results of the count will be compiled. To participate, call Al Thomas at 708-957-9847 or Aura Duke at 708-748-6407.

### TREES REMOVED FROM NEW WETLAND SITE

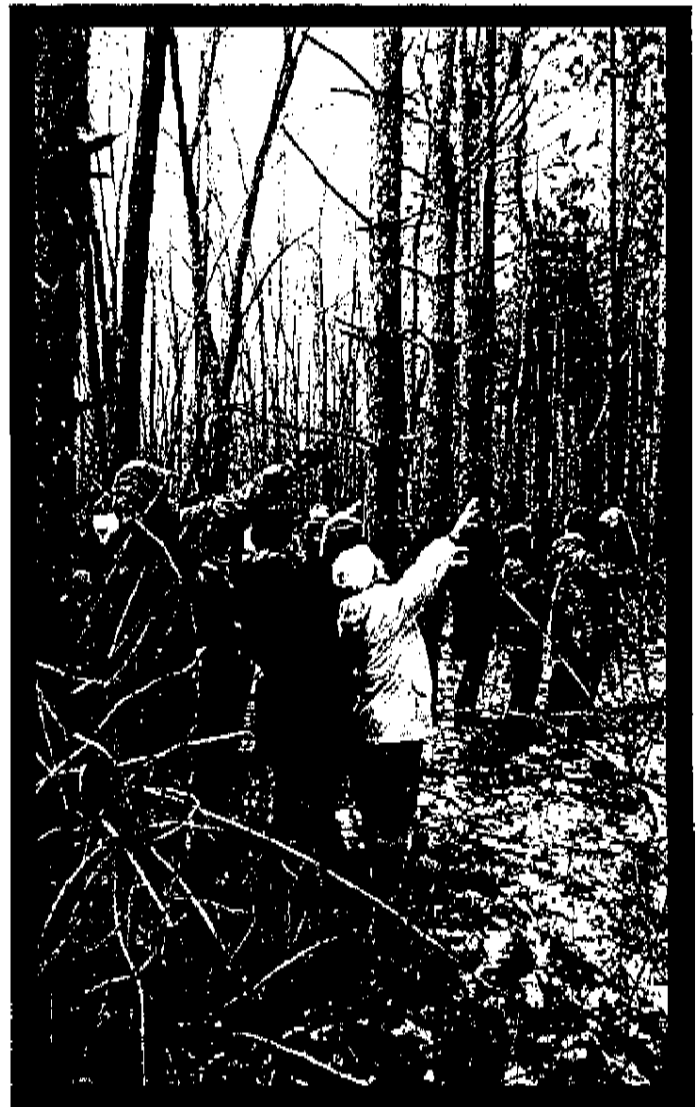
Another step in the restoration of the Tinley Creek Preserve of the Cook County Forest Preserve north of the Bartell Grassland has been completed. The trees have been removed from the north end of Bartel and the south end of the model airplane field.

The next step will be planting a cover crop to keep invasive plants to a minimum. At another stage seeding and plugging of native plants will be done by contractors, as the site is too large to be covered by volunteers, according to Bartel Steward Dick Riner. The Bartel Grasslands will remain grasslands to provide nesting sites for threatened birds.

The final aim of the project is to restore wetlands to compensate for those that were destroyed when building the new O'Hare Airport runway. Money for the project comes from the U. S. Corps of Engineers through Open Lands/CorLands.

### MEMORIAL BENCH STOLEN FROM BARTEL GRASSLANDS

A bench at the Bartel Grasslands site that was a memorial to the late Joe Stanton has been removed. The bench was on the berm overlooking the grasslands. Made of poured concrete and a combination of recycled materials, it was put up about a year ago in Joe's honor. At this time there is no clue to its whereabouts. Joe's companion Wannetta Elliott is very upset at the loss of the memorial, according to her friends.



Excited birders point to one of the owls Wannetta Elliott found for them on a recent field trip. Four Long-eared Owls, two Northern Harriers and one Red-tail made the day for the 32 spotters, some from as far as the North Shore.

*Photo by Dick Riner*

## **FIELD TRIPS**

Wednesday, April 1, 8 a.m.

### **MCGINNIS SLOUGH AND ENVIRONS**

Mary Anne McLean, 708-672-5494

The first field trip of the spring will be to McGinnis Slough and environs. We'll be looking for Loons or perhaps a Horned Grebe. Who knows what rare and exotic species might be migrating by? Come and see. We'll meet at the McGinnis Slough Parking Lot at 8 a.m. Please contact Mary Anne if you plan to join us by phone or at [mclean908@comcast.net](mailto:mclean908@comcast.net).

Saturday, April 11, 8 a.m.

### **PARK FOREST WETLANDS**

Al Thomas, 708-957-9847

Meet at the Aqua Center for a chance to see the elusive Common Snipe, perhaps an American Bittern, Sora Rail, Bluebirds, and many migrants. Easy short walks make this trip a favorite.

Email [wood\\_duck1999@yahoo.com](mailto:wood_duck1999@yahoo.com).

Wednesday, April 22, 8 a.m.

### **MONEE RESERVOIR/RACCOON GROVE**

Charlie Habecker, 708-747-6061

Meet at the parking lot at Monee Reservoir to see possible Bluebirds, Green Herons, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Teal and other migrating ducks as well as numerous songbirds. This is a good opportunity to check your skills for the May Spring Bird Count just two weeks away. Later we will go to Raccoon Grove to see a variety of spring wildflowers and perhaps some woodpeckers as well.

Saturday, April 25. All Day.

### **EARTHDAY AT GOODENOW GROVE**

TCAS will have a table at Earthday featuring a biodegradation exhibit that shows how long it takes for man-made materials such as plastics to disappear from the earth. A quiz for kids and adults will be part of the display.

Wednesday, May 6, 7 a.m.

### **LEVASSEUR PARK, KANKAKEE**

Mary Anne McLean, 708-672-5494

This trip will start with a stroll along the Kankakee River to look and listen for warblers and other spring migrants, with possible forays to a nearby prairie and a stream-fed pond. Directions available by phone or e-mail.

## **TEACHER THANKS TCAS FOR AUDUBON ADVENTURES**

Thanks to all you extra-mile givers, the *Audubon Adventures* fund is back in the black. To all who have contributed this year and in the past, we relay this "thank you" from a fourth grade teacher in Frankfort, who has been using the materials for a number of years:

"I want to thank you for providing us with another set of *Audubon Adventures* for my fourth grade students this year. This year's newspapers are better than ever in helping to motivate my students to learn so much about the magnificent living creatures in our world. The issues are timely in that we begin our year studying plants and animals. *Audubon Adventures* presents an interesting and fun way to supplement our curriculum. My students enjoy reading them because they are bold, colorful posters with brief non-fiction reports on fascinating information. We have used them to study science as well as other areas of the curriculum such as expository writing."

Now it is time for us to turn our attention to next year (the 2009-2010 school year) making it possible for us to offer *Audubon Adventures* to teachers free of charge. Appeal letters will soon be in the mail, but early bird givers are encouraged to send contributions, with check made out to Thorn Creek Audubon Adventures fund, care of Sue Putnam, 3704 W 213<sup>th</sup> St, Matteson, IL 60443. *Mary Anne McLean*

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## **FIELD NOTES**

TO REPORT SIGHTINGS CALL  
MARY WHITE AT 708-396-0794

### **DECEMBER 08**

**12/17** 8 Snow geese flying over Cal-Sag at Cicero Avenue

*April LeClaire*

**12/26** Ground covered with ice and snow. 4 Pheasants (3 males, 1 hen) under rural Crete bird feeder for about an hour.

*Anne Rosen*

**12/31** 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker at his Olympia Fields feeder

*Larry Lubertosi*

### **JANUARY 09**

**1/01** 1 Fox Sparrow, several White-breasted Nuthatches and 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches at his Park Forest feeder.

*Tony Kurth*

**1/16** About 20 Snow Geese flying in two V formations at 175<sup>th</sup> and Ridgeland.

*Sarah Hendrickson*

**1/17** 1 Sharp-shinned Hawk, 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker, 2 Chickadees, 1 Carolina Wren, 1 Hairy Woodpecker, and 1 Tufted Titmouse at her South Chicago Heights feeders.

*Sarah Hendrickson*

**1/30** 20-30 Cedar Waxwings, 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker, Little Red Schoolhouse nature Trail.

*Mary White*

### **FEBRUARY 09**

**2/06** 1 Kestrel up close and personal eating breakfast on a low sign on Central Ave.

*Mary White*

**2/07** 1 male Pheasant, 2 American Tree Sparrows under rural Crete feeders. Also 1 Tufted Titmouse. 1 Merlin flying overhead.

**2/08** 1 Red-tailed Hawk and 1 Rough-legged Hawk hunting along Cottage Grove Ave. in rural Crete.

*Anne Rosen*

## **BIRDWATCHER DETAILS LIFE OF ROGER TORY PETERSON**

"Birds are, perhaps, the most eloquent expression of reality." So said Roger Tory Peterson in his 1948 *Birds Over America*. It was a philosophy, if not an obsession, that dictated the life he would live and the career he would follow. That life and career are described in great detail in Elizabeth Rosenthal's *Birdwatcher: the Life of Roger Tory Peterson*, published by Lyons Press.

Peterson was born in 1908, during the crisis in bird protection, when hunters still shot as many birds as they could for sport. From the beginning he demonstrated a consuming interest in birds, an ability to quickly pick out the patterns and distinctive field marks that would differentiate one bird from another, and exceptional art and writing talent. It seems almost inevitable that he would produce the first easily-accessible field guide, one that would be the model for those that followed.

Readers who want to know just about everything about the man who made watching birds a popular occupation will find it here. The author quotes more than 100 people who knew the famous ornithologist and influenced or were influenced by him. The book reveals Peterson's personality, both his strengths and his less attractive qualities. Divided into five sections, it covers his early life, his travels around the world, his conservation efforts, his personal relationships, and the development of his field guides and other works.

This is not a book to be read in a hurry. Its wealth of detail can be overwhelming. But the many good stories that outline the development of birdwatching as a hobby and habitat conservation as a concern for Americans, along with fascinating glimpses of the great naturalist, make it worth the time.

*Joan Crabb*

## AUDUBON SURVEY SAYS CLIMATE CHANGE MOVING CHICAGO-AREA BIRDS NORTH

Birders in the south suburbs have been seeing some southerly birds in recent winters. Data from hundreds of Chicago region bird monitors (and thousands more around the country) have recently demonstrated that global warming is more advanced than most people think. The National Audubon Society's new report tracks the seasonal movements of birds to demonstrate that global warming is already disrupting our environment not just in the Arctic but right here in Illinois, and has been doing so for the past forty years. The short-term impacts on specific birds will vary, but scientists warn of a serious long-term toll on birds, other wildlife and the health of the environment.

The Turkey Vulture, Eastern Bluebird, Gadwall, American Robin and the Hermit Thrush are all moving their winter ranges north into the Chicago region. At the same time, the Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Goshawk and Pine Siskin are shifting their ranges away northward and are being seen less frequently here.

"This national report also shines a light on this region's grassland birds," said Bartel Grassland steward Dick Riner. "They're the one group that isn't moving north. They have no northerly habitat to go to. Their numbers are down more than 90%." The south suburbs grassland forest preserves make this area a hotspot for rare grassland birds including the Bobolink, Meadowlark, and Short-eared Owl. Fortunately for the Bartel Grassland, a long-term project funded by the Openlands Project will increase the size and quality of the grassland habitat while providing water quality and flood control benefits.

"All the little prairies are living on borrowed time unless we expand the size and quality of our local grassland forest preserves," said

Stephen Packard, Director of Audubon for the Chicago Region. In other words, the bird populations are "mine canaries" that provide early warning of deeper problems.

Local nature lovers are also tracking some animals that are not as mobile as birds and may adapt even less well to changing climates. The Calling Frog Survey, the Illinois Butterfly Monitors' Network and the Dragonfly Monitoring Network are all collecting data about vulnerable wildlife.

"The Chicago region is home to some of our nations' most threatened birds. Their habitats are degrading or being converted to other uses. They face threats on their migratory paths. Now, with new and unpredictable challenges, these birds will need healthy, diverse habitats to survive the coming decades," said Judy Pollock, Audubon Chicago Region's Director of Bird Conservation.

Citizen action throughout the Chicago region is combating these threats. At scores of local projects, volunteers fight back a torrent of invasive species and spread diverse native seeds, bringing back the complex ecosystems that our wildlife will come to rely on more and more as the climate changes.

For further information about this issue, see websites [www.bcnbirds.org/trends07](http://www.bcnbirds.org/trends07) and [www.habitatproject.org](http://www.habitatproject.org).

### CATHARINE BLAIR IN AUTO ACCIDENT

Catharine Blair, a longtime Thorn Creek Audubon member and conservation activist, suffered a serious automobile accident recently in rural Frankfort. She is currently in Applewood Living Center at 21020 Kostner Ave., Matteson, 60443, where she will stay until she can return to her Park Forest home. She would appreciate receiving mail or personal visits from old friends.



Thorn Creek  
AUDUBON SOCIETY

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THORN CREEK AUDUBON OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS		
President: Al Thomas	957-9847	wooduck_1999@yahoo.com
Vice Pres: Dick Riner	720-5683	dickriner@sbcglobal.net
Treasurer: Sidney Duke	748-6407	auraduke@aol.com
Secretary: Terric Spillers	748-1745	hillbrit@comcast.net
<b>Directors</b>		
Michelle O'Connor	845-0083	moconnor07@yahoo.com
Jim Murphy	672-4823	murphyjames823@aol.com
Dory Grosche	481-3166	dorygro@sbcglobal.net

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NEWSLETTER STAFF
Editor: Joan Crabb Database: Sue Putnam
<i>The mission of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society is to promote the enjoyment and appreciation of birds, to educate adults and children concerning our natural environment, to preserve, protect, and restore wildlife habitat, and to create awareness of local conservation issues.</i>
This Newsletter is the official publication of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society, an Illinois not-for-profit organization dedicated to conservation and environmental education. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily endorsed by the TCAS Board or the National Audubon Society.
We welcome editorial proposals and submissions. Please direct all correspondence to: Joan Crabb, Editor, 201 Krotiak Rd., Park Forest, IL 60466 708-481-4962. jbcraab7@att.net website - thorncreekaudubonsociety.org