



# Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 43 - ISSUE 2 MARCH - APRIL 2015

NEWSLETTER

## *TCAS SPECIAL PRESENTATION*

### **BATS ARE ON THE PROGRAM APRIL 1**

Bats are unique animals—the only mammals that have developed true flight—and are in their own scientific order, Chiroptera (Greek for hand-wing). They are also much maligned and misunderstood, often feared for no good reason. To help people learn more about these unusual creatures, the Thorn Creek Audubon Society is scheduling another program by the Organization for Bat Conservation at 7 p.m. April 1 at Freedom Hall in Park Forest.

The program will bring live bats as part of its multi-media presentation, including an insect-eating bat from North America, a leaf-nosed bat from South America, and flying fox bats from Africa. It will show the way bats use sound waves (echolocation) to navigate so efficiently and to find prey in the dark.

The program is open to the public, with young people especially invited. Because of the expense of bringing it here from Michigan, TCAS is suggesting a donation of \$5 per family.

Bats are essential to the health of ecosystems around the world, as they are the primary predators of night-flying insects. For example, the Little Brown Bat, a native of our region, can eat at least a thousand insects per hour, many of them mosquitoes. Nectar-feeding bats help pollinate plants like bananas and cashews, and fruit-eating bats spread seeds.

These diverse and beneficial creatures are among the least studied and most misunderstood of animals. Centuries of myths and misinformation still generate needless fears and threaten bats and their habitat around the world. Bat populations are declining almost everywhere, and some species are almost extinct.

The Organization for Bat Conservation has made it their mission to preserve bats and their habitats through education, collaboration and research. It is a nonprofit environmental education organization dedicated to inspiring people to protect bats and conserve biodiversity, which is based in

the Cranbrook Institute of Science in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. There the staff cares for more than 150 bats from around the world, along with owls, flying squirrels, sugar gliders, skinks and a two-toed sloth. Tours are available on weekends during the winter and all summer.



ORGANIZATION FOR  
**BAT CONSERVATION**

# PROGRAMS

THE THORN CREEK AUDUBON SOCIETY HOLDS PROGRAMS THE FIRST WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH FROM SEPTEMBER THROUGH MAY. THEY WILL BE HELD IN THE PARK FOREST LIBRARY UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED. PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

Wednesday, March 4, 2015, 7 p.m.  
**INDIAN BOUNDARY PRAIRIES—UNIQUE  
REMNANTS**  
Karl Gnaedinger  
**PARK FOREST LIBRARY**

Declines in tallgrass prairie habitat exceed those reported for any other major ecosystem in North America, including old-growth forest and temperate rain forest in the Pacific Northwest and bottom-land hardwoods in the South Central United States.

Losses have been especially severe within the eastern extension of the tallgrass prairie. In Illinois less than 0.01 percent of our once vast prairie ecosystem remains, according to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Located in the bed of ancient Lake Chicago, the Indian Boundary Prairies offer a glimpse of what Chicago looked like 200 years ago. Comprised of five sites totaling almost 470 acres, these prairies contain some of the last high quality prairie remnants surviving within the Chicago Lake Plain.

In 1995 Karl Gnaedinger started working with Dr. Ron Panzer of Northeastern Illinois University in research on remnant-dependency in prairie insects and on the effects of wildland fire on insects. Karl is now the Project Manager of the Indian Boundary Prairies for the Nature Conservancy, in coordination with partner/landowner Northeastern Illinois University.

Their work deals with the difficulties of acquiring, restoring, and maintaining a remnant nature preserve in an urban environment.

Wednesday, April 1, 2015 7 p.m.  
**NOTE CHANGE OF PLACE  
SPECIAL PRESENTATION  
BATS OF THE WORLD**  
Organization for Bat Conservation  
**FREEDOM HALL**  
See Story on page 1

Wednesday, May 6, 7 p.m.  
**BIRDS OF THE SOUTHWEST**  
Larry and Linda Layne  
**PARK FOREST LIBRARY**

This husband-and-wife team, who are also members of Thorn Creek Audubon Society, go birding during the winters they spend in their South Texas home. They are close to many of the well-known birding sites in South Texas and only an hour from Padre Island. They will show pictures photographer Larry has taken of the southwestern birds that those of us farther north seldom have a chance to see.

## **VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO HELP READY BOXES FOR BLUEBIRDS RETURN**

Eager male bluebirds will be arriving in our area early in March. Then, about two weeks later, the females will show up and both will be seriously looking for nesting boxes.

Volunteers will be needed to check, clean and monitor the 106 boxes along our four bluebird trails at Goodenow Grove, Monee Reservoir, Park Forest Central Park Wetland and Glenwood School campus.

For more information and to help with this important project call or email Aura Duke, 708-748-6407, or [auraduke@aol.com](mailto:auraduke@aol.com).

## WEATHER PLAGUES WINTER BIRD COUNT

Rain, snow, sleet—the weather during the Christmas Bird Count on January 3 could hardly have been worse—yet 37 faithful field observers took part in the 2014 count. Perhaps because of the weather, the number of species counted, 49, was lower than in previous years, yet some of them were unusual.

Three bald eagles were spotted by the team of Sue Zelek, Sarah Hendrickson, Ron Leopold and Vera Miller. Nine species were reported at a single sighting, including great blue heron, gadwall, Cooper's hawk, red-shouldered hawk, rough-legged hawk, herring gull, barred owl, winter wren and evening grosbeak. Two teams saw snowy owls, one each (see story on page 5).

Other unusual species seen this year were greater white-fronted geese, cackling geese, American black ducks, and red-headed woodpeckers. Birds seen in considerable numbers were Canada geese, mallards, red-tailed hawks, rock doves, mourning doves, white-breasted nuthatches, starlings, dark-eyed juncos and house sparrows.

Last year's team saw 70 species, and the year before 71 were seen. However, totals in prior years have also come in lower: in 2009 only 53 different species were seen and in 2008, only 58.

Total number of birds seen this year was 10,324; last year's total was 13,987 and 11,323 were seen the year before. In some past years numbers have been increased greatly because of sightings of large groups of one species, such as ring-billed gulls or Canada geese.

In spite of the disappointing weather it was a challenging and rewarding bird count, said Aura Duke, co-chair of the event. She said all who participated deserve a resounding "Thank You" and a special thanks should go to the new count tabulator, Jan Heideman.

## ANNUAL SPRING BIRD COUNT SET MAY 9



*Carolina Wren*

Thorn Creek Audubon Society will once again participate in the annual statewide Spring Bird Count on Saturday, May 9. Our assigned territory will be the eastern half of Will County, from Highway 45 to the Indiana state line.

The spring migration of birds in the Midwest should be at or near its peak during May, making this count a most challenging and exciting event. Many volunteers are needed for this important survey.

Field bird counters will be assigned to specific teams, each being led by an expert birder. Feeder watchers and backyard birders will also count and identify birds. They must report their sightings to Aura Duke at 708-748-6407 or email [auraduke@aol.com](mailto:auraduke@aol.com) By 5 p.m. on Sunday, May 10.

A potluck supper for all participants will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, May 11, at Plum Creek Nature Center, southeast of Crete on Dutton Road. The total compilation of the count will follow the dinner. Volunteers may sign up for this event at the TCAS meeting on April 1 or by calling Aura Duke at 708-748-6407.

# FIELD TRIPS

TO TELL US YOU WILL ATTEND AND FOR DETAILS, PLEASE CONTACT THE TRIP COORDINATOR. FOR TRIPS MARKED WITH AN ASTERISK, MEET AT THE PARK FOREST LIBRARY ONE HOUR EARLIER. WE WILL CAR POOL FOR SOME DISTANT TRIPS BUT NOT FOR LOCAL ONES. IF RAIN IS FORCAST FOR THE TRIP DATE, CALL THE TRIP LEADER THE PRIOR EVENING FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.

**Wednesday, April 8, 3 P.M.**

**HERON ROOKERY—HIGHLAND, INDIANA**  
**Pat Strange (219-923-5164)**

This will be an afternoon walk because visitors can only see the rookery from one side and viewing is best in the afternoon when the sun is not in one's eyes. Some herons may be back, beginning to build nests. There may be waterfowl such as mallards, coots, mergansers, shovelers, teal and possibly buffleheads.

To find the rookery, come to Highland and come through the center of town on Highway Avenue to Liable Street. Turn left (north) and go to the end of the road. For more complete directions call Pat.

**Saturday, April 11, 8 a.m.**

**MCGINNIS /SAGANASHKEE SLOUGHS**  
**Al Thomas (708-957-9847)**  
**woodduck\_1999@yahoo.com**

Meet at the McGinnis Slough parking lot at about 137<sup>th</sup> Street on the west side of LaGrange Road (Rt. 45). We may see both Horned and Pied Grebes, possibly a variety of migrating ducks. In past years osprey, eagles and swans, both Mute and Tundra, have been seen here. We will then go on to Sanagashkee.

**Saturday, April 18, 8 a.m.**

**MONEE RESERVOIR/RACCOON GROVE**  
**Charles Habecker (708-747-6061)**

Raccoon Grove is on Route 50 (Governors

Highway) at Pauling Road, one mile south of Monee. Monee Reservoir is one mile east of Raccoon Grove over the I-57 overpass and south a quarter mile. Meet at Monee Reservoir to see possible woodpeckers, green herons, grebes, teal and migrating ducks as well as songbirds. Then we will go to Raccoon Grove to see spring wildflowers.

**Saturday, April 25, 8 a.m.**

**OAK RIDGE PRAIRIE**

**Pat Strange (219-923-5164)**

We have prairie, marsh, woodland and lakeside habitats to explore. From U.S. 41 in Indiana (Indianapolis Blvd.) take Main Street east toward Griffith (Main is several stoplights north of Highway 30). Go about 3 miles to Colfax Road (the first stoplight after Broad Street, the main intersection in Griffith). Turn south on Colfax and go one-half mile to the preserve entrance, on the east side of Colfax. The parking lot is a mile from the entrance. There may be an entrance fee per car, not over \$10, but we may be early enough to escape it.

**Saturday, May 2, 8 a.m.\***

**LAVASSEUR PARK**

**Mary Anne McLean (708-672-5494)**  
**mclean908@comcast.com**

We 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. To reach the meeting place at LaVasseur parking lot, drive south on Rt. 50 from the intersection with I-57, past Armour Road and Mulligan Street, to North Street and follow to the dead end at Kennedy; turn left (south) on Kennedy and go about two miles to Fifth Street, just before the YMCA (1075 Kennedy Drive, on the right. This is the fourth light south of North Street. Go ¼ mile to the parking lot. Or call Mary Anne to arrange to carpool.

## ***A SMALLER SOUTHLAND SWEEP***

# **SNOWY OWLS BACK AGAIN THIS YEAR**

Last winter's invasion of Snowy Owls in the Great Lakes States, the Northeast and down the Atlantic Coast was epic – an unprecedented irruption. The majority of the Snowy Owls seen last winter were young males. Ornithologists believe that last year's southward sweep of these birds was triggered by a record 2013 nesting season in Quebec. In the winter, some of these fledglings, trying to make their way among the bumper crop of young Snowies, had so much competition they had to travel far south to find food.

Did another irruption occur this year? Snowy Owls have been seen and reported on eBird at Cornell Lab of Ornithology this winter across the northern states from Washington State to Maine. This past summer, 2014, another bumper crop of Snowies occurred far north in Canada.

However, this winter's Snowy Owl invasion is not on the same scale as last year's. Last winter a five-state block in the northeastern United States had more than 8,000 reports of the owls from November to January, while this winter that same block of territory has had only 1,200 Snowy Owl reports. Still, this number represents an above average winter population of these northern birds.

On February of 2014, Wannetta Elliott and John Carr sighted and photographed a pair of Snowy Owls at Tinley Park. Al Thomas reported one south of Monee, while Jim Murphy spotted another along Highway 394 west of Crete. This year just two Snowy Owls were included in our Christmas bird count, one each observed by two separate teams. The lucky birders were from Team H, Sue Zelek, Sarah Hendrickson, Vera Miller and Ron Leopold, and from Team K, Marlys Oostig, Wannetta Elliot and Penny Kneisler.

*Aura Duke*

### **Field Trips continued**

**Saturday, May 9, 7 a.m.**

#### **SPRING BIRD COUNT**

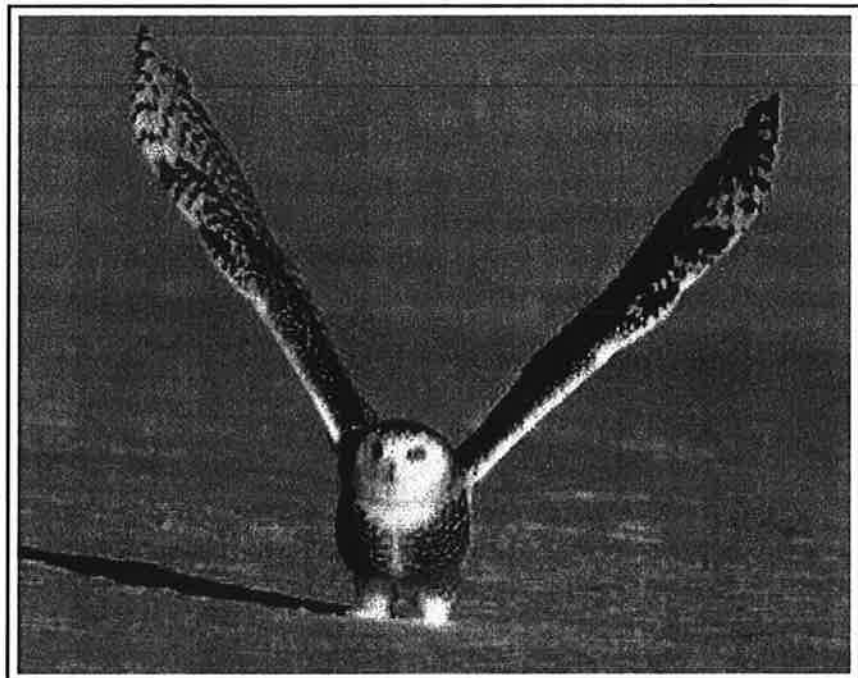
See story page 3

**Wednesday, May 13, 9 a.m.**

#### **GIBSON WOODS**

**Pat Strange, 219-932-5164**

We may see various woodpeckers and warblers and possibly Indigo Buntings, and perhaps a Swainson's thrush coming north. Take Route 30 to Indianapolis Blvd., go north to 165<sup>th</sup> Street, then east to Parrish Avenue. Turn north, go to the end of Parrish to the Nature Center.



*Snowy Owl photo taken by John Carr in 2014*

# PATRICIA REESE BRAKER

# 1929 – 2014

Memorial services for long-time Thorn Creek Audubon Society member Patricia Reese (Pat) Braker were held January 10, 2015, at the Church of St. John the Evangelist in Flossmoor. Mrs. Braker died on December 16, 2014.

She was born in Reistertown, Maryland, and came to Illinois to Northwestern University. There she met Bill (William P.) Braker, and they married in 1950. Both received MS degrees in Microbiology at George Washington University. Back in Illinois, Bill became Director of the Shedd Aquarium. They raised their four children, Beth, Chip, Nancy and Gretchen, at their home in the south suburbs.

Pat taught science at James Hart Junior High School in Homewood for 25 years, served

as a Girl Scout leader, and became a District 162 board member. After retirement she taught at Irons Oaks Environmental Center and became active with the Thorn Creek Audubon Society. Bill also joined and served as president of TCAS.

Pat was involved with many TCAS projects, including the native plant sale and the bluebird trails. "She was one of our most faithful bluebird volunteers," said Aura Duke.

"She was one of the first to help get the restoration of the Bartel Grassland off the ground," said Dick Riner, Steward of Bartel. "She continued supporting TCAS and Bartel until her failing health made it impossible. She was also one of those genuinely nice people."

"She was a wonderful addition to TCAS," said long-time member Mary Anne McLean. "She was on the education committee and helped present school programs. She was a fine science teacher and a great birder. She always had a sparkle in her eye. A passionate advocate for nature, she was an inspiration to us all, a joy to work with, and a treasured friend."



### MEMBERSHIP COUPON

There are two ways to join the Thorn Creek Audubon Society. Choose your way and mail in your application.

#### Dual Membership: National Audubon and Thorn Creek Audubon

National Audubon membership supports environmental concerns and wildlife protection at state, national and international levels, with a small percentage shared with our local chapter. You receive *Audubon* magazine and our TCAS chapter newsletter. Introductory offer – 1 year \$20. Local Chapter code C5ZG590Z.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, Membership Data Center, P. O. Box 422250, Palm Coast, Florida, 32142-2250

#### Thorn Creek Audubon Society – Chapter Only Membership

Chapter only dues remain at home and support environmental efforts in our local community. Members receive our chapter newsletter. Annual Dues \$15; Supporting Annual Membership \$25; Benefactor Annual Membership \$50.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to Thorn Creek Audubon and mail to P. O. Box 895, Park Forest, IL 60466

# FIELD NOTES

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

If you leave a message please leave a phone  
number where we can reach you.

## DECEMBER 2014

**12/23** A Bald Eagle jousting with 2 Red-tailed  
Hawks near Harlem and Oak Park Avenue.

*Jon Panozzo*

**12/26** 2 Eastern Bluebirds at Thorn Creek  
Woods.

*Tom Wegszyn*

**12/28** About 100 Sandhill Cranes flying over  
Steger.

*Carolyn Gann*

**12/28** 2 Pine Siskins and a Fox Sparrow at the  
feeders. Little Red School House.

*Mary White*

**12/29** A Carolina Wren at his Olympia Fields  
feeder.

*Larry Lubertozzi*

**12/29** 75 Crows at Egyptian Trail and Offner  
Road.

*Jon Panozzo.*

## JANUARY 2015

**01/04** A Northern Flicker and 2 Yellowbellied  
Sapsuckers. Thorn Creek Woods. *Jim Pisani*

**01/24** Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy  
Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatches,  
Eastern Bluebird, Goldfinch, Black-capped  
Chickadees and others at the Plum Creek  
Greenway.

*Al Thomas*

**01/05** 5 Chickadees, 2 Downy Woodpeckers,  
several male and female Cardinals, 10 to 20  
Juncos, 4 Goldfinches, 4 Blue Jays, 2 Northern  
Flickers, 6 Pigeons, and several Blackbirds seen  
regularly at her Steger feeders.

*Pauline Small*

## FEBRUARY 2015

**02/11** 1 Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied  
Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch,

## 2015 "WILD THINGS" WELL WORTH WHILE

Saturday, January 31, several members of  
Thorn Creek Audubon attended the sixth  
biennial Wild Things Conference held at UIC.  
Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle  
welcomed us, followed by the keynote speaker,  
Bill Kleiman.

Kleiman's topic was "How the Bison Came  
Back." His fascinating talk detailed how he as  
Nachusa Grasslands Project Director, with the  
help of stewards and scientists, have been  
restoring Nachusa so that the grasslands now  
support a herd of bison.

From there attendees left for the  
"Breakout Session." There were seven of these  
sessions and each session had 13 different  
topics to choose from. Our group enjoyed a  
variety of subject matter such as Mushrooms of  
the Chicago Region, Learning to Bird by Ear, The  
Ecology of Acorns, Creating a Shrubland  
Habitat, and Insects, Spiders, and Mites. Not  
only were the talks informative, but the  
speakers also provided sources and sites where  
additional information could be accessed. Two  
years from now it will definitely be worth  
visiting again.

*Judi Murphy*

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several Chickadees at feeders; 6 Cardinals, 3  
Mourning Doves, 3 Blue Jays, 18 Juncos and 2  
American Tree Sparrows on the ground below  
her rural Crete feeders.

*Anne Rosen*

**02/13** Heard and saw 1 male and 1 female  
Red-winged Blackbird under her rural Crete  
feeders.

*Anne Rosen*

**02/11** 6 American Tree Sparrows under her  
Park Forest feeder, 2 male House Finches on  
feeder.

*Joan Crabb*



Thorn Creek  
AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 895 - Park Forest, IL 60466

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*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.*

The 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 necessary endorsed by the TCAS board or the National Audubon Society.

We welcome editorial proposals and submissions. Please direct all correspondence to:  
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