



# Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 38 - ISSUE 4 JULY - AUGUST 2010

NEWSLETTER

## BIRD NUMBERS DROP AGAIN THIS SPRING

Numbers are down once again for the area spring bird count, the annual tally of birds in Illinois conducted by the Illinois Audubon Society. This pattern of decreasing bird numbers has been seen for some years in the Eastern Will County area in which the Thorn Creek Audubon Society participates.

This spring, on May 8, 2010, 19 groups of Audubon Society members from TCAS and Joliet Audubon counted 13,822 individual birds of 140 species. Last year the count was 15,281 individual birds of 147 species, almost 1,500 fewer birds. Twenty years ago, in 1990, the count was 20,902 birds consisting of 176 species, and it jumped the next year, 1991, to 30,623 birds of 180 species. The 1991 numbers have remained the highest count in the last 20 years, as well as the highest count since 1978, when record keeping began. By 1995 the numbers had dropped to 25,482 birds of 178 species. By the year 2000 it had dropped again to 20,877 birds of 157 species. The 2005 numbers were 17,737, comprising 158 species.

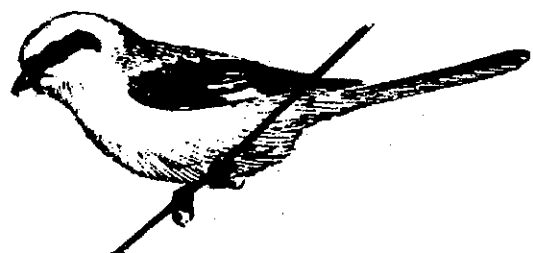
Even though bird numbers are dropping worldwide because of habitat loss and increasing urbanization, Al Thomas, who with Aura Duke was in charge of the spring bird count, said he thought this year's numbers were disappointingly low because of the wind. "Wind really affected this count. You are just not going to see as many birds when it is windy," he said. "You don't get to see the kind of birds you know are there."

One bird seen in especially large numbers was the Double-crested Cormorant, with 1,135 birds reported. As usual, other large numbers were Canada Geese (489), Ring-billed Gulls (2,376), Red-winged Blackbirds (1,092), Common Grackles (696), European Starlings (645), and American Goldfinches (402). American Robins also came in unexpectedly high, with 1,816 spotted.

The most unusual bird spotted was a Yellow Rail, a reclusive species generally seen farther north. Two Upland Sandpipers, four Caspian Terns and a Black Tern were also reported, along with seven Sandhill Cranes, one Eurasian Collared Dove (an introduced species), seven Henslow's Sparrows, one Dickcissel, one Summer Tanager, one Yellow-billed Cuckoo, two Western Meadowlarks, and one Loggerhead Shrike.

Twenty-two species of warblers were seen, and an exceptionally large number of American Pipits, 70, were spotted.

Though the count this year was disappointing, Al thanked those who turned out in spite of the less than perfect weather. He urged birders to come back next year and also said newcomers shouldn't be afraid to join in. "Even if you don't know a lot about birding, you should come along and learn. You don't know what you're missing."



*Loggerhead Shrike*

## FALL PROGRAMS

### PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF PLACE

Our fall programs will be held in the new Wetlands Discovery Center, a science classroom that is a new addition to the Park Forest Aqua Center. The Discovery Center is at the northwest corner of the building, identified by a large sign. The Aqua Center is on Orchard Drive, just north of the Park Forest Library.

**Wednesday, September 1, 7 p.m.**

### **BARTEL INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM**

**Dick Riner, Bartel Steward**

The September program will be presented by TCAS president Dick Riner. Come and follow the planning and implementation of Kim Ramirez's TogetherGreen grant for Bartel Grassland. Keith Nowakowski, head designer and Landscape Architect for Clarence Davids & Company, designed an Interpretive Garden to be located by the parking lot and kiosk at Bartel Grassland. With more than 400 plants and over 80 species, the Interpretive Garden was planted by 30 volunteers on June 12, 2010. What is an interpretive Garden? Join us at the September meeting and find out.

**Wednesday, October 6, 7 p.m.**

### **BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND AND TASMANIA**

**Glyn Dawson**



*Prairie Indian Plaintain, a species just found at Bartel by John Denk. Photo by John Denk.*

## WILDLIFE MIGRATIONS IN AUDUBON ADVENTURES

The 27<sup>th</sup> season of *Audubon Adventures* begins in September. This publication provides colorful, informative kits designed to promote a love of nature and a sense of stewardship in youngsters. It is designed for, but not limited to, third to sixth grade readers. Our Thorn Creek Audubon chapter acts as a local coordinator to get *Audubon Adventures* to teachers and youth leaders free of charge.

This season's *Audubon Adventures*, provided by the National Audubon Society, features migrating animals. This is a timely and poignant topic, considering the dangers migrants are experiencing and likely will continue to experience, from the disastrous infusion of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

Titled "Wildlife on the Move," the four editions for the 2010-2011 year include: 1) Amazing journeys and life cycles of migrating birds of the Americas, 2) Monarch butterfly and dragonfly migration, 3) Whales and sea turtles and their migratory seasons, and 4) Action for Planet Earth, focusing on ways young people can make valuable contributions to conservation in their communities.

A bonus to the four study kits, called "Pennies for the Planet," is an educational fundraising project from TogetherGreen that focuses on protecting habitats for migrating animals.

Many thanks to all who have already made contributions to the *Audubon Adventures* fund, enabling many classrooms to receive this dynamic set of materials for the coming year. Additional support will allow us to include more classes. To contribute, please send a check made out to Thorn Creek Audubon Adventures fund in care of Sue Putnam, 3704 W. 213<sup>th</sup> St., Matteson, IL 60443.

*Mary Anne McLean*

## INTERPRETIVE GARDEN PLANTED AT BARTEL

The rain came at just the right time on Saturday morning, June 12. The more than thirty volunteers who were planting the interpretive garden near the parking lot at Bartel Grassland just had time to get the 440 plants of 80 different species in the ground and put mulch around them before the rain clouds advanced to do the watering.

The garden is part of the ongoing restoration at the 640-acre grassland and wetland bordered by Flossmoor, Central, Vollmer and Richland Roads. It will give visitors a close-up view of the kind of prairie plants that once grew in the area and that are now being returned, little by little, to the restored area. A new sign will eventually show pictures and names of the plants.

The volunteers were on hands and knees by about 8 a.m., using trowels and sometimes shovels to plant Lance-leaved *Coreopsis*, New Jersey Tea, Blue Flags, Flowering Spurge, Purple Prairie Clover, Prairie Smoke, Meadow Anemone, Yellow Coneflowers and many more, including lots of sedges. Some were already in bloom. When the plants were all tamped down, they were protected with mulch donated by Clarence Davids & Company landscaping on Ridgeland Avenue.

Garden Designer Keith Nowakowski was pleased with the turnout and the effort. "I thought it would take us four hours, but we were done in three," he said. The rain predicted for the next few days is just what the plants will need, he added.

Volunteers have been the main workforce in the on-going restoration of the grassland, according to Bartel steward Dick Riner, who was pleased that so many people were willing to work so hard to help bring back a natural ecosystem. Volunteers ranged in age from college students to senior citizens, and they had a variety of reasons for wanting to help.

Clare Mostek is a Master Naturalist and Master Gardener with University of Illinois Extension Service certification. She loves to garden and is becoming more and more interested in native plants. "I notice more bees and hummingbirds in my yard as I add native plants," she said.

Penny Pixler is from Iowa and describes herself as a "grassland person." Although she likes the forest preserve areas here, she thinks it is equally important to have grassland. "I think we need to see some of the original land the way it looked when the first European settlers came."

Valerie Kearns likes to garden but thinks it's more fun to garden with other people. "You learn things and you meet interesting people," she said.

George Brown lives near the grassland and volunteers because he likes what it is doing for the area. "It's good to have Bartel in the neighborhood," he said. "It's esthetically pleasing and also a positive use of land. It provides safety by keeping the land from being used for things not so positive."



*Volunteers planting the Bartel interpretive garden.*

# FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, August 14, 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 Street. Whipple is one block east of Kedzie on 159<sup>th</sup> Street. Look for the McDonald's at the corner of Whipple and 159<sup>th</sup> and turn north there.

Fall field trips are being planned and details will be published in the September-October newsletter.

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:**

*June 2010: In 2005 when I was first elected President of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society, Aura Duke asked me to raise my hand when I was being serious. I have my hand raised at this time!*

*It would be easy to cast blame, wring your hands in despair, and complain about the oil spill in the Gulf. As Audubon members, we don't have time for that. We need to do what we can to help right now. Go to [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org) and get involved. If that means donating to the recovery, going to the Gulf Coast and helping, do something!*

*Dick Riner, President,  
Thorn Creek Audubon Society*

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## **What's Going on is Ongoing at Bartel**

Spring of 2010 was a busy time at Bartel Grassland. In March, 56 people turned out for The Great Bartel Seeding Event, planting a swatch more than 100 yards wide and three-quarters of a mile long with 250 pounds of seed. The seed came from the Tinley Creek/Bartel North Wetland project; about 200 pounds of it was Little Bluestem, "the workhorse of the Prairie," according to Audubon Chicago region's Judy Pollock. Also included were Nodding Onion and Black-eyed Susan. The planting was done just two days after that section of the grassland had been burned, so it had an even better than usual chance to germinate.

On April 24, 37 people turned out to get "down and dirty" planting sedges, "the workhorse of the wetland," along with plugs of other wetland plants such as Wild Iris, Sweet Flag, Great Blue Lobelia and Winged Lythrum. Plants were donated by the Bird Conservation Network, and fifteen members of the Oak Forest High School Ecology Club came to help out and get good and muddy poking holes in the ground and putting plants in them.

By May the Bobolinks had returned. These grassland nesting birds are declining most places because of habitat loss, but they are thriving at Bartel. May also saw a new addition to the grassland, an interpretive sign on the grassland with the heading, "if you restore it they will come." That's not just a catchy motto – a sample of the many plants, birds and animals that have already come to the restored grassland are pictured on the sign. Ongoing activities include the work of the Prairie Scouts and the Mud Monitors, along with contributions of individuals like John Denk, a plant expert who likes to find species that haven't yet been identified at Bartel, such as the Meadow Anemone and the Prairie Indian Plantain.

"Future visitors to Bartel will see an increasing diversity and larger numbers of native plants. Many will be in bloom by summer," Steward Dick Riner said. These visitors may now walk a new four-mile trail that starts and ends at the parking lot at the corner of Flossmoor and Central.

## **TCAS LOSES LONG-TIME MEMBER BOB VANCE**

Bob Vance, a long-time Thorn Creek Audubon Society member, died suddenly at his Matteson home on May 28, 2010 a little more than a month before his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Born July 3, 1920, in Springfield, Ohio, Robert Morgan Vance was a long-time resident of the Park Forest/Matteson area and an active volunteer in area organizations all his life. He was a founding member of Faith United Protestant Church and also a board member and chair of the Matteson Library. An Eagle Scout himself, he was active in Scouting for many years with his sons and also served as reader and computer administrator for Recording for the Blind.

He graduated Magna Cum Laude/Phi Beta Kappa from Kenyon College in 1942. In 1944 he was commissioned in the U. S. Naval Reserve and was Communication Officer on a destroyer during the last days of World War II. He earned his Ph.D. in organic chemistry in 1949 and was employed by the Sherwin Williams Company in Cleveland from 1948 until retirement in 1983.

Bob was an early member of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society, served on the Board of Directors, and was a long-time volunteer. "We depended on him for much of our important record keeping," said TCAS vice-president Al Thomas. "He kept our databases up to date, doing a lot of selfless work behind the scenes. He was extremely helpful in keeping computer records of membership and birdseed sales. He will be greatly missed."

"Bob and I worked together on the birdseed sale for at least ten years," said Kathy Bader. "He compiled statistics concerning customers, their orders, the amount of birdseed to order in each category and finally the grand total of pounds to be delivered. His work was accurate, professional and timely with a minimum of fuss."

"Bob was a quiet man with a twinkle in his eye. He was warm-hearted, loyal to his family, friends, and church and they loved him in return. He quietly went about his work in the community with little fanfare. He enjoyed tennis, gardening, cycling, nature, and golf, and played his last nine holes the week he passed away."

Sue Putnam, who worked with Bob on the membership committee, said, "He enjoyed life and liked to be active and involved. He was caring, organized and kind, one of the good guys."

### ***Compiling Nesting Information***

## **BREEDING BIRD BLITZ FINDS 50 SPECIES**

Thirteen devoted birders enjoyed a rain-free morning at Plum Creek Greenway in Eastern Will County Forest Preserve District's Goodenow Grove vicinity on June 12. Finding nesting birds was the order of the day, and over 50 species were recorded as possible or probable area nesters.

The Plum Creek Greenway is deep woods, shrubland and grassland. Six groups worked to get an idea of the birds nesting in the area and compile records for the Audubon Chicago Region data files. The survey lasted for four and a half morning hours, during which birds and their behavior were recorded to determine nesting preference.

Among the species recorded were Northern and Orchard Orioles, Bluebirds, Empidonax Flycatchers, Great Blue Herons, Yellow-throated Vireos, Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawks.

This information addresses important conservation issues, learning which birds are present and which parts of a site they are using at each of the several sites where a Blitz is held in the Chicago region.

## **THE COFFEE YOU DRINK CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR OUR SONGBIRDS**

The kind of coffee you drink can make a difference to birds everywhere. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, a simple lifestyle change—just drinking shade-grown coffee—can have a positive impact on bird conservation.

Scientists say the traditional method of growing coffee—beneath the canopy of a forest, rather than chopping down the trees for sun-grown coffee—provides vital habitat for birds.

“It’s a simple formula: keep the trees, keep the birds,” says Dr. Kenneth Rosenberg, director of Conservation Science at the Cornell Lab. “When trees are retained, this has tremendous value to birds, especially those that winter in Central and South America and breed in North America during the summer.”

Research has shown that the traditional shade-grown coffee plantations in Mexico support more than 100 bird species, compared with only six to 12 species in sun-grown monocultures.

A partnership has been formed between the Cornell Lab and “Birds & Beans,” a Massachusetts retailer that specializes in shade-grown coffee. The coffee is certified “Bird Friendly” by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and is 100% organic and shade-grown. Also, part of all sales of this coffee in Wild Birds Unlimited stores goes to the Cornell Lab to help support bird research and conservation.

However, if you can’t find this brand you may be able to find others that are shade-grown. Read the labels carefully. You might be helping many songbirds live through the winter, so they can come back to the Chicago area next spring.

## **NESTING IN PROGRESS ON THE BLUEBIRD TRAILS**

As of mid-June this year, no young birds had fledged from the 23 nests occupied by Eastern Bluebirds along the four Thorn Creek Audubon Society trails. Tree Swallows, however, are doing slightly better, as six fledglings were recorded by that date.

Since their arrival in early April both of these species have been very busy competing for nesting sites, building their distinctive nests, laying eggs, and feeding and protecting their young. Eighty-nine Bluebird eggs and 25 young still remained in the nests, while in the 35 Tree Swallow nests there were 93 eggs and 51 young. Tree Swallows nest only once per season, while Bluebirds usually rear two broods a year. Young Bluebird fledglings from the first brood have been observed helping to feed the second batch of young birds.

The House Sparrow is the Bluebird’s worst avian enemy. These sparrows will destroy Bluebird eggs, killing the young birds and adults, and must be kept from using the nesting boxes. Sparrows will give up nesting attempts if their nests are constantly removed. Since House Sparrows are not a native North American species and are not protected by law, their nests must be destroyed whenever possible. To help Bluebirds in their nesting attempts, so far this year volunteers who monitor the four sites have removed a total of 102 House Sparrow nests along the trails.

*Aura Duke*



EASTERN BLUEBIRD

# FIELD NOTES

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

## APRIL

**04/28** Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, White-throated Sparrows and a Scarlet Tanager at her Crete feeders. *Kathy Bader*

**04/29** Barn Swallows and a Brown Thrasher digging in her mulch in Monee. *Paula Arnold*

## MAY

**05/04** The first of the Rose-breasted Grosbeaks at her Crete feeder. *Kathy Bader*

**05/04** 1 male Rose-breasted Grosbeak in her Monee yard. *Susan Davis*

**05/05** 1 Catbird, 1 Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 2 Cedar Waxwings, White-throated Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warblers and pair of Eastern Phoebes in Krotiak Park across from Park Forest Wetland. *Joan Crabb*

**05/07** A Ruby-throated Hummingbird and an Indigo Bunting at her Crete feeders. *Kathy Bader*

**05/07** Yellow-rumped Warblers at Palos Forest Preserves. *Mary White*

**05/07** Pair of Grosbeaks, also Hummingbirds fighting at his Park Forest feeder. *Tony Kurth*

**05/07** 6 Eastern Bluebirds. Goodenow Grove. *Tony Kurth*

**05/08** 2 Solitary Sandpipers and Palm Warblers. Also Baltimore Orioles, several heard and one seen at Lake Katherine. *Mary White*

**05/08** Pair of Hummingbirds, pair of Mourning Doves, 2 Nuthatches, 2 Chickadees, pair of Robins, pair of Cardinals, 6 Goldfinches, 1 Red-bellied Woodpecker, pair of Downy

Woodpeckers, 2 Blue Jays, 2 male Indigo Buntings, 2 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, all watched over by a Cooper's Hawk in her Steger back yard. *Pauline Small*

**05/09** 2 Rufus-sided Towhees, 2 Scarlet Tanagers, 1 male American Redstart, Yellow-rumped Warblers, 4 Baltimore Orioles, 7 Catbirds, one of whom sang for more than an hour straight. Little Red Schoolhouse. *Mary White*

**05/19** Pair of Mute Swans and 8 cygnets at Lake Katherine. *Mary White*

## JUNE

**06/04** 26 Great White Egrets along Old Plank Trail Road. *Al Thomas*

**06/04** Breeding pair of Cardinals, Eastern Bluebirds, Indigo Buntings, Baltimore Orioles and Blue Jays, along with 6 Goldfinches, all at her feeders in her yard in rural Steger. *Pauline Small*

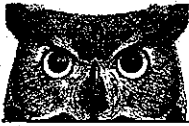
## NATIVE PLANTS FIND BUYERS AT ANNUAL TCAS SALE

Native plants such as trees, shrubs, perennials and grasses went home with 47 buyers on June 5, when orders from Thorn Creek Audubon's annual native plant sale were picked up. Plants came from Keith Nowakowski and Possibility Place.

Some buyers also took home one pound or 4½ pound bags of worm compost fertilizer, to give those native plants a head start.

Dory Grosche, chair of the sale, said she has additional bags of fertilizer available. They can be purchased by calling Dory at 481-3166 or at the fall meeting of TCAS.

Dory sends a special "Thank You" to Sue Putnam, Jim and Judi Murphy for their help on plant sale day.



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