



MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 32, No 2

Summer 2021

Please observe COVID-19 protocols during membership meetings and field trips. Thank you for your help in these constantly evolving times.

Check back soon on our website quadcityaudubon.org for fall membership meetings and field trips.

Building Better Birders Workshop - Friday, July 9th, 2021. 6:30 - 10 PM. Saulsbury Bridge Recreation Area, 2007 Saulsbury Road, Muscatine, Iowa.

6:30 - 7 PM, Aldo Leopold Readings. 7 - 8 PM, Introduction to Nocturnal Raptors of Iowa Bird Identification. 8 - 10 PM, Owl Prowl.

Call Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 with any questions.

Building Better Birders Workshop - Wednesday, July 14th, 2021. 8 - 10 PM. Lake Iowa Park, 2550 G Avenue, Ladora, Iowa.

8 - 10 PM. Birding Internationally: Tales From A Sometimes Wannabe World Lister.

Call Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 with any questions.

Field Trip - Saturday, September 11th, 2021. Wildcat Den State Park.

Meet at Credit Island Lodge at 7:00 a.m. Carpool/Caravan to Wildcat Den State Park near Muscatine, Iowa. Half day trip. Fall migration!

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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Direct all general emails to:**qcaudubon@gmail.com****President's Corner**

Quad City Audubon members do indeed watch birds. But our ability to be keen observers of the environment translates to much more. At certain times of the year, our bird watching becomes part of a data set that is important for looking at long-term trends in bird population size and timing of migration and breeding that is indicative of changes in our climate. At other times, we provide an education resource for our community.

Quad City Audubon is regularly active in education. When members of our community are looking for birding experts, folks who can describe birds in our community, how to protect them and how to observe them, the community members reach out to the Quad City Audubon Society. We have been asked to give presentations on television, at conferences, and to interested groups. This summer we have been asked to lead a Nature Walk for Davenport Library, to assess the breeding bird population at Illiniwek Forest Preserve as part of a Bioblitz, and to help with educational programming for a new Purple Martin hotel at the Davenport Cemetery.

We hope that more of our members will join in our activities and our outreach. One easy way to get more involved in these activities is to just start attending a field trip, a program, or join our Board. No special knowledge is required. Quad City Audubon is a learning environment. We all learn from each other and from our expert resources. As you enjoy your summer, please consider joining in our field trips and programs we will be lining up for this fall, starting in September. New Board members are elected in December.

Watch our web site for updates on events - quadcityaudubon.org.

- Jody Millar

June Field Trip Report

Quad City Audubon members finally had a lovely day for a field trip this past June 6. The birds seemed happy, too, and gave us birdwatchers a lovely show. Because the day was predicted to be hot, we stopped at the prairie near Thomson, Illinois on our way to Palisades State Park which had much more shade. Though Janelle Swanberg was not able to join us, she gave us ideas of where to look for some unique species.

As soon as we left the cars and walked up the Upper Mississippi River Refuge trail near Thomson, we heard the Yellow-Breasted Chat. There was no mistaking its varied songs and it even allowed us a quick glance or two.

Walking back near the entrance, a Bell's Vireo was heard singing. It was not long before the bird popped out of the tree quite close to us. It was even hopping on the ground not far from our feet! At the same spot, we were able to find the Blue Grosbeak. And quickly, both the male and female Blue Grosbeaks appeared. We were all pleased at the good viewing.

We traveled on to Palisades State Park just north of Savanna, IL where we made an effort to find a Cerulean Warbler. Very nicely, the Cerulean responded and showed itself for quite a while, though it remained within the protective tree canopy. The Yellow-Throated Warbler, however, was very showy. We marveled at its beauty and its robust song for a number of minutes and the photographers in our group were able to take some very nice pictures. Nearby, a Scarlet Tanager also showed itself briefly.

As we headed back to the Quad Cities, we stopped at Lock and Dam 13 at Fulton, IL and spotted some water-related birds to add to our list. Sixty-eight species later, we departed for our homes and all felt fortunate to see such lovely birds on a pleasant summer day.

- Jody Millar



Participants and scenery from the June field trip (left), photograph by Sherif Ragheb. Scarlet Tanager (center) and Prothonotary Warbler (right), photographs by Rueben Segura.

2021 Illinois Spring Bird Count

Rock Island County

Submitted by Tim Murphy

May 8 was the 50th annual Illinois Spring Bird Count. In Rock Island County 7 field parties made up of 1 or 2 people fanned out in an attempt to census all the birds in Rock Island County. This is part of a statewide effort. I have been compiling and have records for the count beginning 1986.

Conditions for migratory birds on May 8 seemed a bit challenging. The day started chilly with a dawn temperature of 32 degrees and a daytime high of 60 degrees. Migration seemed to be a bit delayed due to relatively cool spring temperatures and frequent prevailing winds from the north. In addition lack of rainfall created almost no flooding conditions and very little habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl.

Many of the field parties struggled to find a variety of species and bird numbers in general seemed to be low. That is until I received county totals from Pat Carlson and Al Frohlich who birded western Rock Island County. Below is a bit of a summary for the county.

For the day we totaled 132 species which is about average. Some birds proved hard to find. As expected shorebirds were nearly non-existent, 5 species sighted including killdeer. Bobwhite (1) and pheasant (2) continue to be scarce. Rock pigeon (18) was a record low previous low being 37, a kingfisher (1), Carolina wren (1) were very low numbers and titmouse (16) was half our normal average. Common grackle (154) presented another record low number following a trend of the last decade. This trend has been repeated even in house sparrows, red-winged blackbirds and European starlings.

We did though find a remarkable number of birds in record high numbers. These include great egret (36) previous 33, gray catbird (178/108), orange-crowned warbler (23/9), Kentucky warbler (8/6), black-throated green warbler (25/17), and dickcissel (43/26). In addition while not records Swainson's thrush (36), savanna sparrow (10), blue-winged warbler (13) and American redstart (122) were abnormally high.

Other unusual birds sighted for our count date were: gadwall, common loon, black tern, yellow-billed cuckoo, Acadian flycatcher and red-breasted nuthatch.

Overall, weather conditions and migration patterns notwithstanding we had a pretty successful year. If one would like, contact me for a species list. Full public available state wide records are available at spring-bird-count.inhs.illinois.edu

Anyone who would like to participate in future spring bird counts, either as a feeder watcher, a neighborhood counter or to join a field party should contact me at molmurphy53@gmail.com or 309-764-9779.

I would like to thank our participants this year, Pat Carlson, Don Fish, Steve Freed, Al Frohlich, Jeanne Hedges, Mary Osborn, Janelle Swanberg, Chris Swanson, Cathy White, Jo Ann Whitmore, & David VanLandegen.

Field Trip Illiniwek/Dorrance Park

Submitted by Tim Murphy

Two years ago this field trip had been a very good experience with a lot of bird sightings and some very good looks. This year it rained steadily all morning. Tim Murphy, Janelle Swanberg and Cathy Konrad decided the shower was not bad enough to keep us from the appointed task so we trudged up the timbered hill of Illiniwek Park.

As we went the rain increased and birds were exceptionally scarce. A red-eyed vireo here, a house wren there, Baltimore orioles and redstart calling, a dickcissel in an open area were our highlights.

After two hours of dripping raincoats and an increasingly slippery trail we decided to call it a morning. Sometimes the birding is good and other times it is just plain bad. This morning was bad.



From the June field trip; at left, Grasshopper Sparrow, at right, Yellow-throated Warbler. Photographs by Sherif Ragheb.



Swainson's hawk, above, at Nachusa Grasslands Visitor Center, Lee County, Illinois. April, 2021. Photos used with permission by Sue Bidgood.

Day Trip to Nachusa Grasslands

In April, I happened upon a Facebook post about the sighting of a Swainson's Hawk at the Nachusa Grasslands in Lee County, Illinois. Having only observed Swainson's in the west, I was inspired to make the trip the following day to see if it was still lingering. I'd never visited (or even heard of) Nachusa, and thought it would make for a nice day trip. The Grasslands are a restored tallgrass prairie in Lee and Ogle Counties, managed by The Nature Conservancy. In addition to the considerable number of bird species one can see there, a herd of American Bison were released on the property in October 2014.

I set off the following morning, and made the drive to Dixon, and arrived at the visitor center by mid-morning. The grasslands were a delight, and I hiked the short trail system for over an hour before leaving to do some "road birding" in the area. While I never resighted the Swainson's Hawk, the trip was definitely not a disappointment. I observed several species of birds in and around the Grasslands. There are some small ponds adjacent to the visitor center property, which held a few Canada Geese. Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, and a pair of Sandhill Cranes foraged in the shallows. I heard the call of a Ring-necked Pheasant, and a Belted Kingfisher rattled as I drove slowly north away from the ponds.

Grasshopper, Field and Chipping Sparrows were easily seen. Tree Swallows swept through the air constantly. Eastern Meadowlarks sang, and Red-winged Blackbirds were numerous. I saw Common Grackles and American Robins throughout the morning. A trio of American Crows "cawed" in the distance while two Turkey Vultures kited above, their wings nearly frozen in that characteristic V. In the forest not far away, I could hear Chickadees and Cardinals. A lone male Kestrel waited on an overhead line along the road, and an adult Red-tailed Hawk perched atop a large maple overlooking a pasture a mile or so south of the Grassland.

I'd like to thank Suzanne Bidgood, for her original post about the Swainson's Hawk, which introduced me to the Nachusa Grasslands. She graciously allowed me to print her pictures in the newsletter, which you can see above. I'd recommend anyone make the trip to Nachusa. It was a treat and I'm sure to return.

- Jason Monson

The Education Birds of Clinton County Conservation

Late in March of this year, I met with Clinton County Conservation Environmental Education Coordinator Mark Roberts, and Naturalist Jill Schmidt to talk about their education birds. I'd seen the birds firsthand in September of 2020 at a Building Better Birders Workshop at the Soaring Eagle Nature Center in Clinton.

Presently, Clinton County Conservation houses 2 birds of prey for educational purposes: a Red-tailed Hawk and Barred Owl. The Red-tailed Hawk was taken in in the fall of 2016 as a juvenile with an injured wing. A female, the bird's diet consists largely of rodents, including mice and rats. Some fish, quail and chicken help sustain the hawk's nutrition as well. A male Barred Owl, originally recovered in Minocqua, Wisconsin after being struck by a car, made it's way to Clinton County Conservation in June of 2019.

Staff at CCC provide regular care for the birds, including trimming of talons and coping the beak to prevent over growth. The birds' weight is carefully monitored with weekly weigh ins, to assure they are maintaining a proper intake of nutrition.

Photographs of both birds can be found on page 6 of the newsletter.

- Jason Monson

Building Better Birders Workshops Reach Over 1000 Participants

Jason L. Monson – Kelly J. McKay – Mark A. Roberts – Brian P. Ritter

In 2020, Kelly McKay (BioEco Research and Monitoring Center), Mark Roberts (Clinton County Conservation Board), and Brian Ritter (Nahant Marsh Education Center), began presenting Building Better Birders and Citizen Scientists workshops throughout Iowa. These workshops are free and open to the public, and are funded through a grant from the Iowa Resource Enhancement and Protection Conservation Education Program (REAP-CEP). The workshops are tailored to meet individual groups' needs, and range from Bird Identification and Research Presentations, to Bird Hikes, Owl Prowls and other Miscellaneous Presentations. Through May 2021, 57 workshops have been held in 24 counties across Iowa.

So far, the workshops have exceeded expectations, especially considering the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions enacted last year. They have reached 1,006 total individual attendees, and a cumulative 1,555 attendees (accounting for repeat participation) so far, and 43 more workshops are scheduled through the end of the year and into 2022.

One of the project's goals is to encourage participation in citizen science programs. Data from the owl prowls and bird hikes held during these workshops are being turned into the Iowa Ornithologists' Union seasonal field notes. Therefore, over the course of 57 workshops held so far, 635 attendees have taken part in citizen science through their participation in one or more of the 12 owl prowls and 60 bird hikes held during the already completed workshops. Participants to date have identified 206 bird species during these bird hikes and owl prowls. To date, the program has conducted 12 avian research, 13 miscellaneous and 49 bird identification presentations.

With 43 workshops to go, it's not too late to catch a bird ID presentation or go on a hike for birds or owls. Check out our Upcoming Events page to learn about workshops coming up in July.

Mercer County Spring Bird Count 2021

The cold start of 32 degrees with a NW breeze of 8 mph for Mercer County's 2021 Spring Bird Count almost certainly had an effect on bird activity early in the day, and a subsequent reduction in birds detected. Another factor was volunteers with several years experience in their area of coverage on the south side of the county, below State Highway 17, while some volunteers on the north side were covering their area for the first time. In an attempt to try and mitigate this latter effect, the north side was divided into three parts, as opposed to the two part division of most of the past 49 years, while the south side retained the two part division. The resultant five areas of the county to cover ranged from roughly 17% of the county's surface area in a couple of the northern sections, to 28% in the southeast section of the county (19% NW, 17% center north, 17% NE, 19% SW and 28% SE).

Even with the factors mentioned above, we still had 131 species on the count, which was above our 49 year average of 123 species, and better than 27 of those 49 years. While slim on warblers and shorebirds, we recorded some species not often found for our SBC including Caspian Tern, American Golden-Plover, Wilson's Phalarope, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Hooded Warbler, and Rusty Blackbird. As usual, the 782 Red-winged Blackbirds far outnumbered closest competitors. We could never have guessed 40 years ago, that Wild Turkey would number 44 and beat out Ring-necked Pheasant at 26, and even outnumber the 38 Rock Pigeons! WHAT? More turkeys than pigeons!!

- Bill Bertrand

Purple Martins nest in QCAS gourd houses at Nahant Marsh

Through the support of member donations, Quad City Audubon Society purchased gourd-shaped Purple Martin houses for installation at Nahant Marsh. Nahant Marsh staff report a successful breeding year and have shared some pictures of their nests with us.

Purple Martins feed almost entirely by air and will even drink water while flying. They eat a lot of bugs to sustain themselves, most notably mosquitoes. Thus, they have been a popular companion of humans for a long time. Gourd nest boxes have been found to be used as far back as pre-European Native Americans. They were quite common in the days of John James Audubon. Now most Eastern Purple Martins use nest boxes while Western Purple Martins are more likely to use natural cavities.

Enjoy these birds while you can. By late summer after their young have fledged, they will gather in flocks and begin their return migration down to South America. Thanks to James Wiebler of Nahant Marsh for sharing these pictures with us.

- Jody Millar



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 August 15th, 2021. Submissions are gladly accepted. Send to:

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

Visit us online at:
www.quadcityaudubon.org.



Cerulean Warbler, photographed by Sherif Ragheb during the June field trip.



The educational raptors of Clinton County Conservation. At left, a male Barred Owl. Below, a female Red-tailed Hawk. Article on page 4. Photographs by Jason Monson.

