



Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 37 – ISSUE 4 JULY–AUGUST 2009

NEWSLETTER

NUMBERS STILL FALLING IN '09 BIRD COUNT

Once again the news from the annual spring bird count isn't reassuring: for still another year numbers are slightly down. In May of 2008, 48 Thorn Creek Audubon Society spotters counted 15,213 birds representing 146 species. However, this year, 47 spotters counted only 14,674 birds totaling 148 species. The good news this year is that two more species were seen.

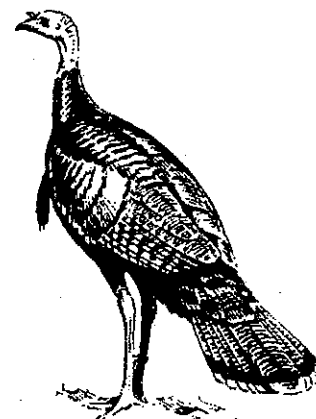
TCAS records show a continuing downward trend for bird numbers in the area it covers in Eastern Will County, even though the number of bird spotters has remained about the same. For example, in 1992 26,894 individual birds were spotted, representing 168 species. Numbers dropped for two years, but in 1995 were back up to 25,482 individual birds of 178 species. Five years later, in 2000, only 20,877 birds representing 157 species were counted, and five years after that, in 2005, the number had dropped again, to 17,737 birds of 158 species. Two years ago, in 2007, 17,734 birds representing 156 species were seen.

Although many factors could account for the decline, "We can be sure that urbanization is part of the reason," said Al Thomas, TCAS president. The West Nile virus, which attacked many bird populations a few years ago, may also be a cause, he said.

Some birds not commonly seen in this area were reported this year, including Wild Turkeys, two LeConte's Sparrows, three Sandhill Cranes, one Blue Grosbeak, three Winter Wrens and 16 White-rumped Sandpipers. Also spotted were one Ruddy Duck, one Osprey, one Blue Grosbeak, five Dickcissels, and one Yellow-breasted Chat.

Shorebirds were well represented: along with the White-rumped there were Solitary, Spotted, Upland, Least, and Pectoral Sandpipers, also both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and Dunlins. Many warblers were seen, including Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Tennessee, Nashville, Northern Parula, Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Cape May, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Palm, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Black-and-white, Worm-eating and American Redstart.

Ring-billed Gulls were the most numerous birds in 2009 at 1,884, with Red-winged Blackbirds second at 1,548. American Robins came in third with 1,403 individuals, and Common Grackles followed at 1,315. European Starlings also numbered high at 1,035. Also seen in considerable numbers were Double-crested Cormorants, Great Egrets, Canada Geese, Mallards, Mourning Doves, Tree Swallows, Barn Swallows, Rough-winged Swallows, Blue Jays, House Wrens, Gray Catbirds, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Northern Cardinals, Song Sparrows, White-crowned Sparrows, Brown-headed Cowbirds, American Goldfinches and House Sparrows.



Wild Turkey

FALL PROGRAMS

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF PLACE

Our fall programs will NOT be held at the Park Forest Library but at the Matteson Elementary School on Main Street. See story on this page about the new location.

Wednesday, Sept. 2, 7 p.m.

IDENTIFYING LBJ's (THOSE LITTLE BROWN JOBS)

Geoffrey A. Williamson

Illinois Ornithological Society

OK, so here's this little brown job, skulking in the grass. What is it? These birds seem determined to give you only a glimpse here or a peek there, and even when they're in the open they often all look the same. Williamson, co-editor of the Illinois-Indiana Region for North American birds, will discuss how to identify sparrows, wrens, pipits, some warblers, and other birds who like to stay close to the ground in fields, hedgerows, and brushy areas.

MATTESON SCHOOL IS NEW TCAS MEETING SITE

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society will have a new location for meetings next year. The regular monthly meetings and programs will be held at the Matteson Elementary School at 21245 Main Street, Matteson. There is no parking in front of the school but there is a large parking lot to the rear that is accessible from 213th Place.

To reach the school, take Lincoln Highway (Route 30) to Main Street in Matteson. This is the stoplight at the Speedway Gas Station. Take Main Street south four blocks to 213th Place. Turn left (east) on 213th Place, proceed one block east, then turn left into the school parking lot.

Although TCAS meetings were formerly held at the Park Forest Library, the library is doing some renovation and will not have the meeting room available in the fall.

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 G59.

Name _____

Address _____ City/State/Zip _____

Make check payable to NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY, Membership Data Center, P. O. box 422246-2246, Palm Coast, Florida, 32142

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

TEACHERS AND STUDENTS THANK SPONSORS OF AUDUBON ADVENTURES

Dear Contributors to the Audubon Adventures Fund,

To you comes the following letter from a Talala Elementary School teacher who, for a number of years, has been sharing Audubon Adventures with her fourth grade class:

Thank you for sponsoring Audubon Adventures for us this year. We have enjoyed the newspapers and supporting materials, and have learned a lot about nature, wildlife and caring for our planet! Your support and generosity have helped education and the environment. Thank you again! The letter is also signed by each student in the class.

Other notes of thanks, appropriately illustrated, come from fourth grade students at Indiana School in Park Forest. We are relaying a few excerpts, feeling sure that you will find them gratifying:

Thank you so very much for letting us have the Audubon Adventures newspapers. I loved all the information on animals, insects and plants. I also loved the pictures. The paintings looked so real. I loved every single one you made. Me and my friend love to read them. When you guys sent the magazines with all that information I wanted to go to the library to learn a lot more.

I think the newspapers were very helpful to learn about what's happening in nature and whom is living there. I think you helped all the 4th graders, including me. I also learned about the process of migrating and who are the ones that migrate. It was very nice to learn these things and I'll keep reading the Audubon Adventures newspapers.

Thank you for teaching us with cool articles that are amazingly awesome. By the way I love the pictures they put in these articles.

I thought the newspapers were helpful and interesting. They told us a lot of information. I was wondering if the next one could be about spiders or scorpions. Just a suggestion.

I learned how animal constructions help plants and animals grow. Our constructions destroy theirs.

Once I finish college, I would love to write Thorn Creek Audubon magazines because of how interesting they are. You inspire me to learn more about the animals you write about and I end up going and searching them.

Fifty-eight teachers have already requested Audubon Adventures for next year, when the subject matter will be "Action for Planet Earth, an exploration of earth science topics from a conservation perspective", with an emphasis on community outreach and on helping birds. If you are, or know of, a teacher or group leader who would like to receive Audubon Adventures in the coming year, please contact Sue Putnam (708) 747-1986 or sputter1986@sbcglobal.net.

To contribute, please send a check made out to Thorn Creek Adventures Fund, c/o Sue Putnam, 3704 West 213th St., Matteson, IL 60443. Each kit, with four editions of the student newspaper and a classroom resource manual for the leader, plus extras, such as a guide to nature journaling", costs \$45.65. Contributions are welcome in any amount.

Mary Anne McLean

GRASSLAND DRAWS STUDENTS OF ALL AGES

Getting really wet at the Fifth Annual Bartel Wild Neighbors Festival earned points for more than half a dozen students from the Oak Forest High School honors biology class. However, the second grade students from Sieden Prairie didn't even have to get damp to earn their points.

The Oak Forest students were there to help plant 290 wild iris plugs in water up to a foot deep and earn points toward biology class requirements. The second graders were there to pick up the prizes they had won in the coloring contest held at their school recently.

Both sets of students were part of the last TogetherGreen volunteer event co-sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Toyota Corporation. The TogetherGreen grant made it possible to purchase \$3,500 worth of native plants and supplies to help restore the grasslands, including the iris plugs, said Steward Dick Riner. The wild iris will bring a burst of blue each spring to the sedge meadow south of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society berm.

It's not absolutely necessary for Oak Forest honors biology students to get wet to earn their required 30 points, but for some it's the most appealing option. Jim, who waded into the cold water wearing shorts, said he chose working at Bartel rather than watching a movie or making a power point presentation.

"This is more fun than being in the classroom, and it helps out the environment," said John, who went home with pants wet to the knees and soggy shoes. Some students have also earned points by cutting non-native trees and burning brush at Yankee Woods in Oak Forest. This hands-on experience has convinced some, like Eli, to consider environmental studies as a college major.

Although the second graders haven't begun to consider careers yet, teachers Karen Meany and Sharice Johnson are making sure they have opportunities to understand and appreciate the natural world around them. Both Riner and Wannetta Elliott, Thorn Creek Audubon's owl expert, have spoken at Sieden Prairie School, which is located just a mile south of the Grasslands on Central Avenue in Matteson. Riner sponsors a coloring contest each year for second graders. Winners this year were Aminah, Aurora, and George.

For the past five years, Meany has taken her second graders to Lincoln Park Zoo, where they study water samples from the South Pond, checking the temperature, the turbidity and the different animals and birds that use the pond.

"Sometimes it just takes one thing to spark a child's interest in nature," she said.

Second grader Aurora's interest is already kindled. Standing on the TCAS berm, she looked out over the birds fluttering in and out of the waving grasses. "I love the Bartel Grassland," she said.

Joan Crabb



Volunteers of all ages planted wild iris at the Bartel Grassland recently. Here Tim punches the hole for a student from Oak Forest High School to plug the new plant into the wet area.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, August 15, 9 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 St. Whipple is one block east of Kedzie on 159th St. Look for the McDonald's at the corner of Whipple and 159th and turn north there.

BARTEL GRASSLAND WANTS MORE PRAIRIE SCOUTS

Volunteers are still needed to become Bartel Grassland Prairie Scouts. These Scouts monitor designated areas of the grassland to find and map invasive weeds and other problems, and also to observe how the native prairie and wetlands plants and animals are responding to the restoration. The knowledge will be shared with Bartel volunteers and Cook County Forest Preserve staff so that whatever problems are found can be addressed. To date 14 Prairie Scouts are at work, having received training in detecting both native and invasive plants and other site basics. Another training session will be held in the fall.

Scouts tour their territory once or twice a month during the growing season and report their findings to Bartel Steward Dick Riner. They will be meeting informally every Friday morning at 10 a.m. at the Kingsberry Waffle House at Vollmer Road and Governor's Highway, where they will report findings, bring plants for botany expert John Denk to identify, and enjoy coffee with friends.

Grass is the forgiveness of nature – her constant benediction. Forests decay, harvests perish, flowers vanish, but grass is immortal.
Brian Ingalls

"BARTEL NORTH" BECAME "SHOREBIRD HEAVEN"

The new wetland in the Bartel Grassland/Tinley Creek Preserve just north of Flossmoor Road (sometime called Bartel North) became "shorebird heaven" during migration this spring, said John Elliott, education manager for the Cook County Forest Preserve District.

Elliott counted a lot of these birds at the former model airplane flying field on May 17, the Annual Bartel Wild Neighbors Festival.

He reported many Lesser Yellowlegs (there were hundreds here a few weeks ago, he said), a dozen or more Dunlins in their black-bellied breeding plumage, both Dowitchers (the Short-billed and the Long-billed), many Semipalmated Sandpipers, a few Least Sandpipers and Spotted Sandpipers, one Solitary Sandpiper, a couple of Stilt Sandpipers, and Semipalmated Plovers. Other unusual visitors to the area were two American Pipits, he said.

However, birders who want to see a variety of shorebirds in the old model airplane flying field should get there next spring, Elliott said. The smaller species are stopping now because of the mudflats, but when the vegetation starts to come back they will go somewhere else.

"It is not part of our management plan to maintain the open mudflat habitat that attracts small shorebirds," he said. "We have different goals for the area." He believes that the larger shorebirds, such as the Yellowlegs, will continue to stop on their way to the far north even when the vegetation grows back.

While he can't guarantee that the same birds will return next spring, he believes birders who visit there will be well rewarded by interesting sightings. He also advises them to wear high rubber boots, as the area is very wet.

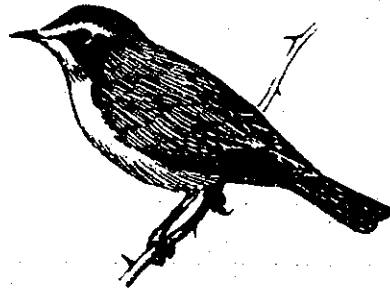
BREEDING BIRD BLITZ SPOTS 70 SPECIES

The Seventh annual Breeding Birds blitz was conducted at six important birding habitats throughout the Chicago region from June 12 to 22. Thorn Creek Audubon was assigned to canvass the Plum Creek watershed in the Goodenow Grove preserve in Will County. During a four-hour period starting at 7 a.m. on June 13, six teams of volunteers gathered data on the current breeding status and distribution of birds seen or heard along specific routes within the count area.

A total of 70 species were recorded as probable breeding birds at the preserve. Highlights of the count included a solitary Black-crowned Night Heron at a lake; a Great Blue Heron at an isolated rookery; a soaring Red-shouldered Hawk, rare to our area; one Olive-sided Flycatcher; one Yellow-throated Vireo and a White-eyed Vireo; a female Red-eyed Vireo at a nest; a male Kentucky Warbler in bleeding plumage displaying territorial behavior; an Orchard Oriole as well as several common Northern Orioles. In addition to these rarities were nesting Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows galore, Scarlet Tanagers and the rarer Summer Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and six Yellow-billed Cuckoos identified by their throaty rapid calls.

A big "Thank You" to the dedicated counters: Kathy Dehn, Sara Hendrickson, Amar Ayash, Steve Ambrose, Bob Harrison, Laura Berry, Ellis Kornblum. Mary Anne McLean, Pat Strange, Mary Bernat, Michelle O'Connor, Al Thomas (compiler), Leslie McClintock and Aura Duke. Participants were treated to a barbecue lunch after the count. We hope others will join us for this informative and enjoyable count next year.

Aura Duke



Rare Kentucky warbler a probable nester at Goodenow Grove

BLUEBIRDS, TREE SWALLOWS NEST SUCCESSFULLY

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society's bluebird trails consist of 106 boxes distributed along four wildlife areas at Glenwood School campus, Park Forest's Central Park Wetland, Monee Reservoir and Goodenow Grove Preserve in Will County.

At the midpoint of the nesting season this year (close to the end of June) nesting promises to be a huge success for Tree Swallows and Bluebirds. So far, in 20 Bluebird nests, 81 eggs have been found, out of which 32 young have hatched and 25 have fledged safely. Amazingly, in the 44 Tree Swallow nests, 210 eggs have been recorded, 100 young have hatched, 20 of which have left their nests already. At this time last year only 9 Bluebirds had fledged and Tree Swallows had produced only 84 eggs, from which 12 young had fledged.

On average, a Tree Swallow clutch consists of 4 to 6 eggs. However, several nests this year contain 7 eggs and much to our surprise, one magnificent nest at Monee Reservoir had 8 pure white eggs nestled among the feathers. Tree Swallows will hatch one brood per season, June being their peak time for nesting. Bluebirds average 3 to 6 eggs per brood and commonly nest twice per year. The aggressive House Wrens have been lagging in their nesting activities. In 23 boxes, 46 Wren eggs have been found, 17 young hatched, and none have fledged as yet.

Aura Duke

FIELD NOTES

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

When calling in sightings on the answering machine, please spell your last name.

APRIL 2009

4/18 A hunting Sharp-shinned Hawk catching a Mourning Dove for breakfast in Crete.

Nancy Kaz

4/24 1 Baltimore Oriole, 1 Brown Thrasher, White-throated Sparrows, a Chipping Sparrow and a Turkey Vulture overhead, Rural Monee.

Paula Arnold

4/25 3 Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. Little Red Schoolhouse.

Mary White

4/27 1 F Red-bellied Woodpecker, 1 Gray Catbird, 1 molting M Indigo Bunting, 1 M & 1 F Towhee, 1 Nashville Warbler, 2 M Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 1 Pine Siskin and about 100 White-throated Sparrows in her Crete back yard.

Nancy Kaz

4/27 Many M & F White-crowned Sparrows on the ground in rural Monee.

Paula Arnold

4/27 1 Indigo Bunting, 2 M Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and 6 White-throated Sparrows in his Park Forest yard.

Tony Kurth

4/27 Nesting Robins and Cardinals, 3 M & 2 F Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 5 Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a Cooper's Hawk in her Steger yard.

Pauline Small

4/27 1 Rose-breasted Grosbeak and 1 Indigo Bunting in her Park Forest back yard.

Bernadette Maune

4/28 1 Baltimore Oriole and 1 Orchard Oriole at her feeders in Crete.

Deb Marberg

4/29 Pair of Downy Woodpeckers, 2 Northern Flickers, 1 M Bluebird, pair of Cowbirds, 1 Tufted Titmouse and 4 Chickadees in her Steger yard.

Pauline Small

4/30 1 Pileated Woodpecker on an oak tree in her back yard, Crete.

Nancy Kaz

4/30 Several Hermit Thrushes, flock of White-throated Sparrows, 3 M and 1 F Indigo buntings, 1 M Oriole, 10 hungry Goldfinches, Chipping Sparrows and Chickadees at her Crete feeders.

Kathy Bader

4/30 3 M Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 1 Downy Woodpecker and Goldfinches. Olympia Fields.

Sally Long

MAY 2009

5/1 1 Red-headed Woodpecker, 1 Oriole, 1 Catbird and 1 Wood Duck attempting to get into a tree cavity, Crete.

Mary Anne McLean

5/1 3 M Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and 1 White-crowned Sparrow, Crete.

Deb Marberg

5/2 1 Great Crested Flycatcher and a Common Yellowthroat at Goodenow Grove.

Mary White

5/6 2 Prothonotary Warblers. Sand Ridge Nature Center.

Dick Riner

5/9 Pair of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, pair of Indigo Buntings, Cowbirds, Goldfinches, 1 House Finch, pair of Cardinals, 1 Nuthatch, 1 M Downy Woodpecker, Chickadees, 1 Baltimore Oriole and a Red-bellied Woodpecker in her Olympia Fields back yard.

Pauline Wolfson

5/11 1 Pileated Woodpecker and 1 M Eastern Bluebird in her Crete backyard.

Nancy Kaz

5/17 First Hummingbird and 1 Indigo Bunting on her feeders in Crete.

Deb Marberg

5/23 1 Yellow-billed Cuckoo in her oak tree in Crete.

Mary Anne McLean

JUNE 2009

6/10 1 Kestrel on phone wires along Cottage Grove Ave. in Crete and Great Blue Heron flying over.

Anne Rosen



Thorn Creek
AUDUBON SOCIETY

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| <i>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.</i> |
| This 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. |
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