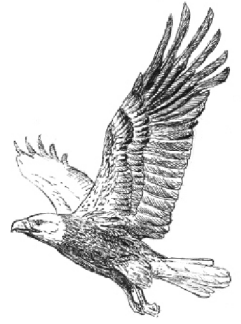




MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 36, No 4

Winter 2025

Thursday December 11th, Membership Meeting and Pie Night at Deere-Wiman House, 817 11th Avenue, Moline. Meet at 6 p.m. for our annual pie night and officer elections.

Sunday December 14th, Davenport Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Monday December 15th, Clinton/Savanna Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Tuesday December 16th, Louisa Y Christmas Bird Count. Contact Janelle Swanberg at 563-349-8182 or jswanberg@mchsi.com to participate.

Wednesday December 17th, Princeton/Camanche Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Saturday December 20th, Western Mercer County Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Sunday December 21st, Bald Bluff Christmas Bird Count. Contact Jason Monson at jmonson75@hotmail.com to participate.

Tuesday December 23rd, Muscatine Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Wednesday December 24th, Andalusia/Buffalo Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Sunday December 28th, Eastern Mercer County Christmas Bird Count. Contact Jason Monson at jmonson75@hotmail.com to participate.

Wednesday December 31st, VanPetten Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Friday January 2nd, 2026, Buchanan County Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Saturday January 3rd, Northwest Clayton County Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Sunday January 4th, Southeast Clayton County Christmas Bird Count. Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

January 9 - 11, 2026: Bald Eagle Days at QCCA Expo Center, Rock Island, IL. QC Audubon will host 4 bus tours to observe bald eagles in the Quad Cities Saturday and Sunday. Stop at the QC Audubon booth in the Expo center for more information or contact us at QCAudubon@gmail.com.

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



Audubon

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

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P.O. Box 81

Bettendorf, IA 52722

www.quadcityaudubon.org

**Direct all general emails
to:**

qcaudubon@gmail.com

Bald Eagle Nesting Activity and Productivity Near the Proposed Development Site in Milan Bottoms During the 2025 Breeding Season

By

Kelly J. McKay

During the spring and summer of 2025, I conducted opportunistic random area search surveys within Milan Bottoms near the proposed development site (truck stop, car wash, marijuana dispensary, etc.). The primary purpose of these surveys was to document the composition of the terrestrial vertebrate community (i.e., amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals), in order to oppose this planned development by demonstrating the biological richness of Milan Bottoms. This development will not only severely impact the wildlife inhabiting Milan Bottoms, but the activities associated with these businesses will specifically have potentially catastrophic impacts to the Bald Eagle winter night roost, which is immediately adjacent to this site. To put these impacts in perspective, this is the largest Bald Eagle night roost that has ever been documented in the lower 48 states! During the course of these surveys, I also conducted intensive searches for the state endangered Blanding's Turtle. These searches produced a total of 4 turtles! Additionally, I attempted to document the productivity from 3 of the 6 known active Bald Eagle nests located in the vicinity of the proposed development.

Periodically through the spring and summer months, I observed and determined the nesting activity and eventually the reproductive success from the 3 nest sites closest to the proposed development on the west side of Illinois Highway 92. The location and determined productivity from each of the 6 known nest sites is summarized in Table 1. Overall, all 6 nests were active in 2025 (i.e., adult pairs were observed incubating eggs and/or brooding young). These 6 nests produced a minimum of 7 fledglings in 2025!

By comparison, the developers hired Terracon Consultants, Inc. to assess eagle usage of Milan Bottoms near the proposed development. Terracon was charged with investigating both nesting and night roosting activities here. It appears they conducted both the breeding and wintering assessments in a single day (6 May 2025)! According to their results, there are no active eagle nests in close proximity (660 feet) to the proposed development site. In fact, based on my field studies, all 6 known active nests occur within 1.0 mile of the site. Furthermore, Terracon stated that the winter night roost has not been used by eagles during the last two winters. However, they fail to explain how they can possibly determine night roost usage over the last two winters based on a one-day visit in May - a time of year when eagles never utilize night roosts. That would be like me going to your home one day for over an entire year, when I know you are out of town, and proclaiming that because you are not there that day, you have abandoned your house! Not only that, but no supporting information was provided for that conclusion.

Table 1. Active Bald Eagle Nests Located Within Milan Bottoms Near the Proposed Development Site (2025).

Nest 1	- GPS Coordinates	15T 0698627	UTM 4592126
	- The nest was located at the point.		
	- This nest successfully produced 2 fledglings.		
Nest 2	- GPS Coordinates	15T 0697871	UTM 4592258
	- The nest was located at the point.		
	- This nest successfully produced at least 2 fledglings.		
Nest 3	- GPS Coordinates	15T 0697558	UTM 4592808
	- The nest was located at the point.		
	- This nest successfully produced at least 2 fledglings.		
Nest 4	- GPS Coordinates	15T 0698822	UTM 4592035
	- The nest was located approximately 1,200m southeast of this location.		
	- The reproductive outcome of this nest was unknown.		
Nest 5	- GPS Coordinates	15T 0700225	UTM 4592127
	- The nest was located approximately 600m south of this location.		
	- The reproductive outcome of this nest was unknown.		
Nest 6	- GPS Coordinates	15T 0700760	UTM 4591850
	- The nest was located approximately 300m south of this location.		
	- This nest successfully produced at least 1 fledgling.		

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.

Raptor Rescue and Rehabilitation: Right In Our Backyard

by Jason Monson

Over the years, I've had many ask me about wildlife rescue and rehabilitation operations in this part of the Midwest. The question used to be difficult to answer. So often, the contacts I had for local rehabbers were out of date or limited in their scope of specialty and ability to respond. That was, until about 4 years ago, when I met Tamara Yarger.

It had been reported to me that a Bald Eagle was injured, north of Joy, Illinois. I responded to the area and found the immature bird down on the ground; alive, but unable to fly. Tamara responded and took the bird back to Kewanee, where Hog Capitol Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation do their work. In 2022, "Valor" (as she came to be called) was rehabilitated, but unable to be released back into the wild. She became a permanent wildlife ambassador at Niabi Zoo.

Tamara, and her husband Jim, are President and Vice President of the non-profit wildlife rehabilitation and rescue group. Along with a handful of other volunteers, the Yargers have been rehabilitating wildlife for 10 years now. They began raptor rehab with a sub-permit under Northern Illinois Raptor Rehab in 2018, and eventually "branched out" on their own in 2022. She describes the permit process as grueling. The State of Illinois requires a letter of recommendation from a veterinarian, measurements of all indoor and outdoor caging, a sketch of the layout of the rehabilitation areas, and partnership with a college or university. Even tougher is the permit process with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Hours as an apprentice, a letter of recommendation from the mentor she apprenticed under, photos of enclosures, another veterinarian recommendation, measurements of the enclosures and area, materials the enclosures are made of, the list goes on and on.

It seems every year I meet up with the Yargers for one reason or another. Whether its bringing her an injured owl, calling her about a bewildered Belted Kingfisher, or standing by with a Bald Eagle, Tamara is always helpful, friendly and patient. Recently, we met along the highway near Viola, where she and Jim picked up a Bald Eagle that had been struck by a car. While that bird ultimately did not survive, I'm grateful that they're available to try with so many birds and other wildlife. Tamara estimates that they rescue over 200 birds annually, and as of the writing of this article, have responded to 15 Bald Eagles just in 2025.

As a non-profit, Hog Capitol relies on grants and public donations to fund this 24/7 enterprise. The expense of feeding fish and rodents to their raptors, providing medication for pain and infections, vitamins, and therapy for lead-poisoned eagles is considerable. Consider that they don't just service raptors, and its easy to understand how great the need is for financial support.

I asked Tamara about advice she would offer the public, when they encounter what appears to be injured wildlife. She asked that it start with a phone call to her. If she can't respond or help directly, often she knows of another that can. If you see what looks like an injured wild animal, before you approach or act, please call Tamara Yarger at 309-540-9126. If you would like to provide financial support to Hog Capitol Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, you can send it to Hog Capitol Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation, 821 N. Burr Street, Kewanee, IL 61443..

Learn more about the Yargers, Hog Capitol Wildlife Rescue and Rehab, and the work they're doing, on Facebook.



Some of Hog Capitol's recent patients. Photos courtesy of Hog Capitol Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation.

Occurrence of the State Endangered Blanding's Turtle Near the Proposed Development Site in Milan Bottoms

By
Kelly J. McKay

During 13 survey days between 15 May and 1 August 2025, I spent 124.5 hours intensively searching many of the wetland areas containing appropriate habitat for the state endangered Blanding's Turtle near the proposed development site in Milan Bottoms (i.e., truck stop, car wash, and marijuana dispensary, etc.). This was part of a broader effort to document as much of the terrestrial vertebrate community as possible. With no funding, equipment, or required trapping permits, my efforts consisted of opportunistic random area searches.

During the Blanding's Turtle surveys specifically, I positioned myself along the edge of various wetlands and sat quietly for 1+ hours observing, with a spotting scope, the heads of submerged turtles poking above water briefly to breathe or turtles out basking on logs or mudflats. Even at distance, the definitive field marks of the two-toned head consisting of a dark dorsal side (i.e., top of the head and back of the neck) and brighter yellow ventral side (i.e., chin and throat), as well as the more domed and yellowish-speckled carapace for basking individuals certainly aided in the identification of this species. I also attempted to identify evidence of turtle nesting activities, especially Blanding's Turtles, in the proposed 10-acre development site until I was threatened by both the city of Rock Island and the Illinois DNR with legal action. I wonder what the city and DNR were so afraid of to resort to making threats, was it that I might actually find nesting Blanding's Turtles? I was only able to search about 25% of the 10-acre site. Nevertheless, I observed 38 depredated turtle nests. Although I was unable to determine the species, the importance of this site for turtle nesting overall was obvious!

I observed a total of 4 Blanding's Turtles, each in a different wetland tract (Table 1). Three of the turtles appeared to be adults, while the other was a smaller (i.e., younger) individual. This suggests that Milan Bottoms may have a breeding population of this state endangered turtle! However, the survey being used by the city of Rock Island and the developers to determine if the Blanding's Turtle is present within or near the proposed development site did not report any Blanding's Turtles. I believe this is because of multiple flaws in the survey methodology. First, it was conducted over a brief 3-week study period. Second, the survey only evaluated the presence of Blanding's Turtle in a single wetland containing appropriate habitat for this species, while the many other wetlands in the vicinity were not studied. They additionally assessed an adjacent deeper water borrow pit which is not a habitat type utilized by Blanding's Turtles. Third, their traps were only placed along the shoreline, meaning most of the wetland was not sampled. Fourth, they only searched for nesting turtles during the day, although many of these turtles tend to nest in the dark. Fifth, they did not perform any intensive visual searches for the species. My observed sightings coupled with the faulty nature of the official study call for a new survey to be conducted in a more rigorous and scientific manner before the proposed development destroys these turtle's homes.

Table 1. Blanding's Turtle Observations Within Milan Bottoms Near the Proposed Development Site (Spring and Summer 2025).

5-15-25	6-14-25
- Effort: 7.5 hours (0730-1500)	- Effort: 13.75 hours (0600-1945)
- Observer: Kelly McKay	- Observer: Kelly McKay
- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles	- Results: 2 Blanding's Turtles
5-23-25	7-2-25
- Effort: 9.5 hours (0730-1700)	- Effort: 12.0 hours (0700-1900)
- Observer: Kelly McKay	- Observer: Kelly McKay
- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles	- Results: 1 Blanding's Turtle
5-27-25	7-9-25
- Effort: 11.25 hours (0800-1915)	- Effort: 9.0 hours (0730-1630)
- Observer: Kelly McKay	- Observer: Kelly McKay
- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles	- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles
5-30-25	7-17-25
- Effort: 12.0 hours (0700-1900)	- Effort: 10.5 hours (0630-1700)
- Observer: Kelly McKay	- Observer: Kelly McKay
- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles	- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles
6-1-25	7-31-25
- Effort: 4.0 hours (1815-2215)	- Effort: 15.25 hours (0600-2115)
- Observer: Kelly McKay	- Observers: Kelly McKay; Jason Wambsgans
- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles	- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles
6-2-25	8-1-25
- Effort: 6.5 hours (1500-2130)	- Effort: 7.25 hours (0730-1445)
- Observer: Kelly McKay	- Observers: Kelly McKay; Jason Wambsgans
- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles	- Results: 1 Blanding's Turtle
6-4-25	
- Effort: 6.0 hours (1300-1900)	
- Observer: Kelly McKay	
- Results: 0 Blanding's Turtles	

November 2025 Waterfowl Field Trip

On Sunday November 16th, 8 Quad City Audubon members met at Rapids City for the Fall waterfowl field trip upriver to Spring Lake. This is a full day field trip and designed to coincide with the beginning of diving duck migration with the hope of seeing a fair number of late puddle ducks as well.

However this year, as has been the case for the past few years, was unseasonably warm. It was expected that diving ducks could be sparse but puddle ducks could be present in good numbers. That proved to be the case overall.

We met at Shuler's Boat Ramp in Rapids City. This can be a decent place for observation but the river was empty and we had to settle for a lone eurasian tree sparrow. The morning was near 32 degrees but clear with no wind.

We decided to backtrack to Lock and Dam 14 as Tim Murphy had observed what he thought were likely rusty blackbirds. The rusty's though turned out to be Brewer's. Both species are observed most often during spring and fall migration but Brewer's are more western than Rusty and thus a bit more unusual.

With that out of the way upriver we went. We took a brief side trip at the Nuclear Power Plant but failed to observe any bluebird or turkeys. Meredosia Slough south of Albany was empty as well.

We arrived at Lock and Dam 13 with only a few passerines and mostly mallards seen. The huge backwater along the access road to the L&D was pretty empty as well. Closer to the river however there were Coots by the 1000's and a few pied billed grebes. Cathy White through her scope picked up a kingfisher a quarter mile away from the causeway which was a great spot.

Below the lock and dam there were a few ring-billed gulls, herring gulls, pelicans and bald eagles but still the numbers were low, almost outnumbered by the walleye fishermen. Above the lock and dam we found diving ducks in the channel. There were very few compared to most years but a decent variety as we found canvasback, redhead, ruddy duck, lesser scaup, bufflehead, and canada goose.

Upriver we could see there was a very large concentration of waterfowl but they were much too far away to identify. On the way out along the causeway we found a few more ducks including northern shoveler, gadwall and pintails.

Our next stop was Thompson Causeway, an Army Corps of Engineers Campground. We turned left as we entered the campground and there is a relatively large backwater that the past couple of years has been filled with puddle ducks. This year was no exception as we had mallard, pintail, gadwall, northern shoveler, and green-winged teal. The light was good and they were relatively close for easy identification.

The northern end of the campground was a disappointment as we only added killdeer.

Our final stop was the overlook at Ingersoll Nature Center and Spring Lake just south of Savanna. We continued to add a few species as we picked up wood duck, and trumpeter swan.

We ended the afternoon with a nice but unscheduled lunch in Savanna, 41 species total and most of the expected waterfowl with the most surprising miss, being ring-necked duck.

Tim Murphy