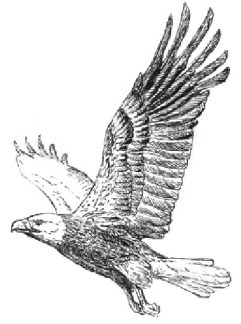




MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 36, No 3

Fall 2025

Thursday September 11th, Jon Stravers Program at The Butterworth Center. Program begins at 6 p.m. and will also be available via Zoom. See page 4 for more details. You won't want to miss this presentation!

Saturday September 13th, Evening Bird Walk, Sunderbruch Park and Fairmount Cemetery. Walk begins at 5:30 p.m. Meet at the Sunderbruch Park main parking lot near the picnic shelters. See page 3 for more details.

Saturday October 11th, Field Trip to Wildcat Den State Park with stops at Credit Island and Nahant Marsh. Meet at Marquette Street Boat Landing at 8:00am for carpooling. Stops at Credit Island and Nahant Marsh for potential waterfowl. Travel to Wildcat Den for woodland year round residents and fall migrants. This will be about a two-hour field trip with a return no later than 11:00. Questions contact qcaudubon@gmail.com.

Thursday December 11th, Membership Meeting and Pie Night at The Butterworth Center. Meet at 6 p.m. for our annual pie night and officer elections.

Visit us on the web at
www.quadcityaudubon.org.

We're also on Facebook!



Audubon

The Quad City Audubon Society is a Chapter of National Audubon Society

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Summary of the Endangered and Threatened Terrestrial Vertebrate Species Occurring Near the Proposed Development Site in Milan Bottoms...So Far

By
Kelly J. McKay

Throughout the spring and summer seasons of 2025, I documented the terrestrial vertebrate community (i.e., amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals) occurring within the northeastern portion of the Milan Bottoms Complex, in the vicinity of the proposed development project consisting of a truck stop, car wash, marijuana dispensary, etc. Overall, I surveyed the terrestrial vertebrate community during 16 trips occurring between 12 March and 1 August, 2025. During the course of these trips, I surveyed for a total of 145.0 hours.

Due to the lack of funding, equipment, and required trapping permits, these survey efforts consisted of opportunistic random area searches. In other words I simply spent time covering, in varying intensity, many floodplain forest and wetland habitat tracts occurring in close proximity to the proposed development. During these opportunistic random area search surveys, I recorded every identified terrestrial vertebrate species observed. These types of surveys can adequately determine the presence or absence of certain taxa, while being totally inappropriate for others. For example, as an avian biologist I believe a large proportion of the bird species present here were able to be accounted for through songs or calls, or by visual identification. Likewise, most of the anuran community (i.e., frogs and toads) were identified based on breeding chorus calls. Among reptiles, I believe a majority of the turtle community was recorded using visual identification through a spotting scope of basking individuals. Furthermore, many of the large and meso-sized mammals were identified visually or by observing fresh tracks or droppings. In contrast, these types of surveys do not facilitate the sampling of various other taxa. For instance, amphibians other than anurans (i.e., salamanders), reptiles such as snakes and lizards, as well as small mammals can only be adequately sampled using a variety of trapping methods and/or cover boards. Many of the more secretive mammals need to be documented using bait stations and camera traps, while passive high-frequency call recorders (i.e., anabats) and/or mist-netting efforts are necessary for determining the composition of the bat community.

Continued on page 5



At right:

Common Gallinule

*Photographed at Milan
Bottoms*

Photos courtesy of

Kelly J. McKay

Mission Statement

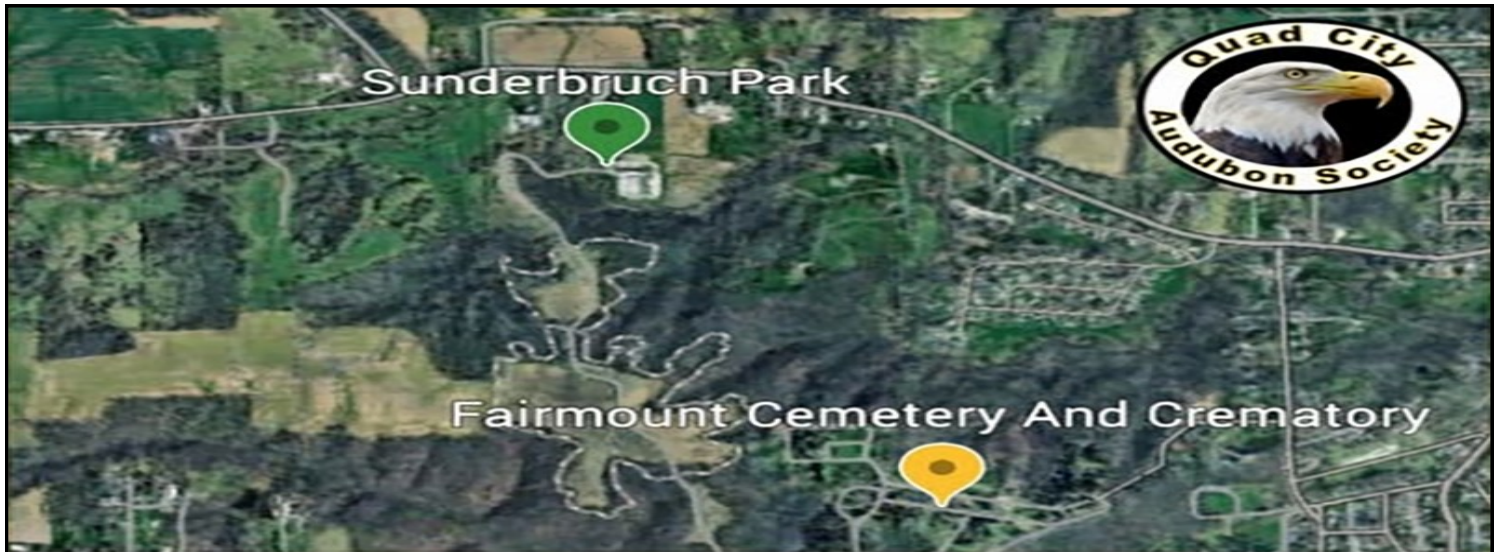
The Quad City Audubon Society is dedicated to the enjoyment of birds; a better understanding of the natural world; stewardship of natural areas and habitats; fellowship; improvement of community awareness of environmental issues; and education of youth for the benefit of future generations.

Thank you to those who contributed to this issue of *Mississippi Currents*.

The next deadline is November 25th, 2025. Submissions are gladly accepted.

Send to: Jason Monson,
(309) 221-1177, jmonson75@hotmail.com

Visit us online at: www.quadcityaudubon.org.



EVENING BIRDING WALK – SUNDERBRUCH PARK



4675 TELEGRAPH ROAD, DAVENPORT, IA AT 5:30PM

MEET IN THE MAIN PARKING LOT NEAR PICNIC SHELTERS.

AS DAYLIGHT SOFTENS, SET OUT ON A GOLDEN-HOUR WALK THROUGH LUSH, VARIED HABITATS—ALIVE WITH COLORS AND SONGS OF LATE SUMMER MIGRATORY BIRDS.



FOLLOW-UP WALK – FAIRMOUNT CEMETERY



3902 ROCKINGHAM RD. DAVENPORT, IA



IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING SUNDERBRUCH WALK (~6:30 PM)

A PEACEFUL EVENING WALK THROUGH CEMETERY GROUNDS AS BIRDS BEGIN TO SETTLE IN FOR THE EVENING

LATE SUMMER BIRDING EVENT

SEPT. 13TH

SATURDAY | 5:30PM - SUNSET

VISIT US @ QUADCITYAUDUBON.ORG

A SPECIAL EVENING WITH JON STRAVERS



QuadCityAudubon.org



QCAudubon@gmail.com

 **Thursday, Sept. 11th**  **6:00 PM - In The Library Room**
 **At The Butterworth Center - 1105 8th Street, Moline, IL**

Join Hawk Daddy Jon Stravers—ornithologist, musician, and conservation leader—for an evening of bird science, storytelling, and song. With over 40 years of research on Red-shouldered Hawks and Cerulean Warblers, Jon's work helped designate parts of Northeast Iowa as Globally Important Bird Areas.

Highlights:



Red-shouldered Hawks: Nesting collapse along the Mississippi



Cerulean Warblers: Hidden populations, global impact



Bonus: Bird photography from Costa Rica, Baffin Island & New Mexico



FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



ACCESSIBLE ENTRY PLEASE

NOTIFY QCAS IN ADVANCE TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS.

Summary of the Endangered and Threatened Terrestrial Vertebrate Species Occurring Near the Proposed Development Site in Milan Bottoms...So Far

By
Kelly J. McKay

Continued from page 2

Among the 183 species of terrestrial vertebrates identified so far, 11 were classified as either federal or state listed endangered or threatened species. These included 2 reptiles (Smooth Softshell Turtle and Blanding's Turtle), as well as 9 birds (Black-billed Cuckoo, Common Gallinule, Whooping Crane, Least Bittern, American Bittern, Yellow-crowned Night Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron, Osprey, and Northern Harrier) (Table 1). My efforts completely contradicted the Environmental Assessment produced by Shive-Hattery Consulting for the city of Rock Island, Illinois, in which the Illinois DNR proclaimed there were no endangered or threatened species within Milan Bottoms. However, this determination was based on a desk-top exercise relying entirely on outdated and inaccurate databases. No actual onsite visits, surveys, or research efforts were conducted by either Shive-Hattery or the Illinois DNR! Yet the city and the developers (Matt Stern and Jeff Hughbanks) continue to claim they have done their due diligence when it comes to endangered and threatened species occurring in Milan Bottoms near the proposed development site. This is just one of the many instances of the outright dishonesty and corruption that has been clearly exhibited by Rock Island, Illinois, Matt Stern, Jeff Hughbanks, and their agents throughout this entire process!

Table 1. Federal or State Listed Endangered or Threatened Species Observed Within Milan Bottoms Near the Proposed Development Site (Spring and Summer 2025).

REPTILES

Smooth Softshell Turtle (state threatened)
- 05-15-25 (2 individuals)
- 05-23-25 (1 individual)
- 06-14-25 (1 individual)
- 07-02-25 (2 individuals)

Blanding's Turtle (state endangered)
- 06-14-25 (2 individuals)
- 07-02-25 (1 individual)
- 08-01-25 (1 individual)

BIRDS

Black-billed Cuckoo (state threatened)
- 05-23-25 (1 individual)

Common Gallinule (state endangered)
- 07-09-25 (2 individuals)
- 07-17-25 (1 individual)

Whooping Crane (federally endangered)
- 03-23-25 (1 individual)

American Bittern (stated endangered)
- 07-31-25 (1 individual)

Least Bittern (state threatened)
- 05-27-25 (1 individual)
- 08-01-25 (1 individual)

Yellow-crowned Night Heron (state endangered)
- 07-17-25 (1 individual)

Black-crowned Night Heron (state endangered)
- 05-15-25 (1 individual)
- 05-27-25 (1 individual)
- 07-17-25 (3 individuals)

Osprey (state threatened)
- 07-17-25 (1 individual)

Northern Harrier (state endangered)
- 07-31-25 (1 individual)

Local Biologist Receives Conservation Award

Wildlife Biologist Kelly McKay of Hampton has received the Prairie Rivers Network's 2025 River Steward Award. As many of you know, McKay has worked tirelessly over the last several months to help preserve Milan Bottoms from the development proposed by the City of Rock Island. He has spent countless hours monitoring and documenting the wildlife in Milan Bottoms, and attended meetings Rock Island City Council meetings week after week advocating for their protection, and protesting any proposed development there.

The River Steward Award recognizes and celebrates the important work of an individual working on-the-ground to protect Illinois' rivers and streams. Prairie Rivers Network's mission is to protect water, heal land, and inspire change. They are an independent, state affiliate of the National Wildlife Federation. Learn more about PRN and their work at prairierivers.org.

A Devastating Year For Males

Walter Piper

Director: The Loon Project

Loon calls seem to demand our attention. And sometimes they affect us emotionally. So it was this spring as I sat in a canoe with Sophia on the Blue Lake-West territory. While mopping up lakes after the pre-breeding census, we found the 16-year-old Blue-West female, W/G,B/S or “White-Green”, alone. Her behavior was ordinary, for the most part; she foraged, rested, and preened. Yet every few minutes, as if guided by an unseen hand, she lifted her head skyward and emitted a loud wail whose declining pitch seemed to convey profound and irredeemable sadness. Clearly her mate from the previous season was gone, and no male had stepped in to fill the vacancy. Indeed, White-Green spent the spring alone and still had found no partner in mid-June, long after the window for nesting with a new mate had closed.

White-Green was not alone in her solitude. On the following day Korben and I found the female on Hilts Lake, “White-blue-Silver”, nervously hanging out in the northwestern corner of that small lake. She foraged cautiously, unable or unwilling to drive off an intruder that foraged at will in her territory. She too found no mate with whom to breed this year. Having observed two openings for male breeders at the beginning of the year, I started to wonder if I was seeing a pattern.

I was chagrined to observe one of my favorite males, Green over Green, White over Silver (i.e. G/G,W/S or “Green-Green”) caught up in the male troubles that seemed to typify 2025. In 2015, when he took over Flannery, he created headaches for the resident female, who was rearing a chick on her own after losing her mate suddenly. But in the decade that followed, Green-Green became the steady, unflappable presence that his father was on Townline¹. I smiled each time my schedule called for me to visit Flannery, knowing that I would get to check in on this tame, accepting male. But this spring, a few days after finding males missing on Blue-West and Hilts, I failed to locate Green-Green on Flannery. Instead, I followed his mate as she foraged throughout the lake. Every few minutes, she wailed pitifully -- just as the Blue-West female had done. I took her behavior as a sign of Green-Green's likely disappearance. A week later, however, Anna found Green-Green on Flannery behaving normally but reported that his left eye was cloudy. He remained on Flannery for the next month. But on July 13 he was found incapacitated by lake residents. Linda and Kevin Grenzer captured Green-Green and took him to REGI for treatment. Nine days later he seemed recovered and was released on Boom Lake. That was the last we heard of him until three days ago, when I got a report that his carcass had been recovered on the north shore of Washington Island on Lake Michigan. His presence there showed that he had recovered well enough to make a long flight east in preparation for his southward migration. We cannot be certain how he died, but his neck had a deep wound, which might indicate a prop strike. Life moves on, of course, but I am not looking forward to my next visit to Flannery, as I used to.²

The news was even more disheartening for the North Two male, “Red-Blue” (R/B,Ts/S). This tame 18-year-old loon -- a veteran breeder that claimed the lake in 2014 -- beached himself in early July. Linda and Kevin netted Red-Blue and took him to REGI also. He did not look terrible at capture, except that his right wing drooped. But he slid downhill rapidly and passed away within two days. The sudden appearance of necrotic tissue without other symptoms led REGI to conclude that he might have been electrocuted, perhaps through an ungrounded wire associated with someone's dock lights. Naturally, his death was another blow. Despite the dearth of good nesting habitat on North Two, Red-Blue had raised four chicks during his eleven years on the lake.

Bad news comes in threes they say. So it was with a sense of inevitability that I learned recently of the third death of an established male during the breeding season in Wisconsin. G/S,Ar/Y (“Auric Red-Yellow”) was a skulker. My memories of Auric Red-Yellow are chiefly from capture nights. His was the ghostly black and white form that would take shape in the distance at night after we had motored slowly down sinuous, weed-choked Jersey City Flowage and spotlighted what seemed like ten thousand mallards lurking in patches of lily pads. But he was a successful parent, having fledged nine chicks with his even-more-skittish mate: Silver over Pink, Green over Green. Auric Red-Yellow was found dead on shore and emaciated, having ingested some form of metal. A vet must confirm this, but it seems that he swallowed someone's lure, lost the ability to feed himself, and died of starvation.

Continued on page 7

A Devastating Year For Males

Walter Piper

Continued from page 6

Preoccupied as I have been with loon capture and marking, wrapping up the field season, and starting a year-long sabbatical, I have had difficulty processing the flurry of male mortality. I hope that the three males lost mid-season will be replaced by youngsters who had been waiting for their chance. After all, that is the way of things. Yet loss of male breeders does not always happen smoothly -- or at all. The disappearance of our much-beloved male, Clune, from Linda Grenzer's home lake in spring 2023 has resulted in three years (and counting) without a breeding pair on Muskellunge Lake.

In fact, I find this recent loss of five established male breeders profoundly unsettling. I have pointed out before that males are the limiting sex in loons. That is, males live shorter lives than females, and this tilts the adult sex ratio towards females. Put simply, males are in short supply, while there are ample females to fill breeding positions. Males have also been impacted by loss of water clarity. They, like chicks (and unlike females) are of substantially lower mass now than 20 years ago. As the "weak link" in the population, males seem most likely to be the cause of further population decline. Does the loss and lack of immediate replacement of these males this past season signal the beginning of that downturn? I hope not. But the pitiful wails of the solitary Blue-West and Flannery females after losing their mates made this year's loss of males especially poignant and the memory hard to shake.

¹Although there are many finalists for the honor, my all-time favorite loon was the old Townline male, Silver over Red, Orange over Green (S/R,O/G). "Orange-Green" was a doting dad who cranked out 20 chicks with five different females during an incredible 24-year run on his tiny lake just west of Rhinelander. Banded as an adult in 1994, Orange-Green seemed uncertain at first about his role on the Loon Project. Each time we launched our canoe and approached to take data he would eye us suspiciously for a moment and then relax, as if recalling that we were just those canoeists that liked to hang around with him and his family during the summertime. I was sad when Orange-Green did not return in 2018.

²The only good news to report regarding this episode is that another local male -- this one an eight-year-old who was raised on Emma Lake and who made failed nesting attempts on Sherry and Hook lakes recently -- is showing signs of claiming Flannery for his own and settling in with the breeding female. If he does so, the Flannery female -- a pleasant, tame individual whom we banded as an adult in 2021 -- will have no more reason to wail.

Walter Piper is a Professor of Biology at Chapman University in Orange, California, and Director of The Loon Project. The Loon Project is a long-term scientific investigation of territoriality, breeding ecology, and population dynamics of common loons in the Upper Midwest. They currently have two study populations: 105 marked breeding pairs in northern Wisconsin (chiefly Oneida County) and 110 marked pairs north-central Minnesota (Crow Wing and Cass counties). Learn more about The Loon Project at loonproject.org.