

Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 39 - ISSUE 6 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2011

NEWSLETTER

HUMMINGBIRDS BRING BIG TURNOUT

Our smallest bird has many friends, and more than a hundred turned up at Freedom Hall on the evening of September 7 to hear avian expert Vernon Kleen talk about hummingbirds.

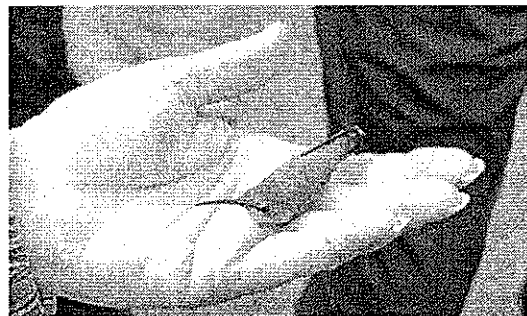
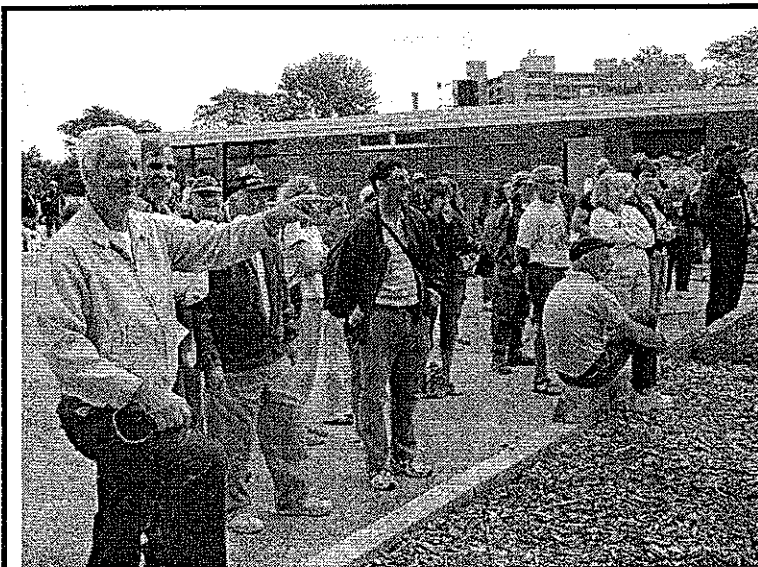
The next morning, at least 70 enthusiastic fans were at the hummingbird garden at the Wetland Discovery Center at the Park Forest Aqua Center to watch Kleen capture and band four of the tiny creatures. The most exciting part of the morning came after the hummingbirds had been banded, using metal circles so small 20 are kept on one safety pin.

The first four people who had signed up to "adopt" a bird got to hold one and release it after it had been banded. But anyone who cared to – and most folks there did – were able to touch a bird's breast and feel its heartbeat as it rested in Kleen's hand.

Perhaps the best part – the birds didn't seem to mind. There was no sign the procedure in any way disturbed them. Each bird was caught in a remote-controlled trap set up over a feeder, checked, and banded by Kleen. It then rested quietly in Kleen's hand while people clustered nearby and felt its rapid heartbeat. The bird was then transferred to the palm of one of the first four people who had paid \$5 to "adopt" it. A light tap on the bottom of that hand by Kleen signaled "release" to the hummingbird, which quickly flew off, but evidently not far. TCAS member Michelle O'Connor, who had set up and tended the hummingbird feeders, reported that the next day she saw at least one of the banded birds back at the same feeder.

Three of the birds banded were hatch-year males and one a hatch-year female, Kleen said. Forty-six birds were "adopted," and everyone who adopted one will get a certificate and be notified if the bird is ever captured again. The adoption fees go to the Illinois Audubon Society for acquisition of land to preserve wildlife. Kleen pronounced the day a success said he hopes to have a repeat performance sometime next August.

Joan Crabb



Vernon Kleen at far left with some of the fans who turned out Sept. 8 to see hummingbirds banded.

Photos by Jim Kelly

FALL PROGRAMS

THE THORN CREEK AUDUBON SOCIETY HOLDS PROGRAMS THE FIRST WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH FROM SEPTEMBER THROUGH MAY. PROGRAMS ARE HELD AT THE PARK FOREST LIBRARY. ALL PROGRAMS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

November 2, 7 p.m.

ADVENTURES IN BELIZE

Marilyn Campbell

Marilyn Campbell is currently editor of *Illinois Audubon* magazine. She retired as Executive Director of the Illinois Audubon Society in 2006, after 12 years in that position. Previously she was Director of Education and Programs for the Vermilion County Conservation District, where she developed the Outdoor School Program, bringing thousands of students to the county's parks for nature education. She was also a naturalist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, leading hikes in state parks. Next summer she will be leading "Birds and Bridges," a program for the Illinois Audubon Society, combining birding and exploring historic covered bridges.

Adventures in Belize will feature wildlife of this small but interesting country; about the size of New Jersey, it has hundreds of species of birds. The program will include scenery such as jungle trails, ecotourism areas, Mayan ruins, and birds and wildlife such as trogons, parrots, hawks, iguanas, bats, howler monkeys and more.

December 7, 7 p.m.

BIRDS OF CAMBODIA

Glenn Johnson and Cindy Alberico

Glenn and Cindy will present a photographic journey to Cambodia, starting at the ruins of Angkor Wat, a huge 12-century

temple complex, traveling down the Mekong Delta, and ending at Phnom Penh. Avid birders, their presentation will include photographs of the birds they saw along the way, including the Giant Ibis, Bengal Florican, Great Slaty Woodpecker, and Mekong Wagtail. The Giant Ibis is the largest ibis in the world, and the Great Slaty Woodpecker the largest woodpecker. The ibis and the wagtail may be extinct in the next 5 to 10 years because of loss of habitat, as the growing population is using more and more land for food production.

Glenn and Cindy are members of the Will County Audubon Society and the Illinois Ornithological Society.

January 4, 2012, 7 p.m.

LANDSCAPING FOR BIRDS

Connor Shaw

Connor Shaw, owner of Possibility Place nursery in Monee, will give a program on landscaping to attract birds.

BARTEL TO HOST WINTER SOLSTICE PARTY DEC. 21

Want to celebrate something different this year? Come to the Bartel Grassland from 4 p.m. to midnight on December 21 for the Sixth Annual Winter Solstice celebration.

The winter solstice is the shortest day and longest night of the year. Early people used to light fires at the solstice to persuade the sun to return and bring spring and summer again.

Bartel steward Dick Riner will light a brush pile to keep you warm. He will also provide hot chocolate, hot dogs and cookies from the Mad Baker of Bartel. Bring your own chair and park in the lot at Central and Flossmoor road.

Riner says he expects the Ghost of Christmas past to drop by. Other appropriate costumes are also expected. Druids are especially welcome.

41ST YEAR FOR TCAS

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT DEC. 17

The traditional Christmas Bird Count began in the year 1900. Instead of shooting birds, a popular holiday sport in that age, a group of 27 conservationists spent the day identifying and counting as many bird species as they could find in a 24-hour period. Today over 2000 official counts are conducted all over the Americas, the Caribbean, Hawaii and several other Pacific islands. Each count contributes to the overall database used by conservationists, ecologists and other scientists.

This upcoming count on Saturday, Dec. 17, will be Thorn Creek Audubon Society's 41st year of participation. Our official territory lies within a 15-mile circle centered at Governors State University and includes parts of Homewood, Chicago Heights, Crete, and Frankfort, extending south to the Beecher-Peotone Road. Parties of field observers will be organized to cover specific areas, a leader being assigned to each group. Feeder watchers should report the highest number of each species seen at a feeder and yard on count day. Feeder watchers must report their observations no later than 8 p.m. on count day to Dory Grosche at 708-481-3166.

In addition to count day tabulation, any rare birds sighted during count week (Dec. 14 thru Dec. 20) should be reported to the count compiler, Bob Harrison. Rare sightings must be documented using official forms that will be provided.

All participants must sign up in advance for this important census. A planning session will be held at the Nov. 2 TCAS general meeting (7 p.m., Park Forest Library). For further information or to sign up, please call Bob Harrison (708-889-9693) or Aura Duke (708-748-6407).

WE NEED YOUR HELP... JOIN THE FUN !

Aura Duke

NEW AUDUBON ADVENTURES GO TO SCHOOLS

New and exciting studies are underway for 55 teachers, other educators, and students in grades 3 to 5 who, thanks to your contributions, have received their *Audubon Adventures* kits for this school year. Included so far are three editions of the *Audubon Adventures* mini-magazine, with copies for every student.

The edition "Flow of Life" presents a study of rivers with colorful pictures of a great egret, damsel fly, leopard frog and salmon on the cover page. The four-page magazine folds out into a map of the Mississippi and the rivers that empty into it, with headings such as "What's a Watershed?," "Dazzling Delta," and "Enter the Dead Zone."

The other editions included in the kit are "Wild Alaska" and "Zip! Hover! Zoom!" a study of (you guessed it!) hummingbirds and other pollinators. More information about these will appear in future newsletters. Meanwhile copies will be available for browsing at the monthly TCA meetings.

The fourth edition, still to come, is "Action for Planet Earth," focusing on ways that young people can make valuable contributions to conservation in their community.

As always, contributions in support of *Audubon Adventures* are welcome in any amount. The cost per kit this year is \$45.95. To contribute, please send a check, made out to Thorn Creek Audubon Adventures Fund, to Sue Putnam, 3704 West 213th Street, Matteson, IL 60443.

Mary Anne McLean

BARTEL CITED IN BIRD PUBLICATION

"The State of the Birds 2011," a national publication that more than 15 major bird conservation groups in the United States produce together annually, has highlighted Bartel Grassland for successfully restoring habitat to conserve declining bird species. This year's publication gives the first assessment of the distribution of birds on public lands. Bartel, in the far south suburbs, is part of the Cook County Forest Preserve. Restoration of what was once farmland began 10 years ago and is still continuing. It is the only grassland project noted in the report.

Grassland birds are among our nation's fastest declining species. According to "The State of the Birds," more than 97% of our native grasslands have been lost, mostly to agriculture, and as a result the grassland bird populations have declined far more than any other group, including birds of wetlands, arid lands, forests, islands, the arctic, and coasts and oceans.

BARTEL BROUGHT BACK GRASSLAND BIRDS

To protect grassland birds, the habitat they need must be restored, and Bartel Grassland has done that, the report says. "The Bartel Grassland Restoration Project has successfully restored grassland birds on Cook County public lands near Chicago, Illinois. Invasive trees, such as box elder and buckthorn, were removed from the site. Soon after, birds such as Grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows, Meadowlarks, Bobolink and Short-eared Owls increased. When complete, the site will include 900 acres of restored grassland and wetlands."

The grassland restoration is a labor-intensive project, requiring all kinds of hard and dirty work such as weeding, seed collecting and scattering, and plugging plants into wetland habitats. Many hands are needed to keep the change from invasive weeds to native plants ongoing.

MANY VOLUNTEERS MAKE IT A SUCCESS

Dick Riner, who has been steward for the past seven years, has a cadre of volunteers who turn out for workdays, usually on Saturdays, and are becoming knowledgeable themselves on grassland and prairie restoration. Many of his volunteers are from the Thorn Creek Audubon Society. Another source of ready hands are students from area high schools.

On a recent fall Saturday, 15 students from Summit and Delta Charter schools in District 218 put in a morning's work collecting seeds from Little Bluestem and Mountain Mint, then scattering the seed in bare areas of the grassland. Jake McManus and Jimmy Palaggi, both sophomores, said they had volunteered for the field trip when it was announced at an assembly.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS READY TO RETURN

"I like the wilderness," Jake said. "I like this big open space."

Though both were tired after a long morning's work, both said they would volunteer again. "I want to come back next year and check out what we did," Jimmy said.

Members of the Oak Forest High School Ecology Club often lend a hand, as do students from Lincolnway North, Rich Township Central and South, and Tinley Park High Schools,

Judy Pollock, Director of Bird Conservation, Audubon Chicago Region, who works with Riner on the restoration, said the volunteers should be proud of the work they have done that got Bartel recognized in the national publication.

Riner added: "Come out to Bartel and take a walk. The four mile perimeter trail or the Thorn Creek Audubon berm is calling you."

"State of the Birds 2011" can be read in its entirety on the internet.

Joan Crabb

FIELD TRIPS

Wednesday, November 9, 8 a.m.
THORN CREEK WOODS TRAILS WALK
 Mary Anne McLean – 708-672-5494
 mclean908@comcast.net

Once each month Thorn Creek Audubon members walk the trails at the Thorn Creek Nature Center, birding and monitoring the condition of the trails.

Saturday, November 12, 3 p.m.
JASPER-PULASKI – CRANES
 Al Thomas – 708-957-9847, or
 woodduck_1999@yahoo.com
 Rain date Saturday, November 19

At Jasper-Pulaski there is a good viewing stand where we can see 10,000 to 15,000 birds flying in at sunset to spend the night. Occasionally a Whooping Crane may join them. Dinner on the way home. Call to see about carpooling from Park Forest or to get directions.

TCAS OFFERS NATURE HOLIDAY CARDS AND GIFTS

A nesting box for use by bluebirds, house wrens or chickadees is the perfect gift for your bird-loving friends. TCAS offers a well-constructed pine box with a predator guard at the entrance hole for \$15.00.

Packets of six note cards and envelopes with original pictures of bluebirds, spring birds, wildflowers of Raccoon Grove, the common loon or a group of Illinois birds sell for \$4.00. You can also send Holiday cards with a nature message, such as winter cardinals, a wreath with six birds, a wood duck or a bluebird with a wreath. Packets of 12 cards and envelopes cost only \$7.00.

One more gift idea -- send *Audubon Adventures* to a local classroom as a gift in honor of a friend or relative. In that way you will be giving a gift to an entire group of youngsters. A special card will announce the donation (see story on page 3).

Call Aura Duke at 708-748-6407 or purchase items at the next TCAS meeting.

Three of Bartel Grassland's regular volunteers, Charlie Habecker, Joan O'Keeffe, and Judy Gleitsman, take a break for a little birding on a recent workday. Many uncommon prairie and grassland birds, such as meadowlarks, bobolinks, and Henslow's sparrows, like to pose for birders at Bartel.

Photo by Dick Riner



NATURE CENTER STILL NEEDS VOLUNTEERS

The Thorn Creek Nature Center is still keeping its doors open and some programs going, but it could use more volunteers.

Penny Chamberlain, a member of Friends of the Thorn Creek Woods, is thankful for those like the Thorn Creek Audubon Society members who help staff the center and monitor the trails, but would like a few more helpers.

"We could really use more people to keep the center open and provide some special services," she said. Call her at (708-748-7222).

The building at 247 Monee Road in Park Forest is open from noon to 4 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, staffed by volunteers. One volunteer is cataloging the books in the Nature Center's library.

Will County Forest Preserve naturalists are providing several programs. On Nov. 5 from 9 to 11 a.m. "Know Your Oaks" will show how to identify different types of oak trees. On Dec. 20 from 1 to 3 p.m. a program on "Animal Tracks in Winter" is open to those age 8 and older. The programs are free but registration is required.

The annual Garlic Fest was held on Oct. 1 and went very well, Chamberlain said, completely selling out of garlic. The funds raised will help keep the center operating.

Another annual program, "Woodland Carols," will be held Dec. 10 from 2 to 5 p.m. Local music groups will present an afternoon of folk and other music. Cost is \$10 per person or a big bag of groceries per person. The groceries will be donated to the Rich Township Food Pantry.

Because of a big deficit in the budget, the Nature Center had to lay off its two staff members as of June 30 and depend on volunteers until the financial situation improves.

TCAS MEMBERS CONTINUE TO STAFF NATURE CENTER

For the next two months TCAS members will continue to assist at the Thorn Creek Nature Center as follows:

Wed., Nov. 9 - 8 a.m. - Nature Trail Hike

Fri., Nov. 18 - noon to 4 p.m. - Nature Center Open Hours volunteers

Wed., Dec. 14 - 8 a.m. Nature Trail Hike

Fri., Dec. 16 - noon to 4 p.m. Nature Center Open Hours Volunteers

We want to give a big thanks to our Nature Center volunteers: Alice McBride, Judy Gleitsman, Judy Murphy, Joan O'Keeffe, Pat Strange, and Aura Duke.

We still need your help. Please call Aura Duke (708-748-6407) or Mary Anne McLean (708-672-5494) to join Thorn Creek Audubon Society volunteer efforts. For other volunteer opportunities call Penny Chamberlain (708-748-2227).

BLUEBIRD NUMBERS MAKE COMEBACK IN SEPTEMBER

On a beautiful afternoon, September 17, 20 dedicated bluebird volunteers gathered for the annual picnic at the Duke's residence to share the joys and problems of bluebird watching and monitoring the 105 boxes along the TCAS trails.

The final results of the nesting season were distributed, and to everyone's surprise, bluebirds had made a good recovery. As of early August bluebirds were lagging in their nesting activities. The final tabulation in September shows an increase in bluebird fledglings from 53 in August to 74, which actually comes close to the figures in previous years. The effort put forth by bluebird volunteers is really helping to bring back bluebirds to our own back yards. *Aura Duke*

FIELD NOTES

TO REPORT SIGHTINGS CALL
MARY WHITE AT 396-0794

AUGUST

08/30 a male Bald Eagle in a dead tree just south of the Old Plank Trail in Matteson.

Dick Riner

08/30 An immature Red-tailed Hawk in her birdbath in Homewood.

Sally Kruger

SEPTEMBER

09/12 An unidentified hawk on top of an oak tree, a Downy Woodpecker, and a Nuthatch. Park Forest.

Delpha Williams

09/19 Sandhill Cranes (heard) and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Lake Katherine.

Mary White

OCTOBER

10/04 More than 50 Great White Egrets in a pond across the street from the Orland Metra Station.

Mary White

10/05 a Great Horned Owl at the Thorn Creek Nature Center trail.

Charles Habecker

10/11 A group of at least 200 Meadowlarks staging to start south; also a group of at least 100 Redwing Blackbirds doing the same at Bartel Grassland.

Dick Riner

PARK DISTRICT DONATES PLANTS TO WETLAND DISCOVERY CENTER

The Frankfort Square Park District, which has its own greenhouse, has donated 10 flats of native wetland and prairie plants to the Hummingbird and Butterfly garden at the Wetland Discovery Center, reports Michelle O'Connor, who tends the garden. She thanks Julie Avaria of the Park District for the plants, which will help attract even more birds and butterflies to the area used for nature education.

SHOP AT CARSONS FOR TCAS FUNDRAISER

Thorn Creek Audubon Society members can help raise funds for the group's many projects by shopping at a Carson Pirie Scott Store on November 11 and 12, or even online. Board members are selling coupon books with a \$10 coupon good on any item of \$10 or more, along with \$200 worth of other coupons, for just \$5.

Anyone who has a coupon book may shop online by using the coupon codes that are under the bar codes, but online shoppers must have bought a coupon book.

The biggest benefit of this fundraiser is that all the money collected by coupon sales stays right with TCAS, says Dory Grosche, ways and means chairman. Board members are selling the five dollar books, which will be available at the November 2 general meeting or by calling Dory at (708) 481-3166.

The event is Carson's annual Community Day sale, starting Friday at 9 a.m. and Saturday at 6 a.m. There are 20% off coupons for many items and special price coupons for very specific merchandise, along with the \$10 coupon. Last year the fundraiser brought TCAS almost \$400.

These fundraisers support Audubon activities in conservation and environmental education, such as its programs and its grants to area organization.

TCAS GRANTS COMMITTEE SELECTS RECIPIENTS

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society Grants Committee met in October to examine the grants applications received this fall and prepare a recommendation of potential recipients for approval by the TCAS Board of Directors. Grants recipients will be announced at the general meeting on November 2, 2011.