

# Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

## Spring is on the Way!

### Beginning Birding Classes

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society will offer a Beginning Birding class, including both lectures and field trips taught by experienced teacher Marianne Hahn, this spring. The course is designed for people with little or no experience in the out-of-doors and will be taught in a manner that allows beginners to progress at their own pace. Hikes will be over easy terrain that can be handled in walking shoes. Classes will start April 4. Six slide-illustrated lectures will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Fridays at the Homewood Izaak Walton Preserve. Each lecture will be followed by a field trip on Saturday or Sunday mornings. The lectures will be held rain or shine, but in case of bad weather the field trips will be rescheduled. Fee for the class is \$30, and participants must register by March 28.

Hahn is a past president of TCAS and has been an active birder since 1990. She retired after 22 years of teaching microbiology to medical students. She serves currently as a reference birder, fielding questions that are called or emailed to Audubon-Chicago Region. She is also president of Friends of the Kankakee and program director for Homewood Izaak Walton Preserve. Hahn designed the class for neophyte birders earlier and taught it for three years. She then turned her attention to land acquisition and ecosystem restoration, but recently began teaching again. For this class she will have help on field trips from various TCAS members, some of whom have taken the course in previous years. The class will be limited to 15 persons, so those who wish to take it are advised to register before the March 28 deadline by calling Hahn at 708-799-0249. Proceeds will be used to enhance TCAS's slide collection and for habitat acquisition and restoration.



### The NAS Spring Bird Count is May 3<sup>rd</sup>

Once again, TCAS will be taking part in the annual National Audubon Society Spring Bird Count. This year the count date is Saturday, May 3. Volunteers are needed for this important annual survey of spring birds, some willing to hike while counting birds outdoors, and others watching feeders and tallying birds seen there. Compared with the Christmas Bird Count, which covers a circle 15 miles in diameter, the spring count encompasses a much larger area. In addition, 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. A potluck supper for all participants will be held at the Will County Environmental Center in Mokena, Monday, May 5, after which the bird count tally will be compiled. Volunteers may sign up by calling Aura Duke at 708-748-6407 or Al Thomas at 708-957-9847.



## TCA Spring Meetings and Christmas Count News

**Our monthly meetings will continue to be held on the first Wednesday of the month at 7 p.m. at the Park Forest Public Library. There are no programs in June, July and August. Programs resume in September.**

### **Tues, March 4, 6:30 p.m. Annual Dinner and Live Owl Show**

The TCAS Annual Dinner at Faith United Protestant Church in Park Forest. Live raptor show featuring owls. Tickets must be purchased ahead of time.

### **Wed, April 2, 7 p.m. "The Amazing Birds"**

Vernon Kleen, recently retired Nongame and Endangered Species Section Manager of the Illinois Department of conservation, will present the program. It includes slides of birds, and animated bird behavior. The slides show species that occur in Illinois plus a handful of exotic species. The sounds are songs and calls that the birds use to communicate with each other. The animation shows interesting bird behaviors. Among his many contributions to

ornithology, Kleen initiated Illinois' statewide Bird count through the Illinois Audubon Society.

### **May 7, 7 p.m. "Bartel Grasslands Restoration"**

Where else can you see Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers hunting voles on a winter evening or find an orchid – Nodding Ladies' Tresses – on a summer day? What once was a hayfield with many Osage orange trees forming fencerows is now an open square mile prairie called Bartel Grasslands. Dick Riner, president of Thorn Creek Audubon Society and a site steward of the Grasslands Restoration Project, will narrate with slides how restoration has increased nesting of Eastern Meadowlarks and Bobolinks. He will also relate how Bartel has been used for educational activities by elementary and high school students and how it has attracted visitors from different parts of the state. The present prairie is mainly a dry land habitat but there are plans to restore a small wetland. Riner will give details of this project at the meeting.

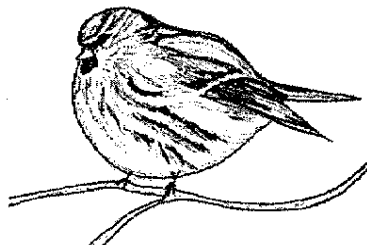
**Charles Habecker**

## **Christmas Bird Count Lists 59 Species**

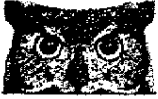
**On a cloudy January 5, 34 Audubon members in 14 groups tramped through fields and woods and spotted from cars for the annual Christmas Bird Count. Nineteen feeder watchers also counted, listing 7,808 individual birds representing 59 different species.**

**A few unusual birds were noted, 2 Ruddy Ducks, 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and 2 Chipping Sparrows. Another uncommon site was one lone Sandhill Crane in a cornfield.**

**American Tree Sparrows showed up in large numbers 675 in all. 416 Dark-eyed (slate colored) Juncos (and dark eyed Junco of the Oregon race) were counted and 191 Common Redpolls.**



**New website-[www.thorncrekaudubonsociety.org](http://www.thorncrekaudubonsociety.org)**



## TCA Spring Field Trip Dates

**Wednesday, April 2, 8 a.m.**

**Plum Creek Nature Preserve**

Coordinator Al Thomas (708) 957-9847)

Time to see if our Bluebirds and other early migrants have arrived. Goodenow Grove is located 2 miles east of Route 394 on Goodenow Road. Watch for the sign on the south side of 394 as you approach the north turnoff and then go about one mile to the preserve. Meet in the first parking area, by the Nature Center building.

**Saturday, April 12, 8 a.m.**

**Palos Area, from McGinnis Slough**

Coordinator Mary Anne McLean  
(708) 672-5495

Meet at the McGinnis Slough parking lot, about 137<sup>th</sup> St., on the west side of LaGrange Rd (Rt. 45). Although the McGinnis sign may not be visible, there is a turn lane into the preserve.

**Wed, April 16, 8 a.m.**

**Monee Reservoir and Raccoon Grove**

Coordinator: Mary Anne McLean  
(708) 672-5495

Meet at the reservoir parking lot. Spring birds **and blooms** will be on our agenda.

**Wednesday, April 23, 8 a.m.**

**Oak Ridge Prairie**

Coordinator: Pat Strange  
(219) 923-5164

From U.S. 41 take Indiana (Indianapolis Blvd.) take Main St. east toward Griffith (Main St. is several stoplights north of Highway 30). Go approximately 3 miles to Colfax Rd. (Colfax is the first stoplight after Broad Street, the main intersection in Griffith.) Turn south on Colfax and go about one-half mile to the preserve entrance, on the east side of Colfax. The parking lot is about a mile from the entrance.

**Saturday, April 26**

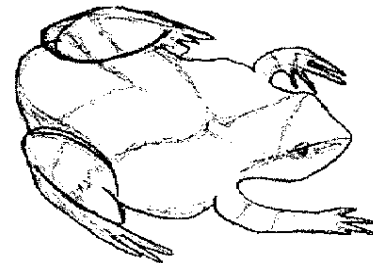
**Old Plank Road**

**Frog Habitat Restoration**

Coordinator Dick Riner (708) 720-5683

Take Central Ave. one-fourth mile south of Route 30. Turn east on Miller Drive just north of the Trail and go to the University of Illinois building parking lot, or park along the north side of Miller. Walk up to the Trail entrance at Central Ave.

Be prepared for muddy work. Thorn Creek Audubon Society and Chicago Wilderness have received a permit to restore the Dewey Helmick Nature Preserve. The restoration is an effort to make the habitat better for a variety of frogs, such as Chorus Frogs, Spring Peepers and the American Toad. We will remove man-made artifacts and invasive species. A healthy population of a variety of frogs is one sign of a healthy environment. Restoring the frog population along Old Plank Trail will be one step in providing a good wetland habitat for other species as well.



### More Restoration

**Bird Conservation Network**

**"Give Back to Birds"**

**April 12**

**National Wildlife Refuge**

**Savanna, IL**

**Contact Joan Bruchman at**

**[pjbruchman@comcast.net](mailto:pjbruchman@comcast.net) or 847-253-4128**

**Earth Day Plum Creek Saturday April 19**



## TCA Bat Project Gets Kids Fired Up

The Little Brown Bat, a native of Illinois, is getting children in School District 163 out of their classrooms and into a hands-on experience in the natural world. District 163, Thorn Creek Audubon Society, ME4E (Multidisciplinary Education for the Environment), and the Park Forest Parks and Recreation are cooperating to allow elementary students to provide houses for this bat species and learn valuable lessons about the environment.

"The children are so excited. They are on fire with enthusiasm about this project," says Marti Blaies, District 163's Science Depot Coordinator. "You have to catch children when they're young to get this level of enthusiasm."

"We have produced a lot of bat enthusiasts," Michelle O'Connor of ME4E told Audubon members at a recent meeting. O'Connor and Emily Kenny, who founded the environmental learning program, have been working with District 163 students for several years.

The bat project started with each of the district's fifth grade classes building a bat house. Sidney Duke cut the bat houses to exact specifications and Aura Duke marked directions on each piece. The fifth graders assembled the boxes and stained them.

Though this part of the project is done, the students' participation is not over. The bat houses will be put up in the Central Park wetlands, and students will monitor the boxes as they learn about the wetlands and how the bats interact with that environment. They have already learned about the bats' habitat needs, behavior, and anatomy and have kept journals about their experience. These journals will go to their "bat buddies," second graders who are also part of the bat learning experience. The district's special education classes also participated.

The children are learning more than just science, Blaies added. While preparing their journals they use language skills and artwork, they learn construction skills while putting together the bat houses, and as they explore the wetlands they will be learning more about their local community. "We are getting the community and the children together," she said. The next project focuses on protecting the endangered Barn Owl. Audubon vice-president Al Thomas is constructing the owl nesting boxes.  
*Joan Crabb*

### December Field Sightings

**12/14** 12 Robins and 5 Cedar Waxwings at the Little Red Schoolhouse. *Mary White*

**12/14** Short-eared Owl eating breakfast at 8 a.m. at Flossmoor Road near Central *Jeanne Christianson*

**12/20** Many Pine Siskins, 2 Redpolls and a lone female Cowbird at her feeders in unincorporated Homewood-Flossmoor *Georgiana Srachta*

**12/30** Cooper's Hawk hitting her patio door while pursuing a Mourning Dove in Crete. *Debra Marberg*



## Donations Needed for Audubon Adventures

If winter comes, can our annual appeal for *Audubon Adventures* funds be far behind? Snowdrops and skunk cabbage will soon remind us that nature is beautiful, that abundant life is just waiting to burst forth from the frozen landscape, and that our children desperately need to acquire an appreciation for the beauty and diversity of the earth, as caring for and protecting it will be in their hands before we know it.

Teachers who request *Audubon Adventures* kits will be supplied with a wealth of carefully researched, well written, beautifully illustrated material to introduce their students to various aspects of the natural world. These "newspapers" are designed for, but far from limited to, a third to fifth grade readership. This year's materials answer questions about animals that have been on the endangered species list in recent years, noting the factors that set the stage for their extinction and ways that protection under the endangered species act has brought them back from the brink. Topics covered in previous years have included alligators, backyard nesting birds, Bald Eagles, bats, bees, deciduous forests, John James Audubon, and native plants, to name just a few. The theme "sharing the earth" prevails throughout.

The cost per classroom kit is \$45.65. Contributions are welcome in any amount. To contribute, please send a check made out to Thorn Creek Adventures Fund, in care of Mary Anne McLean, 908 E. Richton Road, Crete, IL 60417-1541. You may designate your gift for a particular classroom or to be used in a particular community. If there is no specific designation, we will use it where most needed.

### New Members Always Welcome

Thorn Creek Audubon Society welcomes new members at any time of the year. You don't have to be an ornithologist to join; you just have to be interested in birds and nature. There are two ways to join, a dual membership with National Audubon and Thorn Creek Audubon, and a chapter only Thorn Creek Audubon membership.

The dual membership dues go to National Audubon's efforts to address environmental concerns and foster wildlife protection at state, national and international levels, with a small percent of the dues shared with our local chapter. The dual member receives both the *Audubon* Magazine and our TCA Newsletter. Cost is \$20 for a one year introductory offer, \$34.95 for two years. The local chapter code is G59. Checks should be made payable to National Audubon Society, P. O. Box 52504, Boulder, CO 80323-2504.

Chapter only dues remain at home and support environmental efforts in our local community.

Members receive our chapter newsletter. Annual dues are \$15; sustaining membership is \$50. Checks should be made payable to Thorn Creek Audubon and mailed to P.O. Box 895, Park Forest, IL 60466.

#### January Field Sightings

**1/01** Two Red-tailed Hawks in the trees in her Crete backyard *Debra Marberg*

**1/07** Male Peregrine Falcon sitting on a clothesline post in a Park Forest backyard *Tony Milcarz*

**1/29** Male Peregrine Falcon observed capturing a sparrow in his Park Forest backyard *Milcarz*

**1/29** Cooper's Hawk observed daily shopping the bird feeders throughout the neighborhood *Dick Riner*

#### February Field Sightings

**2/01** Red-tailed Hawk sitting on her back yard feeder in rural Steger *Florence Hall*

**2/05** One robin at her University Park backyard feeder. Since Jan. 31, 9 male Cardinals, several female Cardinals and 3 Chipping Sparrows at the feeder *Chris Sheaffer*

**2/09** One male Ring-necked Pheasant, a Red-breasted and a White-breasted Nuthatch, 3 Chickadees, 3 Blue Jays, a Red-bellied and a Downy Woodpecker *Anne Rosen*

**Thorn Creek Audubon P.O. Box 895 Park Forest IL 60466**