

Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 39 - ISSUE 4 JULY - AUGUST 2011

NEWSLETTER

23 NEW SPECIES SEEN

NUMBERS GO UP FOR SPRING BIRD COUNT

After having a very good Christmas Bird Count earlier this year, we have followed it up with an equally good Spring Bird Count held on Saturday, May 7, for the northeastern Will County region. Nineteen groups consisting of 51 volunteers covered our area with impressive results. There were 152 species of birds spotted, as compared to 145 last year.

Even more impressive was the increase in the total number of birds seen, 20,244 this year compared to 13,822 last year. This represents the greatest number of birds seen since the spring of 2000, and is in the top one-third of the results we have dating back to 1978.

There can always be a surprising assortment of birds migrating through our area in early spring, but it is interesting to note that 23 species were reported this year that were not seen in the last Spring Count. Among the more unusual for our territory were a Cerulean Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Winter Wren, Redhead, American White Pelican, and an American Bittern.

The team of Marlys Oosting, Penny Kneisler, and Wannetta Elliott also spotted three Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, which had never before been recorded for our Spring Count. We had a surprising 12 teams that each spotted over 50 species of birds, and three teams that saw over 80 species.

There were 7 species of birds that were seen in record numbers for the count. American Robins again showed unusual increases, as they did in the Christmas Bird Count last January. There were 3,177 Robins seen, where the previous high count had been 2,140 in the year 1992. If climate and habitat changes are affecting birds, apparently Robins like the changes. While their increase in our area has not been a perfectly consistent growth over the years, the trend does seem to show their population going up. The other 6 records are shown below:

	<u>This Year</u>	<u>Previous Record</u>
Great Blue Heron	817	361 in 1991
Great Egret	546	538 in 2001
Cooper's Hawk	18	16 in 2006
Eurasian Collared-Dove	5	3 in 2009
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	104	79 in 2005
Henslow's Sparrow	16	9 in 2008

I would like to thank everyone who participated in the count for the valuable information that they provided. I would also like to thank all our club members who help to organize, compile, and make the Spring Bird Count work.

Bob Harrison

PROGRAMS

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society holds programs from September through May at the Park Forest Library.

Wednesday, September 7
**HUMMINGBIRDS AND HUMMINGBIRD
FESTIVALS IN ILLINOIS**
Vernon Kleen

One of only three licensed hummingbird banders in the state, Vernon Kleen will explain the status of hummingbirds in Illinois and what happens at hummingbird festivals. Here birds are banded and people have a chance to get acquainted with these tiny creatures.

He will also give a demonstration of hummingbird banding on the morning of Sept. 8 at the Wetland Discovery Center. Both the banding and the program are open to the public (*see article next column*).

Kleen began birding at age 7 and got his bird banding license at age 18. He was hired by the Illinois Department of Conservation, now the Department of Natural Resources, in 1972 and became the agency's Avian Program manager. He initiated the Spring Bird Count in Illinois and is author of the *Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas*, published by Illinois Natural History in 2004.

Along with coordinating hummingbird festivals in Illinois and managing the Margery Adams Bird Banding Station in Springfield, he leads workshops, provides programs and leads birding trips to Illinois, the US and most continents. He also helps raise funds for land acquisition in Illinois to provide wildlife habitat.

Wednesday, October 5
**BIRDS OF ECUADOR AND THE GALAPAGOS
ISLANDS**
Glyn and Sylvia Dawson

HUMMINGBIRD BANDING AT DISCOVERY CENTER

Area birders will have a chance to learn about hummingbirds and see them at close range on Thursday, September 8, at 9 a.m.

Vernon Kleen, a retired avian ecologist who is licensed to band birds in Illinois, will be at the Hummingbird Garden at the Discovery Center at the Park Forest Aqua Center at 9 a.m., where he will show how he captures and bands these little birds.

Participants may "adopt" a hummingbird by making a \$5 contribution to the Illinois Audubon Land Acquisition Fund. They will receive a special adoption certificate with information about "their" bird. If the bird is recaptured, the donor will be notified.

The event is sponsored by the Thorn Creek Audubon Society and the Village of Park Forest. Kleen will also give a program at Park Forest Library at 7 p.m. Wednesday, September 7.

TOO MANY HOUSE SPARROWS USING BLUEBIRD BOXES

So far this year, bluebirds have been doing poorly. Only 11 active bluebird nests have been recorded among the 104 boxes at Gooderow Grove, Monee Reservoir, Park Forest Wetland and Glenwood School campus.

The major factor seems to be the fierce competition for nesting sites from house sparrows. Volunteers have really been busy removing over 80 house sparrow nests to give bluebirds a chance to succeed.

Other species competing for nesting sites include tree swallows with 27 nests, house wrens with three nests, and black-capped chickadees with one nest. All of them indicated a marked decrease this year in active nests with eggs and young. In addition, the extremely wet weather has not been helpful.

Aura Duke

TCAS, BARTEL WIN 4TH TOGETHER-GREEN GRANT

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society board has unanimously voted to accept the TogetherGreen grant from Audubon/Toyota for year four.

TogetherGreen is a conservation initiative of National Audubon, supported by a gift from Toyota. The goals of the program are to "nurture conservation leadership, achieve conservation results, and engage millions of Americans in conservation action."

This is the fourth such grant TCAS has accepted for use in the Bartel Grassland.

This year's grant is for \$9,000 and will be used for volunteer days. They will focus on restoring habitats for species of special concern and improving water quality to protect biodiversity at Bartel and at the Tinley Creek Wetlands north of Bartel, according to Bartel Supervisor Dick Riner.

Some of the species of special concern are grassland birds, which are declining because of lack of habitat. Bartel provides nesting grounds for these birds, including the bobolink, eastern meadowlark, and Henslow's sparrow. Bobolinks, which have become rare in most of Illinois, are thriving at Bartel.

The conservation targets at these sites are the emergent wetland and the wet/mesic prairie ecosystems. Activities will include control of invasive exotic plant species, shrub and brush removal, native plug planting, native seed collection and dispersal, an International Migratory Bird Day event, and a cooperative effort with Audubon-Chicago Region to monitor the condition of the emergent marsh areas and their use by migratory shorebirds.

Several high school ecology clubs will take part in this effort, including Oak Forest High School, Lincolnway North High School, Rich Township Central and South High Schools, and Tinley Park High School. *Dick Riner*

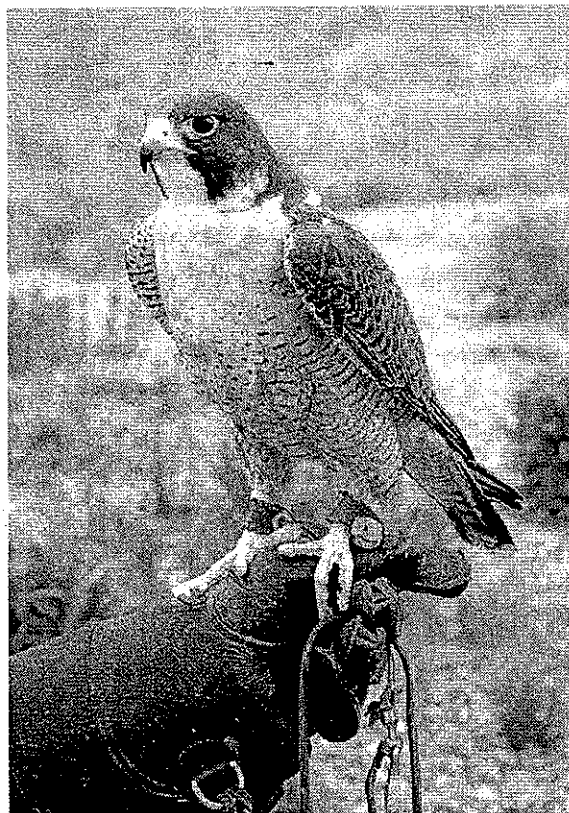


Photo by John Denk

Brenda Occhiuzzo, a Bartel Grassland volunteer, brought this peregrine falcon to the Wild Neighbors Festival on May 21.

A GOOD DAY AT BARTEL WILD NEIGHBORS FESTIVAL

The rain held off, the plugs got planted, the hot dogs got cooked and the cookies got delivered, so the forty-plus friends and volunteers had a good day at the 7th Annual Wild Neighbors Festival at the Bartel Grasslands on May 21.

The day started before 9 a.m., when volunteers planted 2,680 wetland plant plugs. At noon they ate 10 pounds of hot dogs and approximately 1,000 cookies baked by Peggy Riner, "the mad baker of Bartel."

Live animals, a peregrine falcon and a bull snake, along with skins of local animals such as coyote and fox, were brought to the festival by Sand Ridge Nature Center members and Bartel volunteers.

VOLUNTEERS TO KEEP DOORS OPEN

THORN CREEK NATURE CENTER LOSES PAID STAFF

A growing deficit in the Thorn Creek Nature Center's budget has made it necessary to lay off its two staff members as of June 30, but volunteers will keep the center open through the fall and winter in hopes that the financial situation will improve.

Although the building at 247 Monee Road, Park Forest, will be without paid staff at least through December, the Thorn Creek Management Commission hopes to be able to hire part-time staff again in January of 2012. In the meantime, volunteers will help keep the nature center open from noon to 4 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays and will monitor the trails.

A group of Thorn Creek Audubon Society members are among these volunteers. (*See story next page.*) TCAS has always provided some support for the center and has awarded it a number of grants for equipment and supplies over the years.

The two naturalists who have staffed the center, Tara Janisch and Lily Bormet, were thanked for their hard work, dedication, and love of the woods at an open house June 18. They will be missed greatly, said Judy Mendelson, a caretaker of Thorn Creek Nature Preserve's historic farm and long-time supporter of the Nature Center.

"Tara was raised hiking Thorn Creek trails, and in these last four years has brought a new energy and a wonderful new look to our trails and our children's areas, bird window and library. Lily, our 'nature woman,' has guided children and adults in the wonders of Thorn Creek Woods for more than 16 years," Mendelson said.

According to Mendelson, some limited programs will be offered August through December, but the very popular children's programs developed by Lily over the years, *Little Twigs Nature Playtimes*, *Roots & Shoots Club* and *Junior Ecologists Club*, have been cancelled, with the strong recommendation that they be revived in the spring.

The Forest Preserve District of Will County naturalists will offer three nature hikes in the fall months, and artist Pat Moore will offer two *Drawing from Nature* classes for children in August. A few other events will also be held, including the popular Garlic Fest the first Saturday in October. The Will County Forest Preserve district and the Village of Park Forest will continue to provide maintenance to the Nature Center building, just as they have been doing.

The Friends of the Thorn Creek Woods, a volunteer organization which supports the center, along with the TCAS volunteers and those who just like to walk in the woods, will monitor the walking trails in Thorn Creek Woods, reporting any problems they see, such as loose planks in the boardwalk or vandalism, and help keep the trails in good order.

Anyone who would like to volunteer or otherwise offer support may call the center at (708) 747-6320.

John Joyce, Park Forest Parks and Recreation supervisor, said the financial crunch came because of factors such as the escalating cost of health insurance for the employees as well as rising costs in other areas. "We will save as much as we can during the 6-month hiatus and then we hope our funding will cover a part-time person," he said. "A lot depends on whether the State of Illinois funding comes through."

The Thorn Creek Nature Preserve, a 1,000-acre woodland south of Monee Road, is financially supported by the Forest Preserve District of Will County, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Village of Park Forest, Village of University Park, and Friends of Thorn Creek Woods.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, August 13, 8 a.m.

MARKHAM-GENSBURG PRAIRIE

Charles Habecker – 708-747-6061

Come and see the prairie in full bloom, with perhaps some butterflies and insects among the flowers. Meet at the parking lot at the north end of Whipple Street. Whipple is one block east of Kedzie on 159th Street. Look for the McDonald's at the corner of Whipple and 159th and turn north there.

GOODENOW GROVE, PLUM CREEK TO CLOSE FOR RENOVATION

On August 1, 2011, Goodenow Grove Nature Preserve and Plum Creek Nature Center will be closed for road improvements, extensive trail development, and renovation of campgrounds and parking lots. The preserve will remain closed until July, 2012.

The bluebird volunteers are concerned for the protection of nesting bluebirds and tree swallows that every year use some of the 48 boxes at the preserve. Kathy Dehn and Aura Duke have been in communication with the project manager, Lori Goerlich, and with Karen Forte, the landscape architect for the Forest Preserve District of Will County, regarding the problems that are bound to arise during the construction.

Kathy has agreed to act as contact person to coordinate construction with the monitoring of the boxes. As requested by the Forest Preserve District, on June 24 Dick Riner and Kathy will be marking the boxes with yellow plastic tape. Kathy and Aura Duke will be notified when a box needs to be relocated.

The concern of the bluebird volunteers is to protect nesting bluebirds and tree swallows at Goodenow Grove while cooperating with the project contractors.

Aura Duke

TCAS MEMBERS HELP KEEP CENTER'S DOORS OPEN

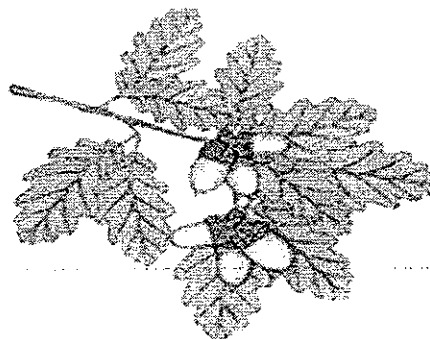
Thorn Creek Audubon Society members will be helping to keep the Thorn Creek Nature Center open during the six months in which there is no funding for employees. Members have volunteered to help staff the center and monitor the trails in Thorn Creek Woods from July 1 until the end of December.

More help would be very welcome, said Aura Duke, TCAS member who helped organize the staffing. TCAS members will keep the Nature Center at 247 Monee Road in Park Forest open on the third Fridays of each month. Dates are 7/15, 8/19, 9/16, 10/21, 11/18 and 12/16.

They will also help by monitoring the trails in the woods on the second Wednesday of each month. This will be combined with TCAS's regular Wednesday bird walks. Dates are 7/13, 8/10, 9/14, 10/12, 11/09 and 12/14. Starting time is 8 a.m. and trail walkers will meet at the Nature Center parking lot.

Already some TCAS volunteers have signed up. They include Alice McBride, Joan O'Keeffe, Judy Murphy, Mary Anne McLean, and Aura Duke. Additional volunteers are welcome. To join the Audubon volunteer team call Mary Anne (708)672-5494) or Aura (708)748-6407.

There are many other opportunities available for volunteers. To learn more call Penny Chamberlain at (708)748-2227.



AUDUBON ADVENTURES NEW THEME IS "FEATHERS, FUR, FINS AND YOU"

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society has received from National Audubon eagerly awaited information regarding the subject matter of next year's *Audubon Adventures*. The working title of our new 2011-2012 kit is "Feathers, Fur, Fins and You." This new kit will contain four new editions of *Audubon Adventures* and will cover the following themes:

Pollinators, featuring hummingbirds and bees

Wild Alaska

Rivers of Life

Caring for our Planet – a special "Action for Planet Earth" edition focusing on ways that young people can actively participate in Audubon.

In addition, everyone will receive a bonus, *Pennies for the Planet*, an educational fundraising project that focuses on protecting habitats for migrating animals, (of course including birds).

The price of the kit will remain the same; however, due to a 30 cent increase in shipping and handling costs, the total cost per classroom has gone up to \$45.95. Contributions continue to be welcome in any amount. To contribute, please send a check made out to Thorn Creek Adventures Fund, c/o Sue Putnam, 3704 West 213th St., Matteson, IL 60443.

Meanwhile, Sue is busy contacting teachers who participated in *Audubon Adventures* this year to ascertain whether they wish to continue. If you are, or know of, a teacher or other educator who would enjoy exploring *Audubon Adventures* with his or her students, contact Sue at (708) 747-1986 or sputter1986@sbcglobal.net.

Mary Anne McLean

MEMBERSHIP COUPON

There are two ways to join the Thorn Creek Audubon Society. Choose your way and mail in your application.

Dual Membership: National Audubon and Thorn Creek Audubon

National Audubon membership supports environmental concerns and wildlife protection at state, national and international levels, with a small percentage shared with our local chapter. You receive *Audubon* magazine and our TCAS chapter newsletter. Introductory offer – 1 year \$20. Local Chapter code C1ZG590Z.

Name _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Make check payable to NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, Membership Data Center, P. O. box 422250, Palm Coast, Florida, 32142-2250

Thorn Creek Audubon Society – Chapter Only Membership

Chapter only dues remain at home and support environmental efforts in our local community. Members receive our chapter newsletter. Annual Dues \$15. Sustaining Membership \$50.

Name _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Make check payable to Thorn Creek Audubon and mail to P. O. Box 895, Park Forest, IL 60466

FIELD NOTES

TO REPORT SIGHTINGS CALL
MARY WHITE AT 396-0794

APRIL

4/11 A Vermillion Flycatcher near Norfolk Avenue in Steger. *Florence Miller*

4/23 A Red-necked Grebe, an Osprey, Cormorants, Mergansers, Swans, Scaup, and other diving sucks. Wolf Lake.

Al Thomas

4/29 A Great Blue Heron in a dead oak tree and a Red-headed Woodpecker in her Crete back yard.

Mary Anne McLean

4/30 A Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a Hummingbird and a Carolina Wren in her Crete back yard.

Debra Marberg

MAY

5/03 A first-time-ever-seen Red-headed Woodpecker in her Crete back yard.

Debra Marberg

5/03 A variant adult male Scarlet Tanager, 5 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, a Baltimore Oriole, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak, a Red-headed Woodpecker, 2 Eastern Bluebirds, and way too many Brown-headed Cowbirds. Little Red Schoolhouse.

Mary White

5/03 A Baltimore Oriole spent a week on her orange feeder. Pair of Tree Swallows nesting in her bluebird box. Frankfort.

Susan Weinrebe

5/04 5 male and 1 female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at her back yard feeder. Park Forest.

April LeClaire

5/06 3 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Glenwood Forest Preserve, Main Street.

Mary White

5/07 A Great Crested Flycatcher, an Indigo Bunting and a Baltimore Oriole. Lake Katherine.

Mary White

5/09 2 male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at her feeders and a Black-headed Grosbeak passing through. Olympia Fields.

Sally Long

5/10 2 Baltimore Orioles and 1 Catbird in her Crete backyard.

Debra Marberg

5/12 A male Scarlet Tanager in her Park Forest backyard.

Bernadette Maune

5/13 Pair of Black-and-white Warblers feeding in trees in Krotiak Park, Park Forest.

Joan Crabb

5/13 4 male Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, a Baltimore Oriole on her Hummingbird feeder, 1 Hummingbird, 1 Veery, 1 male Redstart, 1 Common Yellowthroat and 2 pairs of nesting House Wrens, all in her Homewood backyard.

Jan Neumann

5/13 8 male and 3 female Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, a Scarlet Tanager and a Sharp-shinned Hawk in her Park Forest backyard.

April LeClaire

5/16 2 male and 1 female Scarlet Tanagers, 3 Baltimore Orioles, 4 Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 2 Red-headed Woodpeckers, 1 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and 1 Great Crested Flycatcher. Little Red Schoolhouse.

Mary White

5/20 An adult female Barred Owl and three babies, 147th St. and Central Ave., Oak Forest.

Sarah Hedrickson

JUNE

6/02 Pair of House Wrens, pair of Robins, pair of Blue Jays all nesting. Pair of Cardinals and 1 fledgling, pair of Hummingbirds, 5 Goldfinches, all in her Steger back yard.

Pauline Small

6/07 Pair of Baltimore Orioles feeding at her Hummingbird feeder, 2 pairs of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks possibly nesting nearby and a Scarlett Tanager at her Park Forest feeders.

April LeClaire



Thorn Creek
AUDUBON SOCIETY

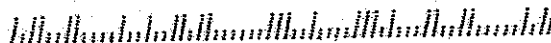
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The mission of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society is to promote the enjoyment and appreciation of birds, to educate adults and children concerning our natural environment, to preserve, protect, and restore wildlife habitat, and to create awareness of local conservation issues.

The newsletter is the official publication of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society, an Illinois not-for-profit organization dedicated to conservation and environmental education. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily endorsed by the TCAS board or the National Audubon Society.

We welcome editorial proposals and submissions. Please direct all correspondence to:

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Printed on 30% recycled paper.

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society's website is thorncreekaudubonsociety.org