



# Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 37—ISSUE 1 JAN.- FEB. 2009

NEWSLETTER

## NATIVE PLANT SALE OFFERS COLOR ALL YEAR

Nothing brightens a dark winter day like planning next summer's garden. And nothing keeps that garden blooming without extra watering and fertilizing like plants that are native to the area. Thorn Creek Audubon Society's annual native plant sale offers a convenient way to purchase native plants that will add color to your garden from March to October.

Plant sale chairman Dory Grosche will be mailing order forms to everyone who bought plants last year. Forms will be available at the Jan. 7 and the Feb. 4 TCAS meetings in the Park Forest Library, and they can also be requested from Dory by calling 481-3166. Forms must be returned to her by Friday, February 20; pick-up day for the plants will be the first week in June.

As in previous years, trees, shrubs, grasses and perennials will be available. Many plants will come from Possibility Place, the regular supplier, while others will come from Keith Nowakowski, a landscape designer and author of *Native Plants in the Home Landscape*. Nowakowski will be presenting the TCAS program Jan. 7, discussing using native plants to landscape and to attract birds.

Plants that thrive in both sun and shade will be available. Spring blooming plants will include Solomon's Seal and False Solomon's Seal, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Wild Hyacinth and Green Dragon. Summer plants include Ohio Spider Plant, Butterfly Weed, Foxgloves, Black-eyed Susan and Purple Coneflowers. Asters will provide fall color. New plants include the Prickly Pear Cactus, which is surprisingly hardy this far north, and Northern Sea Oats, a grass that becomes a wonderful orange-red color in autumn.

The plant sale is one of TCAS' major fundraisers. The funds help support the grants and scholarships given by TCAS, as well as its education programs and other activities.



About 30 volunteers braved brisk winds on November 22 to scatter seeds of native plants at the Bartel Grassland. From left to right, TCAS members Mary Anne McLean, Bob Harrison, and Betty Smurawski help strew \$1,200 worth of seeds at the second TogetherGreen event, sponsored by Audubon and the Toyota Corporation.

*Photo by Dick Riner*

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## WINTER PROGRAMS

**Wednesday, Jan. 7, 7p.m.**

Park Forest Library

### LANDSCAPING WITH NATIVE PLANTS

Keith Nowakowski

January is the kickoff of Audubon's Native Plant Sale. Our speaker, Keith Nowakowski, will present ideas on how to use native plants in our home landscape and how to attract birds. He is a landscape designer for Clarence Davids and Co., Matteson, Illinois, and in that capacity has designed a large-scale prairie garden located at 58<sup>th</sup> and Woodlawn Avenue on the University of Chicago Campus. He also did native plant and restoration work at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights. He is the author of *Native Plants in the Home Landscape*, University of Illinois Press. Plants purchased in the Audubon sale will be cultivated this winter by our speaker.

**Wednesday, Feb. 4, 7 p.m.**

Park Forest Library

### BARN OWL REINTRODUCTION PROGRAM

Dan Thompson

Dan Thompson, an ecologist with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, will present a program on the reintroduction of Barn Owls. Thompson has worked on many restoration projects, including salmon introductions at Ketchikan, Alaska, and the Blanding's Turtle Recovery project.

The Common Barn Owl (*Tyto Alba*) is an Illinois State endangered species. The Forest Preserve District of DuPage County in cooperation with other agencies is raising and releasing Barn Owls in northeastern Illinois. The birds are raised in captivity with minimal human contact. They are provided live prey to hone their hunting skills, and they can hunt inside a flight cage to build their flight muscles and improve their flying technique. When the

birds are ready for release they are equipped with transmitters so ecologists can track their movements and their survival, providing valuable understanding into the ecology of Barn Owls.

**Wednesday, March 4, 7 p.m.**

Park Forest Library

### THE KANKAKEE SANDS

Marianne Hahn

"It's hard to believe it's in Illinois," Hahn says of the sand ecosystem of Kankakee and Iroquois County in our state. In a PowerPoint presentation, she will describe the ecosystem, tell how the sand got there, and explain the unique flora and fauna that make the Kankakee Sands so special. Hahn is a past president of Thorn Creek Audubon Society and owns Sweet Fern Savanna Land and Water Reserve in Kankakee County. She is president of Friends of the Kankakee, an all-volunteer organization that is acquiring natural areas in the Kankakee Sands to assure their preservation.

**Tuesday, March 31**

Faith United Protestant Church

### AUDUBON ANNUAL DINNER

Please note that the annual dinner will be held late in March instead of early March this year. Photographer Joe Nowak will give the program. More information will be available in the next newsletter.

### NEW MEMBERS ALWAYS WELCOME

New members are always welcome in the Thorn Creek Audubon Society. Membership in the local chapter is \$15 a year; membership in National Audubon is \$20 yearly. Local dues stay in the local area. For membership information or to join call membership chair Sue Putnam at 747-1986. Current members receiving two newsletters should call Sue.

## TIME TO APPLY FOR TCAS GRANTS, SCHOLARSHIPS

It's time again for those interested in a Thorn Creek Audubon Society grant or scholarship to submit an application. Each year TCAS' Grants and Scholarships committee provides funds to organizations or individuals involved in programs which promote the protection and enhancement of wildlife and the environment. The programs must focus on one of the following areas: environmental education, habitat preservation, and wildlife protection. Grants are limited to \$500 per project, and recipients are expected to contribute additional funds or labor toward the completion of the proposed program.

TCAS is also awarding an environmental scholarship to a high school student or an elementary or secondary school teacher in the area. The scholarship, not to exceed \$500, may be used for tuition or other expenses of a college credit class, workshop or continuing education that will enhance skills and knowledge in environmental studies.

Application forms for grants and scholarships are on the Thorn Creek Audubon web site, [www.thorncreekaudubonsociety.org](http://www.thorncreekaudubonsociety.org) or may be obtained from grants committee chairman Bob Pierce at 20623 Corinth Road, Olympia Fields, IL, 60451. All applications must be received by February 13, 2009. Other grants committee members are Dory Grosche, Joan Crabb and Aura Duke.

## WHOOOS BONES USES GRANT TO PRESERVE BARRED OWL

One of Thorn Creek Audubon Society's 2008 grants winners was Whoos Bones, an educational program offered to Will County schools by the Forest Preserve District of Will County. The group uses owl calls and photos to highlight owl species for students. The grant allowed Whoos Bones to preserve and mount



an owl killed on a Will County highway to add to this program. Katie Caldwell, interpretive scientist at the Plum Creek Nature Center, wrote this "thank you" to TCAS and included the owl photo above.

"Thanks to the generous grant from Thorn Creek Audubon Society, the fourth and fifth grade students of Will County schools can see and touch an owl of Will County. A Barred Owl was found mortally wounded on Dralle Road in the Thorn Creek headwaters, apparently a victim of an automobile accident in February of 2008. This Barred Owl lives on in spirit through our Whoos Bones program, written and presented by Forest Preserve District's Plum Creek Nature Center naturalists.

"It is a beautiful mount that catches the awe and admiration of students and adults alike. The owl serves as a nice addition for the classroom presentation. This program turns the classroom into a forensics laboratory. The students dissect sterilized barn owl pellets, allowing them to discover the predator-prey relationships in the food web. They see for themselves that rodents, moles, birds and shrews really can be an owl meal. The flurry of activity is calmed by the beautiful Barred Owl mount which serves as an ambassador for the owls of Will County."

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## BARTEL EXPANSION TO PROVIDE MORE PRIME BIRD HABITAT

A rich natural habitat that provides nesting sites and stopovers during migration for many rare and threatened birds is about to become even richer.

The Bartel Grassland, which now comprises nearly 640 acres of Cook County Forest Preserve land, will be expanded to more than two and one-half times its present size and will provide prime habitat for many plants and animals that are becoming scarce in Illinois. At an Open House Dec. 6, about 40 visitors saw photos and drawings that explained the planned expansion and learned about details of the restoration from members of the environmental organizations working on the it.

The present grassland is bounded by Vollmer Road on the south, Central Avenue on the east, Flossmoor Road on the North and Ridgeland Avenue on the west. The expanded grassland, wetland and shrubland area will extend north of Flossmoor Road to 183<sup>rd</sup> street and east of Central, and will bring the total restored site to about 1,400 acres, said Bartel Grassland Steward Dick Riner. The entire site is part of the Cook County Forest Preserve District, which bought the land in the early 1950s when it was still farmland. The model airplane flying field north of Flossmoor road will be relocated.

Bartel restoration began in 2000 and now provides 385 acres that bring grassland birds to the South Suburban area. To protect their young from predators, these birds need nesting sites that are at least 100 meters from woods, shrubs and hedgerows. Restoring the site has brought Bartel the biggest population of Bobolinks in the state, and it is one of the few places where Henslow Sparrows breed. Meadowlarks also nest there. Although not yet breeding, Short-eared Owls and Harriers are now hunting in the grasslands during the



*Bobolinks are now thriving in the Bartel Grasslands, but their numbers are shrinking elsewhere because of loss of habitat.*

fall. Bartel has the most grassland birds of any place in the Chicago area, according to Stephen Packard, Director, Audubon Chicago Region.

The expansion will benefit more than grassland birds, Packard added. A separate area of small woody plants will become habitat for shrubland birds, such as the Orchard Oriole, Brown Thrasher, Black-billed Cuckoo and Yellow-breasted Chat. Others areas will be returned to their original state as wetlands and will bring birds such as American Bitterns, Pied-billed Grebes, Virginia Rails, Sora, and possibly even Sandhill Cranes. Along with the birds, the grasses, flowers, and butterflies that populated the area before it was plowed up for farmland will return. Like Bartel, the new areas will have a border of trees to buffer it from surrounding highways.

The complete restoration will take at least five years, says Linda Masters, Project  
*(Continued on next page)*

## **FIELD TRIPS**

Saturday, January 17, 2009

### **STARVED ROCK EAGLE ENCOUNTER**

Charlie Habecker (708) 747-6061

To car pool, meet at the Park Forest Library at 9 a.m. Call Charlie for more information.

Saturday, February 14, 2009

### **OWL WATCH WITH WANNETTA**

By reservation only, limited to 25 people. To reserve a place call Dick Riner, 708-720-5683.

"What else would you like to do with your Valentine but take her on an owl walk?" asks Wannetta.

Regular field trips will resume in April.

### *(Bartel Expansion continued)*

Manager for CorLands. Work will start by removing trees and brush that do not provide good habitat; controlling invasive plants and seeding native plants follows. A big project is restoring the original hydrology: farmers tilled the field to plant crops and destroyed the original wetlands.

The \$4,500,000 cost will come from the O'Hare Modernization and Mitigation Fund; because O'Hare expansion destroyed wetlands, funds were provided to restore them elsewhere. Groups working on the expansion include Audubon Chicago Region, Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Open Lands Project - CorLands, U.S. Corps of Engineers, Thorn Creek Audubon, and the Bartel Grassland Volunteers.

The grassland expansion will give Chicago area nature lovers an unusual opportunity, Packard said. "For many people, it is an enrichment of life just to be able to be within a healthy, natural ecosystem. People like to visit coral reefs and alpine meadows. This grassland ecosystem is much rarer, and it is here."

*Joan Crabb*

## **BIRDS IN FLIGHT BOOK IS A TREAT FOR BIRDERS**

Once in a great while I come across a book that succeeds on more than one level. *Birds in Flight: the Art and Science of How Birds Fly*, by Carrol L. Henderson, is one of those.

As the title says, the book is both art and science. In its 160 color pages are 150 of the author's photographs of birds in the act of flying, taking off, or landing. Some of the photos in the early sections are as esthetically satisfying as any work of art hanging in a gallery. Especially memorable is a picture of Tundra Swans on the river on a foggy winter morning, which might have been painted by a 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape painter. Even the "science" pictures documenting the various stages of flight are a pleasure for the eye.

Henderson is a wildlife biologist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, a writer, and a photographer with a collection of over 70,000 nature photos. He is also a former airplane pilot, and he uses his knowledge of aerodynamics to lead us through the marvels of avian flight. His clear explanations, diagrams, and detailed photographs, from the tiniest hummingbird to the great Andean Condor, give even a non-scientist an understanding of the complex ways birds navigate "through a sea of air."

His writing sometimes reaches the poetic: a Peregrine Falcon becomes "a feathered bullet," and a Frigatebird is "the stunt pilot of the bird world."

Henderson says, "While birdwatching, many people miss much of the wonder and beauty that birds have to offer because they place too much emphasis on simply seeing birds and making lists . . ." This author gives us back that "wonder and beauty."

*Birds in Flight* is published by Voyageur Press of Minneapolis at a retail price of \$25.

*Joan Crabb*

## **BIRDERS WANTED FOR GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT**

The Great Backyard Bird Count, sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, is an annual four-day event open to anyone who wants to participate. Birders throughout North America are asked to count and record birds during the four-day period from February 13 to February 16. Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot from the overall picture of where winter birds are across the continent.

It's easy to participate. Birders young and old can count birds anywhere they find them – a nature preserve, a local park, or their own back yard – for as little as 15 minutes or as long as they wish. They then enter their tallies on the GBBC website, [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). The website gives directions on how to participate.

Thorn Creek Audubon members are urged to join the count. Those who are not comfortable using the web site may call in their count results to Dick Riner at 708-720-5683. He will send the results to Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Road, Ithaca, N. Y., 14850.

Last year, participants reported more than 9.8 million birds of 635 species. Scientists use the GBBC, along with other information from citizen-scientists such as the Christmas Bird Count and Project FeederWatch, to get a picture of our winter birds and whether they are undergoing worrisome declines that show the need for conservation action.

## **NO DECREASE YET IN PLASTIC BAG USE IN LOCAL AREA**

In spite of the efforts of the growing number of people who carry their reusable bags to and from the grocery stores, groceries in the South Suburban area still aren't ordering fewer plastic bags, according to Judy Gleitsman, TCAS's Conservation Chair. Judy said she talked to managers at Jewel, Dominicks and Ultra during the month of November, and all reported that they had not decreased their purchase of plastic bags.

The plastic bags in our environment may take anywhere from 400 to a thousand years to biodegrade. When they do disintegrate, they produce tiny, toxic particles that stay in the soil and water. Each year anywhere from 500 billion to a trillion plastic bags are used worldwide, according to [Reusablebags.com](http://Reusablebags.com). These bags litter the landscape, clog drains, wash up on beaches, and cause the death of birds, sea turtles, whales, and other animals who ingest them, thinking they are food, or become entangled in them.

Using paper bags isn't really better, says [Reusablebags.com](http://Reusablebags.com), because millions of trees are cut to make them. They also produce more air and water pollutants and take more energy to recycle than plastic. Most bags, whether paper or plastic, are not recycled.

In Ireland, a tax of 33 cents on plastic bags has reduced their use by 90 to 95%. Chinese stores can no longer give customers free plastic bags. San Francisco has banned the use of traditional plastic bags in grocery stores (biodegradable bags can be used), and several other cities, such as New York, Seattle, Boston, Phoenix, and Portland, Oregon, are considering a ban or an extra charge. However, industries and other groups are fighting the ban and the extra fee.

"Voluntary efforts appear not to be enough to stop the proliferation of plastic bags," Judy said. "I think government will have to take a hand, possibly by putting a tax on them. She is "cautiously optimistic" that Barack Obama will try to do more to protect the environment than the Bush administration. "I'd feel really good if he made Al Gore environmental czar," she said.

But in the meantime, she is still carrying her reusable bags.

## FIELD NOTES

TO REPORT SIGHTINGS CALL  
MARY WHITE AT 708-396-0794

### OCTOBER 08

10/8 20 Sandhill Cranes flying over Lake Katherine. *Dick Thomas*

10/11 35 White Pelicans on backwater in Channahon. *Mary White*

10/11 First observed pair of Tufted Titmice since West Nile in her University Park back yard. *Chris Shaffer*

10/11 Yellow-rumped Warblers feeding in an oak in his Worth yard.

*Dick Thomas*

10/19 Dark-eyed Junco in her Crete yard.

*Deb Marberg*

10/22 4 Bluebirds on Richton Road in Crete.

*Mary Anne McLean*

10/24 Juncos, a family of three Chickadees and a Cooper's Hawk at her feeders in Crete.

*Kathy Bader*

### NOVEMBER 08

11/09 2 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 2 Chickadees, 1 Great Horned Owl, 1 Northern Harrier, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, and 2 Hermit Thrushes. Bartel Grassland.

*Al Thomas*

11/10 Prothonotary Warbler. Lake Katherine.

*Mary White*

11/16 Sandhill Cranes over Will County and Worth.

*Dick Thomas*

11/17 Two groups of Sandhill Cranes flying east over her Park Forest home. The 1st group of about 60 was flying low. The 2<sup>nd</sup> group, flying higher, appeared to be smaller.

*Delpha Williams*

11/18 1,000 Sandhill Cranes over his Matteson home.

*Dick Riner*

11/19 1 Snow Bunting at her Monce feeder.

*Paula Arnold*

11/25 3 Northern Shovelers. Lake Katherine.

*Mary White*

11/28 30 Sandhill Cranes over Park Forest.

*Mary White*

11/30 1 Caroline Wren and 11 Northern Cardinals at their back yard feeder.

*Tony Kurth*

### DECEMBER 08

12/1 Sandhill Cranes over Matteson.

*Dick Riner*

12/1 All through the past month: 4 Chickadees, 2 White-breasted Nuthatches, 1 Hairy Woodpecker, 1 Blue Jay, 12 Northern Juncos, 1 Flicker, 2 Winter Wrens, several Goldfinches and House Finches in her Steger back yard.

*Pauline Small*

12/12 1 Cooper's Hawk in Area J Co-op in Park Forest, flying low between buildings.

*Joan Crabb*

### WILD THINGS CONFERENCE SET FEB. 7

Wild Things 2009 Conference, set for February 7 at the University of Illinois at Chicago, will bring together the best experts and the most dedicated volunteers in the region's nature conservation community. Three of the presenters, Dick Riner, Michelle O'Connor, and Emily Kenney, are Thorn Creek Audubon members. Both Riner and Rich Treptow, also a TCAS member, have helped to organize the conference.

The day-long conference will feature more than 70 large and small-group sessions. Keynote speaker is Doug Ladd, Director of Conservation Science, Missouri Field Office of the Nature Conservancy. Riner will talk about working with the government; O'Connor and Kenney will talk on connecting young people with nature. Sponsored by Chicago Wilderness, the event is open to the public, but there is a fee. To register call 847-328-3910 or go to the website [www.habitatproject.org/Wild Things](http://www.habitatproject.org/Wild Things).