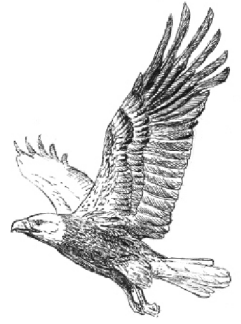




MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 32, No 1

Spring 2021

All membership meetings will require the use of a face covering and social distancing protocols, due to COVID 19 precautions.

Due to concerns for COVID transmission, carpooling is not advised for our field trips. Drivers should only transport members of their own families. Masks should be worn when in close proximity to others. Please take care to space yourself when viewing birds in a group. We can do this safely with an abundance of caution. Thank you!

Membership Meeting, Thursday, March 11th, 2021, 7:00 p.m. - Lauren Larson, a graduate student at Western Illinois University, will present her MS thesis research on Lesser Scaup entitled "Food Availability for Lesser Scaup on Pools 13 and 19 of the Mississippi River".

Field Trip, Sunday, March 14th, 2021 - Up the Mississippi River to Lock and Dam 13, Spring Lake, with stops along the way. Mostly a full day field trip (return around 2:00 p.m.). Due to COVID restriction, it is advised to bring a lunch. Meet at Brother's Restaurant in Rapids City, Illinois at 7:00 a.m. Contact Tim Murphy for further information: 309-764-9779.

Field Trip, Saturday, April 10th, 2021 - Cone Mash, Iowa: migrating waterfowl, shorebirds, early spring migrants. We expect to return around 1:00 p.m. from this long half-day trip. Due to COVID restrictions, it is recommended one bring a lunch. Meet at Marquette Street Boat Landing, Davenport, Iowa at 7:00 a.m. For further information, contact Tim Murphy: 309-764-9779.

Membership Meeting, Thursday, April 8th, 2021, 7:00 p.m.—To Be Determined.

Membership Meeting, Thursday, May 13th, 2021, 7:00 p.m. - Jon Stravers will present "Chasing the Bird Dream". After 40 years of working in the bird conservation world on a variety of monitoring, inventorying and research projects, Jon brings a unique perspective on how birds can unite us, teach us, and bring out the spiritual aspects of our own existence. Jon will describe his work on Red-shouldered Hawks and Cerulean Warblers.

Field Trip, Saturday May 15th, 2021 - Illiniwek and Dorrance Parks. Half day trip. Meet at Illiniwek Park, east side of highway at 6:00am. To view migrating and resident warblers, orioles, tanagers. this field trip in 2020 offered amazing views of a great many species.

Field Trip, Sunday June 6th, 2021 - Mississippi Palisades. This is an all day event. Those interested in attending should meet at Brothers Restaurant in Rapids City at 6:00am. Carpooling will be at discretion of participants. We will stop at Lock and Dam 13 and Spring Lake to view waterfowl en route to Palisades to focus primarily on breeding warblers. This has typically yielded good views of yellow-throated, parula, Kentucky, cerulean warblers and many other species.

On the web at www.quadcityaudubon.org, and available on Facebook.

All membership meetings are held at the Butterworth Center, 1105 8th Street, Moline.



Audubon

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

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President's Corner

Welcome to Quad City Audubon's first all-electronic Newsletter. We hope you all will take time to look through it. You should be able to find some reminders about upcoming meetings and events, summaries of recent past birding events – like the Christmas Bird Count – and general information on birding in our area. If you would like to see some specific item addressed, or have a question we might help with, please do not hesitate to contact us at qcaudubon@gmail.com.

Are we done with winter? Really so done with winter! These last weeks of the Polar Vortex were amazing for the degree of coldness and the longevity of that cold event. We in Iowa and Illinois are mostly prepared for such events, but it is hard not to have sympathy for the area animals and birds. My family has not traveled all winter, so our bird feeders have been kept full. As such, we have attracted birds I have not seen before. A pair of Brown Creepers has visited my suet block several times a day. They rarely stay still, grabbing a bite, hopping off, and returning for more. Crows have shown up lately to feed on the multi-purpose seed that I scattered on the ground. I have also seen Carolina Wrens, while other members have told me they have had Redpolls at their feeders. Watching the birds was surely a bright spot in an otherwise long, cold winter.

As we turn the corner to Spring, please consider partaking in some of the meetings and field events we have scheduled. Check back to our web page often (quadcityaudubon.org). The events column there will be updated as new items arise or changes occur. Hope to see you all in person soon!

- Jody Millar

Meet the Board

Quad City Audubon Society Vice President
Brian D. Peer, Ph.D.

Brian Peer lives in Bettendorf and is a professor of Biological Sciences at Western Illinois University. He is a Fellow of the American Ornithological Society with >70 peer-reviewed publications on birds. His area of research expertise is the Brown-headed Cowbird, which is a brood parasite that lays its eggs in the nests of other birds and relies on these hosts to care for its young. He investigates the adaptations that cowbirds have evolved to trick hosts into caring for their young and the ways in which hosts attempt to thwart parasitism. He also educates the public on the many myths surrounding cowbirds and has successfully demonstrated that the cause of songbird declines is not cowbird parasitism, but rather habitat loss. He wasn't interested in birds until he was forced by his graduate advisor at the University of Illinois to enroll in an Ornithology class. Needless to say, this altered his career trajectory for the better. Finally, he is also known for his work on bilateral gynandromorph birds (half male, half female). He, along with his good friend Bob Motz, published a paper on the famous bilateral gynandromorph cardinal in Rock Island that garnered international attention.



Brian Peer (Far left) with a Prothonotary Warbler.



Summary of the 2020-2021 Local Christmas Bird Counts

Jason L. Monson – Kelly J. McKay – Stephen B. Hager – Cathleen D. Monson

(Rough-legged Hawk photograph courtesy of Stephen Hager)

Dozens of volunteers in Illinois and Iowa counted over 171,000 individual birds across 9 Count Circles around the Quad Cities area during this season's local Christmas Bird Counts. Local counts this season began with Clinton-Savanna on December 15th, 2020. Ten participants in 6 field parties, along with 2 feeder watchers counted 46,970 birds in 85 species. High individual numbers for the count included Cackling Goose (50), Trumpeter Swan (684), Tundra Swan (2,957), Northern Harrier (17), Eastern Screech Owl (16) and Sandhill Crane (284). Some uncommon birds for this circle included 4 American White Pelicans, 4 Evening Grosbeak, and singles each of Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden Eagle, Snowy Owl, and a first ever for this count Marsh Wren.

The Princeton-Camanche CBC was held on December 17th, 2020, with 12 participants in 6 field parties counting 7,945 birds across 69 species. Red-tailed Hawks (54) and Pileated Woodpeckers (12) were abundant for this count. Participants were treated to a few unusual sightings in this circle including 5 Ruddy Ducks, 5 Cackling Geese, and a single Winter Wren.

Twenty-five field participants in 14 parties and 15 feeder watchers counted 75,986 birds and 97 species on December 20th, 2020 during the Davenport Christmas Bird Count. Counters were treated to some great birds such as Mute Swan (3), Blue-winged Teal (2), Lesser Black-backed Gull (2), Brewer's Blackbird (4), and a lone Baltimore Oriole! Greater White-fronted Geese (515) were observed in high numbers, as were Bufflehead (89), Sandhill Crane (10), Carolina Wren (56) and Eurasian Tree Sparrow (609).

Volunteers switched to a more rural setting the following day, December 21st, for the Western Mercer County CBC. Winds picking up by mid-morning didn't stop 11 counters in 6 field parties from observing 9,562 birds in 75 species that day. Some interesting waterfowl were seen, including 19 Trumpeter Swans, 22 Bufflehead, 60 Canvasback, along with 2 American White Pelicans and 2 Winter Wrens.

On December 22nd, fifteen participants in 5 field parties and 7 feeder watchers counted 8,687 birds and 74 species for the Muscatine Christmas Bird Count. Higher than usual numbers of Hooded Mergansers (15) and Barred Owl (30) were observed this year. Some uncommon birds observed on this count included 25 Greater White-fronted Geese, and singles of Ruddy Duck, American White Pelican, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon.

The VanPetten CBC was held on December 23rd, where 7 volunteers in 5 field parties counted 7,945 individual birds among 69 species. Some rare finds were on display this day, with observers counting 5 Lesser Scaup, 1 Hooded Merganser, 1 Red-breasted Merganser, and 1 Field Sparrow.

Four field parties with 11 participants and 2 feeder watchers worked together on December 24th to work the Andalusia-Buffalo Christmas Bird Count. 74 species were observed, and 6,085 birds. Eurasian Tree Sparrows were especially abundant this year, with 1,127 counted. Birders enjoyed some uncommon sightings, including 1 Fox Sparrow, and 1 Common Redpoll.

On December 27th, 2020, seven participants in 4 field parties counted 7,405 birds across a record-setting 81 species during the Bald Bluff CBC. With no snowfall (still!), open country birds were in especially low numbers. In spite of the unseasonably snowless conditions and yet mostly frozen water, volunteers were able to spot some unusual waterfowl such as Ruddy Duck (1), Bufflehead (7), and Hooded Merganser (8); all first-time species for this count circle. Additional new species were added as well, including 1 Wilson's Snipe, 35 Red Crossbill, and 20 White-winged Crossbill.

(continued on page 4)

Local CBC Summary

(continued from page 3)

The local CBC season ended on a rough note on January 3rd, 2021, with the 10th Eastern Mercer County Christmas Bird Count. Persistent fog plagued observers for much of the day, and a heavy crust of snow and ice, coupled with thick hoarfrost, limited observations to just 4,346 birds in 62 species. In spite of these odds, 6 field parties gave it everything they had, securing 5 species of owl (Long-eared, Short-eared, Eastern Screech, Barred and Great-horned), the full cadre of local woodpeckers, and all three open country birds (Horned Lark, Lapland Longspur, and the elusive Snow Bunting). While diversity was actually only a bit below the running average for this count, the environmental conditions definitely limited abundance. With Fyre Lake essentially frozen solid, waterfowl was limited to just Canada Geese and Mallards. A short burst of sunlight in the afternoon seemed to bring out the raptors and improve visibility for a short time, and observers were able to fetch a few uncommon sightings such as 2 Fox Sparrows, 6 Pine Siskins, and a single Winter Wren.

All in all, this CBC season was an unusual one. Mask-wearing due to COVID-19. Locally no snowfall until only one nearby count remained. What did stay the same was everyone's dedication to birding. All of us would like to thank the volunteers from this season for their dedication, diligence and friendship during the 121st Christmas Bird Count. We hope to see all of you again next year!

Sax Zim Bog

In this time of Covid many of our normal routines have been disrupted and I was feeling kind of winter trapped in early January. The holidays had been bereft of the usual celebrations and I began musing for a different kind of experience. I consulted the long term weather forecast and settled on Sax Zim Bog.

I had long heard of this place, a winter birding paradise for northern birds such as great gray owl, northern hawk owl, grosbeaks, redpolls, ruffed grouse, magpie, black-billed and three toed woodpecker, boreal chickadee and others. I figured it would be cold but the weather forecast for my chosen week was highs in mid-teens, certainly tolerable.

I was a little concerned about Covid so, I packed a warm sleeping bag, put a mattress in the bed of the expedition and headed out along clear roads to whatever adventure awaited me. I really did not know what to expect. I will say the Friends of Sax Zim Bog have a website with a good map and great directions to help one find birds. They also have a visitor center but it was closed due to Covid and I kind of had the lay of the land.

I left predawn and drove all day with minimal stops for gas and arrived at the Bog around 3:00, a couple of hours before total darkness. It was here I realized that I was not going to a place, but rather an area of maybe a couple of hundred square miles. The bog is largely good for birding because there are a lot of roads crisscrossing the area. Most of the timber is privately owned but at least three places have boardwalks built into the woods which I am sure are very helpful in summer. There are other trails in upland areas as well. There are no towns in the bog area and no towns of appreciable size for quite a few miles.

Along all the boardwalks, I assume the friends group, has placed feeders, including mounted deer quarters creating the biggest suet feeders I have ever seen. Plus there were people on the boardwalks. The people I spoke with were mostly from Minneapolis area and said they had decided to take advantage of the mild weather to go. They were familiar with the area and shared information about what birds were being seen where.

The boardwalks were very icy to the point of near treacherous in places. Hoarfrost and crusted snow covered everything. One has the impression there is little winter snow melt here. I saw little on my first very short boardwalk and decided to reconnoiter county road 7 for great gray owl but saw none and headed back to Duluth for the night.

By dawn the next day I was back along CR 7 but though the temps were near zero, heavy fog or maybe hoarfrost kept visibility poor for an hour or more in open habitat the great gray owl prefers. Some residents though have great feeding stations scattered throughout the area and these are noted on the map. At these I found pine and evening grosbeak and caught a glimpse of a black-billed magpie.

I spent most of the day traveling the region, walking the icy boardwalks looking for boreal chickadee and woodpeckers. I saw many hairy and downys but not my target birds. A good sized flock of redpolls gave some diversion and again there were people at every stop. I was shown a spectacular picture of a northern hawk owl with an ermine in its talons that I was told had been taken at the visitor center boardwalk. Of course I had not even seen an ermine which I was assured were kind of numerous.

Late afternoon came about and it was time once again to look for the great gray owl along CR 7. As I slowly drove the flats, I came upon a car parked along the roadside. I pulled over and in a tree top directly across the road from me was the great gray owl.

The trip felt vindicated. Well actually it has already been vindicated. I had seen an area that I had been wondering about for quite some time. The friends of the Bog do a wonderful job catering to birders and I gladly left a donation at the visitor center drop box. I will plan to return in winter and summer.

This time though I headed home. The weather forecast had changed and predicted freezing rain, sleet and snow from Minnesota to Illinois by the next morning. I filled my thermos with strong coffee and returned home.

- Tim Murphy

QCAS Field Trip - Smiths Island/Lock & Dam 14

The Quad City Audubon field trip for February 13 to Smith's Island was kind of chilly. The temperature at 8:00am was pretty much zero. Four intrepid members, Bob Bryant, Jody Millar, Brian Peer and I met at Lock & Dam 14 to temperatures pretty much zero.

The river below the Lock and Dam can be very good for diving ducks in winter. I have observed thousands of ducks here and upriver. Plus of course traditionally this has been an excellent spot to view bald eagles. However Saturday was not one of those days. We did pick up a pair of hooded mergansers close to shore and other pairs showed themselves as well. The vast majority of ducks present were goldeneyes, probably a couple of thousand mostly in the channel with a few common mergansers a bit farther downriver. A dozen eagles either loafed in the trees or fished over the river. We saw no gulls.

The lock chambers contained mallards, Canada geese and a lone canvasback.

There was probably a foot of snow on the ground. The trail to Smith's Island had been little used so some trail breaking would be needed. I had also birded Smith's Island the day previous and found essentially no birds except downy woodpeckers and a couple of roosting eagles.

Brian Peer pushed ahead to Smith's Island where he saw red-tailed hawk, downy woodpecker, chickadee, goldfinch, tufted titmouse and another eagle. Jody, Bob and I decided to go to Canal Shore Drive to see if there might be different birds along that portion of the river. We added a smattering of canvasbacks, ring-necked duck and more goldeneyes. Not as many but closer to shore for a bit easier viewing. We did pick up a dozen or so Eurasian tree sparrows, cardinals, house finch and a couple more eagles.

All in all we only birded an hour. It was not one of our more successful field trips but maybe more an exercise in hope and perseverance. Still zero while cold is not that bad, we could have been at Sax- Zim Bog.

- Tim Murphy

51st Annual Illinois Spring Bird Count Saturday May 8, 2021

With Spring comes the Illinois Spring Bird Count. For the 51st consecutive year Quad City Audubon will support the Illinois Natural History Survey and coordinate efforts to count birds in Rock Island County. During Spring Count birders fan out across Illinois to census as many birds as can be identified. This is a huge Citizen Science effort.

Similar to the Christmas Counts, the Spring Bird Counts can reveal long term changes in migration, changes in birds breeding ranges and provide information about bird populations in general. For example these counts have indicated blue grosbeaks and summer tanagers may be moving northward, possibly in response to global climate change. We also have documented the increase of species such as cormorant, pelican and Canada geese.

Covering the state is a big job and we can use a lot of help in different ways. One can join a field party. These are small groups usually led by an accomplished birder that covers a specific territory within the county. One does not need to be a great birder to participate in a field party. Extra eyes are often valuable, one can help with tabulations or even driving. One can also volunteer to count their neighborhood, park or property. There is plenty of territory for everyone. Finally, one can count birds that visit their feeders. The only requirement is the count day is Saturday May 8th, and binoculars are highly recommended.

With Covid 19 still being a concern, carpooling for this event is not recommended. Field parties are encouraged to continue social distance standards and mask wearing.

Though our efforts focus on Rock Island County, counters are needed in the surrounding counties of Mercer, Whiteside and Henry County as well. For additional information contact Tim Murphy at 309-764-9779 or email:

molmurphy53@gmail.com. For information on Spring Bird Count in general <http://www.inhs.illinois.edu/collections/birds/sbc/>.

- Tim Murphy

Membership Application

☐ I would like to join as a new member of the National Audubon Society and my local chapter. Please send me *Audubon Magazine*, *Mississippi Currents*, and my membership card. Enclosed is my check for \$35 payable to National Audubon Society. (include **Chapter # H63** on your check)

OR

I would like to join only as a member of Quad City Audubon ☐ in lieu of National Audubon. Please send me *Mississippi Currents*. Enclosed is my check for \$10 payable to Quad City Audubon.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Send to: Quad City Audubon Society
P.O. Box 81
Bettendorf, IA 52722
www.quadcityaudubon.org

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.

Thanks to those who contributed to this issue of *Mississippi Currents*. The next deadline is May 15th, 2021. Submissions are gladly accepted. Send to:

Jason Monson
(309) 221-1177
jmonson75@hotmail.com

Visit us online at:
www.quadcityaudubon.org.

*Photographs from QCAS
President Jody Millar*

*At right: Red-bellied
Woodpecker*

*Bottom right: Downy Wood-
pecker and Brown Creeper*

Bottom left: Carolina Wren

