



Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

VOLUME 37 – ISSUE 6 Nov – Dec 2009

NEWSLETTER

CHRISTMAS COUNT NEEDS BIRDERS

The traditional Christmas Bird Count began in the year 1900. Instead of shooting birds, which was a popular holiday sport back then, 27 birders spent the day identifying and counting as many bird species as they saw in a 24-hour period. Today, more than two thousand official counts occur all over North, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Hawaii, and several Pacific islands. Each count contributes to an important avian database which is used by scientists.

The count on Saturday, January 2, will mark Thorn Creek Audubon Society's 39th year of participation. Our official territory lies within a 15-mile circle centered at Governor's State University and includes parts of Homewood, Chicago Heights, Crete, and Frankfort, extending south to the Beecher-Peotone Road.

Two groups of birders can participate in the count: field observers and feeder watchers. Teams of field observers will be organized to cover specific territories, a leader being assigned to each group. Feeder watchers work in their own yards recording and estimating the number of each species observed. Feeder observations should be reported to Dory Grosche at 708-481-3166 no later than 8 p.m. on count day.

In addition to count day observations, any unusual sightings within the circle during the week of December 30 through January 5 should be reported to the compiler, Bob Harrison, at 708-889-9693 or nosira@sbcglobal.net.

All participants must sign up in advance for this important census. Groups will be organized during the November and December TCAS meetings. Please call Bob Harrison or Aura Duke at 708-748-6407 to join this year's Christmas Bird Count.

Aura Duke



TCAS members and friends gathered at Wooded Isle recently to see migrating birds including Palm, Yellow, and Black and White Warblers, led by Glyn and Sylvia Dawson. Here, left to right, are Al Thomas, Michelle O'Connor, Charles Habecker, Sylvia Dawson and Larry Layne. Lunch at Café Florian ended the day with a flourish.

Photo by Dick Riner

FALL PROGRAMS

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF PLACE

Our fall and winter programs will NOT be held at the Park Forest Library but at the Matteson Elementary School on Main Street. Please see map on page 3.

Wednesday, Nov. 4 at 7 p.m.

PROJECT SQUIRREL

Steven M. Sullivan

Chicago Academy of Science

Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum

Sullivan is a curator of Urban Ecology at the Chicago Academy of Science, Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum.

Tree squirrels can be found throughout our region in habitats ranging from nearly pristine to completely urbanized. Project Squirrel, a partnership of the Notebaert Nature Museum and the University of Illinois at Chicago, is working with citizen scientists of all ages to determine the population size and species distribution of tree squirrels throughout the Chicago Wilderness region to learn more about our urban wilderness.

Our most common squirrel species are the Gray Squirrel and the Fox Squirrel. Gray Squirrels usually have white bellies and white fringed tails, but sometimes can be all black. Fox Squirrels are bigger and usually have rusty-orange bellies and black fringed tails. Though Fox Squirrels are bigger and manage predators better, Gray Squirrels can often chase Fox Squirrels away. Because of this, the ratio of the two species varies from area to area.

Squirrels can help us understand the ecology of an area because, whether they are living in an intact woodland or in your attic, their natural history and behavior remain the same. Further, they stay within a small home range and are easily visible because they are active during the day. This makes them

useful indicators of local ecosystem resources and good candidates for observation by Citizen Scientists.

Citizen Scientists can gather data over a huge range, creating an accurate picture of a local area. During the first phase of Project Squirrel, over ten years ago, the observations showed that while Gray Squirrels predominated in our region, there were some communities with both species and a few with only Fox Squirrels. We hope more people will participate with this current phase. This will generate a detailed picture of squirrel demographics that we can use to understand the ecology of both large and small habitats as well as observe region-wide changes.

We hope you will find squirrel watching so enjoyable that you will make it part of your everyday routine. Reporting data only takes about a minute. We would like you to report observations as often as you can, but at least once a season, at ProjectSquirrel.org. You can also view and share photos and stories about squirrels at the web site. If you are a monitor for another program, you might find Project Squirrel is a great way to get your neighbors and kids involved in wildlife monitoring, too. For more information go to ProjectSquirrel.org, or e-mail Steve Sullivan at sciurus@uic.edu or call 773-525-0166. Happy Squirreling!

Wednesday, December 2, 7 p.m.

RAFTING DOWN THE NAHANNI RIVER IN CANADA'S NORTHWEST TERRITORY

Bob Moffitt

The Nahanni River, located in the Northwest Territories of Canada, is one of the most spectacular rivers in North America. Because of the rugged remoteness of the river, it was one of the last rivers on the continent to be conquered. Because of its beauty and natural wonders, Nahanni National Park

FALL PROGRAMS (continued)

became the first World Heritage Park of UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. UNESCO designates very special places in all parts of the world as World Heritage Sites.

TCAS member Bob Moffitt will present a program about a real wilderness adventure, his two weeks rafting on this wild river miles from the nearest town or even the nearest road. The eight rafters who made the trip started out in the town of Fort Simpson, which can be reached by road. From there they were flown in to a gravel bar on the river (which cannot be reached by road) with all their gear, including three rafts, enough food for 14 days, tents, and a stove. They were able to drink the river water after it had been put through a purifying filter.

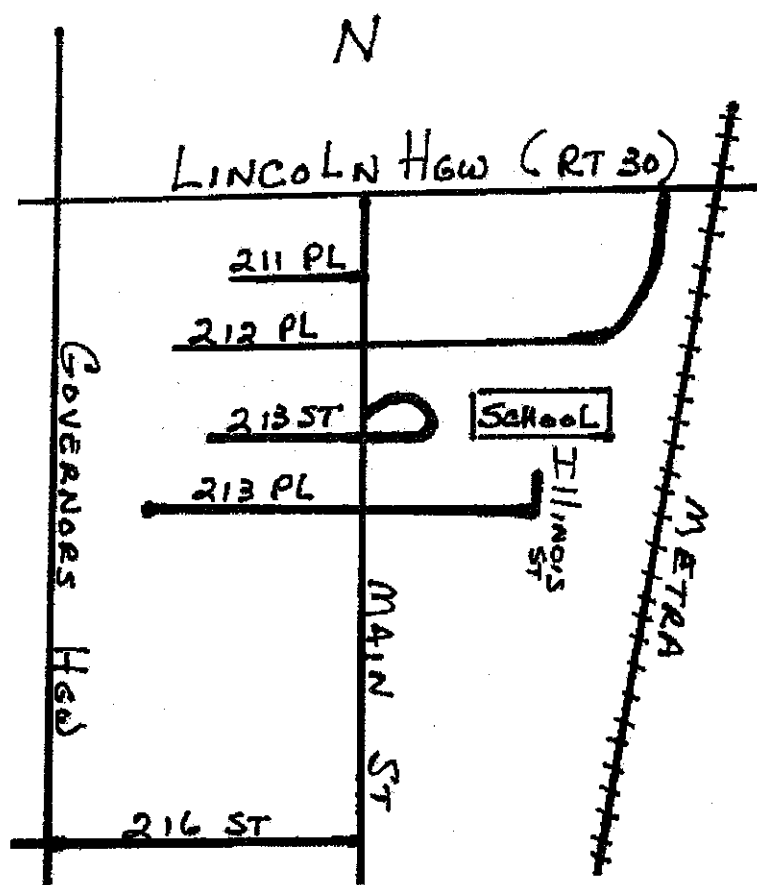
Their destination was Nahanni National Park, also an isolated spot, with only one ranger and no amenities except a camp ground.

"We started out in the middle of nowhere and when we got to the park we were still nowhere, but at least there was a road," Moffitt said. "We rafted for 14 days to get to a road.

"We were in Grizzly Bear country and we had to be careful. We saw lots of bear tracks but no bears. We were told by park authorities about an area where a mother bear and her cub were located and we were instructed to avoid that area."

Moffitt has been a math teacher for 35 years, 30 of those in Tinley Park High School. Now that he is retired he enjoys hiking, rafting, photography, woodworking and taking wilderness trips, including one to the Gates of the Arctic National Park in Alaska and a 21-day trip on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon.

DON'T FORGET NEW TCAS MEETING PLACE



Meetings are being held this year at the Matteson elementary school at 21245 Main Street. There is no parking in front of the school but parking is available in a rear lot accessible from 213th Place. Enter the rear door visible from the parking lot.

Wednesday, January 6, 2010

BOBOLINKING PROJECT

Kim Ramirez

The goal of this TogetherGreen project sponsored by National Audubon and Toyota is to link young people to stewardship and ecological monitoring opportunities at Bartel Grassland and Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. Ms. Ramirez is working on a Master's Degree in environmental biology at Governors State University.

FALL FIELD TRIPS

Please let the trip leader know you plan to attend, so that you can be notified in the event of a change in plans. If you are not on the list for email reminders and updates regarding the trips and would like to be, please contact Mary Anne McLean at mclean908@comcast.net or (708) 672-5494.

Sunday, November 1, 2 p.m.

JASPER-PULASKI

**Al Thomas wooduck_1999@yahoo.com;
(708) 957-9847**

Charlie Habecker - (708) 747-6061

We are fortunate to have this amazing birding phenomenon so close at hand. No need to make a pilgrimage as far as the Platte River to see thousands of Sandhill Cranes, pausing to take on nourishment, as they head south for the winter. The amazing spectacle of hundreds upon hundreds of the cranes staging a fly-in at sunset, is just a little over an hour from Park Forest. A unique opportunity! To carpool, meet at the Park Forest Library.

Wednesday, November 11

OLD PLANK ROAD TRAIL

Al Thomas - see above

Al says this is a trail for all seasons - that even in November there's sure to be something exciting there. Come and see! Meet at the parking lot of the University of Illinois Extension building on Miller Drive, (runs east from Central, just north of the trail).

Saturday, January 2, 2010

Christmas Bird Count

See Story on Front Page

No more field trips are planned until January 23 (a trip to Starved Rock to see Eagles), and two trips in February (13 and 20) to see owls. Details will be available in the next newsletter. Regular birding field trips will begin March 24 and run through August.

TCAS OFFERS "GREEN" CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS

The Thorn Creek Audubon Society is offering ideas for "Green" Christmas gifts that keep on giving to the environment. For your bird-loving friends, you can give a pine bluebird nesting box with a predator guard at the entrance hole for just \$15.

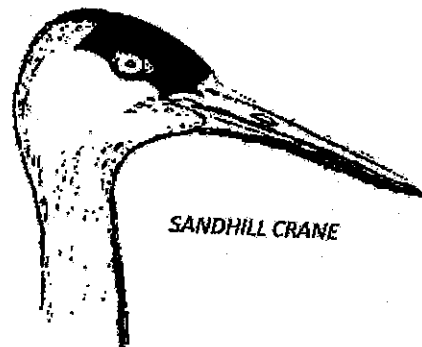
You can send holiday cards with a nature message, such as winter cardinals, a holiday tree with five native birds, or a wreath with five birds. These cards are created by TCAS member Aura Duke and are priced at \$7 for a box of 12, including envelopes.

For gifts with a touch of nature, give packets of cards with pictures of the Common Loon, spring birds, Hummingbirds, wildflowers of Raccoon Grove, or assorted pictures. These are also \$7 for 12 cards with envelopes.

Several copies of the National Geographic *Guide to the Birds of North America*, a soft back field guide, will be for sale at \$12 each.

All profit from these items goes to support the TCAS environmental programs, which include providing *Audubon Adventure* newspapers for grade school children as well as grants and scholarships for environmental projects and education.

These items will be on sale at the December 2 TCAS general meeting or may be picked up at the Duke home, 35 Braeburn, Park Forest. To order call 708-748-6407.



SANDHILL CRANE

A TRIBUTE TO DEWEY HELMICK



Dewey at the dedication of the Dewey
Helmick Nature Preserve in 2004
Photo by Dick Riner

It is with great sadness that we report the death of one of our most beloved members, Dewey Helmick, on September 26. In the many years that he was a member of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society, this Renaissance man, whose interests and adventures spanned the globe, was a consistent contributor of time and talent to our organization, and to the environment we seek to protect.

A long-time newspaperman, Dewey competently and faithfully chaired our publicity committee and saw to it that news of our special projects, excursions and events received timely coverage in local papers. He monitored nest boxes at Central Park in Park Forest, and many of us fondly remember the day when he showed up at the end-of-season monitors' picnic, dressed in clown attire, fresh from delighting children at a Kiwanis pancake event.

His kindness, wisdom and good humor distinguished him at meetings, birding excursions and elsewhere. He served three terms on the Park Forest village board and three as Rich Township supervisor and was honored with membership in the Park Forest Hall of Fame. His volunteer activities, beyond those with TCA, included helping the homeless by participating in PADS, and traveling to Colombia to help the visually impaired by distributing eyeglasses.

A memorial to his efforts and persistence already exists as the Dewey Helmick Nature Preserve, a wildlife-rich stretch of the Old Plank Road Trail, the bike trail that Dewey was instrumental in conceiving and bringing from dream to reality.

Although Dewey will be absent in body from future TCA undertakings, his influence for the good will continue. We send heartfelt condolences to his wife Jeanne, his daughters and families.

A memorial service is planned for October 31, at 10:30 a.m. at Faith United Protestant Church in Park Forest. The family asks that, in lieu of flowers, donations be directed to the church or to the donor's favorite charity. This includes our *Audubon Adventures* fund, providing materials for study of nature and the environment to children in grades 3 to 6. To make a donation to the fund, send a check made out to Thorn Creek Audubon Adventures Fund, in care of Sue Putnam, 3704 W 213th St., Matteson, IL 60443.

Mary Anne McLean

BIRDING HELPS ECONOMY

A report issued in July by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows that one out of every five Americans watches birds. It also reveals that birdwatchers contributed \$35 billion to the U. S. economy in 2006 alone.

So keep on birding, folks.

RINER HONORED BY CHICAGO AUDUBON



Photo by John Denk

The Chicago Audubon Society has chosen Dick Riner as recipient of an Annual Environmental Award for his work as Chief Steward at Bartel Grasslands. The award, "Protector of the Environment - Single Act Avocation," honors Riner for "exemplary work as Chief Steward," citing "all you have done to further restoration and enhancement of the natural habitat there, working with many volunteers and educating the public as to the importance of that area."

Riner, who served three terms as president of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society and also held other TCAS offices, has been Bartel Steward for the past five years. He was completely surprised and greatly honored when he learned of the award. "I was flabbergasted" he said. "I didn't even know I was being considered."

Chicago Audubon is a national society that covers the entire Chicago region. Riner will receive the award on November 5 at the Annual Awards Dinner in Des Plaines.

Riner describes his job at Bartel as organizing volunteers and workdays and continuing the restoration of the area to the

natural wet prairie that it was before the coming of the settlers. He believes his chief contribution is getting other people interested and passing on to others the determination to continue the work.

The Bartel Grasslands provides nesting sites to birds such as Bobolinks, Henslow's Sparrows, Meadowlarks and others whose existence is threatened because of loss of habitat. Bobolinks in particular have declined in numbers by nearly 70% overall, but are flourishing at Bartel.

One of the biggest rewards of his stewardship, Riner said, is hearing and seeing the Bobolinks come back each May. "I look forward to seeing the first Bobolink," he said. "I just stand and look and listen to him."

SOME THINGS WE SHOULD NEVER BUY

Conservation Chair Judy Gleitsman reminds us of some things we should never buy. From Co-op America.

1. **STYROFOAM CUPS.** Styrofoam is forever; it's not biodegradable. Buy paper cups or better still, mugs to take with you and use again.
2. **PAPER TOWELS.** They waste forest resources and your money. If you must buy them, buy non-bleached products, but better still, buy dishtowels and wash and reuse.
3. **BLEACHED COFFEE FILTERS.** Dioxins formed during the chlorine bleaching process contaminate groundwater and air and are linked to cancer. Buy unbleached.
4. **OVERPACKAGED PRODUCTS.** Excess packaging wastes resources and costs more. About 33% of trash in the U. S. household comes from packaging.
5. **HIGHER OCTANE GAS THAN YOU NEED.** Only one car in 10 made since 1982 requires high-octane gasoline. It releases more pollutants and may be bad for you car.

AUDUBON ADVENTURES GOES TO 60 TEACHERS

Thanks to all who have made contributions to the *Audubon Adventures* Fund this year, 60 teachers are now better equipped to guide their students in ways to TAKE ACTION FOR THE PLANET, the theme of this year's materials.

With an ingenious new format, the student newspapers combine four profusely illustrated pages of information and ideas, magically supplemented, when the paper is unfolded, to reveal a 15 x 22" poster on the back, providing additional, largely interactive features.

For instance, in the edition pertaining to *Caretaking our World's Water*, the poster presents a quiz relating to water usage, "Who's Helpful? What's Harmful?" and several thought provoking articles. These include "What's happening to the Frogs, a Mystery in Minnesota," "Thirsty Americans," revealing the disconcerting statistic that each person in the United States uses about 80-100 gallons of water a day at home, and "Citizen Scientists Lend a Hand."

The *At Home in a Habitat* newspaper touches on global warming and other threats to plants and wildlife, provides ideas for fixing damaged habitats such as planting trees, cleaning up streams, restoring grasslands and bringing back wetlands, and includes stories about kids who are helping.

Energy is the focus of the *Power from our Planet* edition. Here children will learn about the problems associated with fossil fuels and about various options for switching to energy from renewable resources, and be challenged to find ways in which they can save energy.

Every kit includes 32 copies of each edition of the newspapers, a resource manual for the teacher, a fact sheet describing and illustrating monarch butterfly migration, and a guide to nature journaling. *Mary Anne McLean*

FIELD NOTES

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

August 09

08/24 Moorhens, 2 adults, 4 fledglings and 1 juvenile at Cline Avenue Service Road just east of the Heron Rookery.

Pat Strange

September 09

09/05 14 Turkey Vultures soaring over Crete and 1 Yellow Parakeet at her feeder.

Deb Marberg

09/07 1 juvenile Osprey on a telephone pole at Markham Prairie.

Sally Long

09/08 1 immature Osprey diving at wetlands on 126th East of Torrence Avenue.

Al Thomas

09/15 Flock of at least 10 Bluebirds, Dog Park, Frankfort.

Susan Weinrebe

09/25 1 Red-headed Woodpecker, Bartel Grassland.

Dick Riner

09/25 30 to 40 Crows gathering in a dead tree at the Reservoir at 167th and Cicero.

Mary White

09/29 Heard a few Sandhill Cranes flying over Steger.

John Bergis

October 09

10/01 3 Green-winged Teal and some Wood Ducks at Old Plank Trail Wetlands. 70-80 Great White Egrets at McGuiness Slough.

Dick Thomas

10/07 The first Junco in her Crete yard.

Kathy Bader

10/11 Yellow-rumped Warblers. Lake Katherine.

Mary White

10/15 1 late Eastern Meadowlark at Bartel.

Dick Riner

10/15 Every day recently, 2 female Northern Harriers and 1 immature Harrier.

Dick Riner



Thorn Creek
AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. Box 895 - Park Forest, IL 60466

STD RATE

U.S. Postage

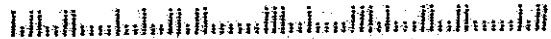
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The mission of the Thorn Creek Audubon Society is to promote the enjoyment and appreciation of birds, to educate adults and children concerning our natural environment, to preserve, protect, and restore wildlife habitat, and to create awareness of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

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.

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

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