



Thorn Creek AUDUBON SOCIETY

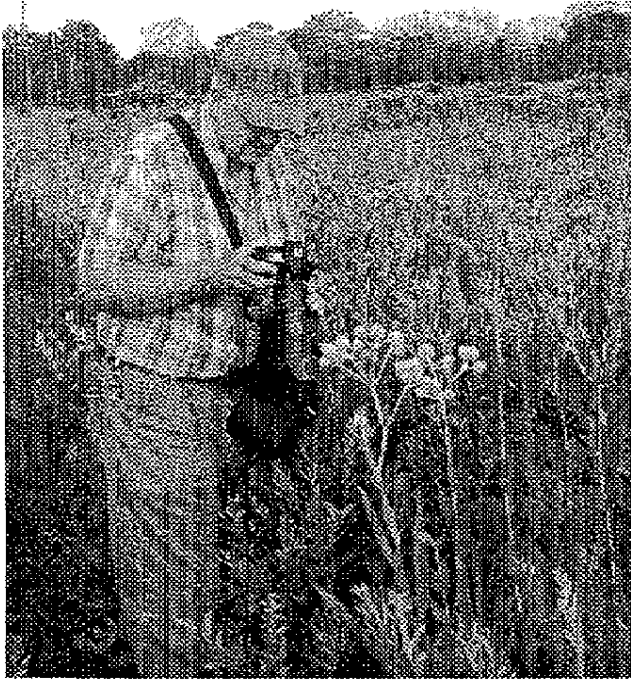
VOLUME 36—ISSUE 5 SEPT.-OCT. 2008

NEWSLETTER

GRANTS AVAILABLE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

Each year the Thorn Creek Audubon Society donates financial assistance in the form of grants to organizations or individuals involved in environmental programs which promote the protection and enhancement of wildlife and the environment. The project must focus on one of more of the following areas: environmental education, habitat preservation and wildlife protection. This year for the first time grants will be awarded in the fall as well as the spring.

Grants are not to exceed \$500 per project, and recipients are expected to contribute additional funds or labor toward the completion of the proposed program. Application forms are available on the Thorn Creek Audubon Society web site, www.thorncreekaudubonsociety.org. Applications must be mailed by October 1, 2008, to the chairman of the Grants Committee, Robert Pierce, at 20623 Corinth Road, Olympia Fields, IL 60461. Other members of the Grants Committee are Dory Grosche, Joan Crabb, and Aura Duke. *For a story on the use of two grants, see page 3.*



John Denk snaps a picture of a Rattlesnake Master plant at the TCAS annual field trip to the Markham-Gensburg Prairie on August 2. Denk led the group through the purple, yellow and white prairie flowers that were in full bloom.

VOLUNTEER DAYS KICK-OFF AT BARTEL, ORLAND GRASSLANDS

As announced in the last newsletter, the Thorn Creek Audubon Society is a Grant recipient from the National Audubon and Toyota Corporation alliance. The grant is to promote volunteerism. The TogetherGreen Volunteer Days program kicks off Saturday, Sept. 27th, which is National Public Lands Day. TCAS urges our members and newsletter readers to support this important event and make our grant a success by coming out to Bartel or Orland Grassland and bring along the family and/or friends.

Tours will be this day's focus with detailed accounts of the planning and processing of the area for conservation preservation and explanations of how volunteers can make a difference at each grassland site. There is something for everyone of every age. Deer, coyote, birds, butterflies and a spectacular assortment of prairie and grassland plants will be on hand to highlight the tours. Come out and find out how to be a part of the solution! Call Dick Riner: 708-720-5683 or Al Thomas: 708-957-9847 for times and details.

FALL PROGRAMS

Wednesday, Sept. 3, 7 p.m.

Park Forest Library

WILDLIFE IN AUSTRALIA

Glyn and Sylvia Dawson, who spent last winter (the Australian summer) working in Adelaide, will present a program about their weekend travels throughout the south and east part of the country to see the approximately 200 diverse species of birds Down Under.

They visited habitats ranging from the Adelaide Hills, Gluepot Reserve and Kangaroo Island, Tasmania, the Outback, and both the temperate and tropical rainforests of Queensland. Birds include large flightless birds such as Emus and Cassowaries, three Megapodes, Bower Birds, Riflebirds and a host of specialized birds such as Honeyeaters, Lyrebirds, Logrunners, Plains Wanderers and Fairy Wrens. They also saw the unique marsupials that inhabit Australia, the Monotremes (Duckbilled Platypus), Koalas, Kangaroos, Possums and the Hairy-nosed Wombat, as well as some of the exotic lizards to be found in Australia.

Wednesday, Oct. 1, 7 p.m.

Park Forest Library

A HISTORY OF CHICAGO BIRD STUDY

"Birding through Time: A History of Bird Study in the Chicago Region," is the program to be given by Chicago-area author Joel Greenberg. When the first Europeans arrived in this area in the 1670s, they discovered a place with a great diversity of landscapes teeming with an abundance of life. The earliest descriptions pre-date scientific ornithology, but they do provide a hint of what was here.

It wasn't until the 1840s, however, with the arrival of Dr. Philo Hoy in Racine, that a scientifically inclined observer began recording local birds. Through the words of witnesses, this program takes us on a field trip through time as we look at the changing birdlife, and equally important, the changing attitudes people held towards birds and nature. The talk is based on

FALL PROGRAMS CONTINUED

Greenberg's new book, *Of Prairie, Woods, and Water: Two Centuries of Chicago Nature Writing*. Copies of the book will be available for sale and signing. Greenberg is also the author of *A Birder's Guide to the Chicago Region* and *A Natural History of the Chicago Region*.

Wednesday, Nov. 5, 7 p.m.

Park Forest Library

WOODPECKERS AND THEIR UNIQUE ADAPTATIONS

Marilyn Campbell

FEATS OF NATURE IN AUDUBON ADVENTURES

The title of the 2008-2009 *Audubon Adventures* kit is *Feats of Nature*. Unit One will feature "Migration." Students will learn about birds that migrate from North American to Central and South America, along with the migratory behavior of gray whales, salmon, caribou, monarch butterflies, pronghorn antelope and polar bears. Unit Two will focus on "Animal Builders," providing information on why, how and what animals build as they seek to provide themselves shelter from weather, protection from enemies, and safety for their young.

Unit Three explores "Animal Defenses," giving information on strategies animals use to defend themselves, including camouflage, spitting, intimidation, mimicking, emitting bad odors, playing dead and much more. Unit Four celebrates the interrelationship of plants with all living things. Teachers receive all materials in one kit at the beginning of the year so they may schedule the topics when they best tie in with their curriculums.

To request your Audubon Adventures kit (or kits, if you are teaching more than one class) contact Sue Putnam, education committee co-Chair (708) 747-1986, or sputter1986@sbcglobal.net.

TCAS GRANTS BRING NATURE TO STUDENTS

An enclosed courtyard at a Homewood school that last year was only grass is now a children's interactive garden. Students in Park Forest and Matteson schools can now see tiny flora and fauna through a digital microscope. These are just two of the projects that grants from the Thorn Creek Audubon Society have helped bring about.

Homewood's Willow School was a grant winner last year and lost no time in changing a grassy inner court into a group of gardens that invite children and adults to step in and explore. Here the kindergarten through second graders can touch and feel and smell and taste, picking herbs such as lemon balm and peppermint and tasting the fruits and vegetables they have grown. They can also plant and harvest, digging potatoes and picking the green beans that were planted last spring. They can watch roots grow down and tops grow up in the plant box, and they can release the Painted Lady butterflies hatched in their rooms into the special butterfly garden, hoping that these winged adults will lay more eggs on the plants that have been provided for them. Classes such as music and reading can use the garden for meeting places.

Two Willow School staff members, Regina Zohfeld and Kim Genduso, saw the possibilities. "We looked at that space and thought, 'We can do something there. It could be a classroom,'" Zohfeld said. They enlisted other staff members, the University of Illinois Extension Master Gardeners, Homewood-Flossmoor High School and other Homewood organizations. The Homewood Tree Committee, which also received a grant from TCAS, helped them get money from the Village of Homewood, and the Homewood Excellence foundation also contributed. Master Gardeners have put in hours of work as well.

A private educational group, Multidisciplinary Education for the Environment (ME4E) also used its grant to promote young people's interest in the environment. They



Regina Zohfeld (left) and Kim Genduso saw the possibilities for this garden in an unused space.

TCAS GRANTS BRING CONTINUED

purchased a digital microscope to use while working with area students, one that is easy to use during field observations. Much of the nature study they provide takes place at the Park Forest Central Park Wetlands.

For example, in May sixth grade classes from Forest Trail Middle School in Park Forest used the microscope at the wetlands. Students collected aquatic invertebrates, placed them under the scope and took digital photographs of the specimens. The microscope is attached to a laptop computer that can send the digital photographs and videos to the school's website by email, so students could continue their studies of the specimens when back in the classroom.

"Many classrooms thus far have used the video microscope, and many more will use it next year," said ME4E's Michelle O'Connor. "It has provided us a fascinating way to teach. The children are enthralled with the microscopic world. The technology provides a great way to continue the field trip studies at school."

Joan Crabb

FALL FIELD TRIPS

Please notify the trip coordinator that you will attend.

Contact information is as follows:

Charlie Habecker – (708) 747-6061

Mary Anne McLean – (708) 672-5494;

Mcleankd@worldnet.att.net

Al Thomas – (708) 957-9847;

wooduck_1999@yahoo.com

Saturday, September 13, 7am

Wooded Island

Remember that potpourri of brilliant warblers we were thrilled to meet in May? Now's your chance to try and identify them in their fall colors. Luckily Glyn Dawson will be on hand to help. Brunch at Café Florian afterward. Call Charlie to register and for carpool information.

Trip Coordinator: Charlie

Wednesday, September 24, 8 am

Old Plank Road Trail, Dewey Helmick Nature Preserve.

Central Avenue ¼ mile south of Route 30. Call Al for up to date parking instructions. See the prairie in its fall bloom while watching for prairie, marsh and waterfowl migrants.

Trip Coordinator: Al

Wednesday, October 15, 8 am.

Wolf Lake.

Meet at the north parking lot, (by small restroom building). Wolf Lake entrance is on Avenue O at 126th Place stoplight. (Avenue O is continuation of Burnham Ave from the South.) Enter at 126th and wind through park, north to boat launch lot. Target species for this trip will be water birds, other late migrants, and a scenic lunch at the Lake Calumet Golf Course.

Trip Coordinator: Al

Sunday, November 2, 1:30 pm

Jasper-Pulaski Wildlife Preserve.

Meet at the Park Forest Library to carpool to Jasper-Pulaski for the Sandhill Crane viewing event of the year. Thousands of Sandhill Cranes flying in at dusk to gather and then fly off together to roost in nearby wetlands. Awesome the kids say!

Trip Coordinator: Al

Wednesday, November 12, 8 am

Miller Beach/Marquette Park.

Meet at the Home Depot parking lot at Ridge Road and Halsted Street in Homewood to carpool to the Marquette Park Pavilion at Miller Beach, Indiana, to search for rare visitors such as Loons, Avocets, and Jaegers. Bring your scope if you have one. Luncheon will be a treat at the famous Miller Beach Bakery Café. So bring your appetite, too.

Trip Coordinator: Al

FORMER TCAS MEMBER DIES

A former resident of Park Forest, Warren Buck, passed away May 9 in Seattle, where he and his wife, Bernice, had moved three years ago. Warren and Bernice were charter members of Thorn Creek Audubon Society, serving on the Board of Directors for several years. A nationally respected physicist, Warren worked at Argonne National Laboratory as a research physicist. After retirement he became an avid wildlife photographer.

His beautiful artistic photos of the Wildflowers of Raccoon Grove Preserve are featured in a series of Thorn Creek Audubon note cards. Memorial contributions may be made to Thorn Creek Audubon Society, P. O. Box 895, Park Forest, IL 60466, or to Faith United Protestant Church, 10 Hemlock, Park Forest, IL 60466.

FALL BIRDSEED SALE SET

Thorn Creek Audubon Society is accepting orders for its annual birdseed sale from now through October 1. Seed for winter feeding will include a premium blend, a special blend and a no waste blend, along with black oil sunflower seed, safflower seed, sunflower chips, nyjer (thistle) seed, and suet cakes. Also for sale are pine bluebird boxes with predator guards and wren boxes.

To be send an order for this year's products and pricing call one of the following: Dory Grosche at 708-481-3166, Bob Vance at 708-747-8494, or Al Thomas at 708-957-9847. Regular customers should receive a form in the mail, but if you do not receive one, please call. Orders must be in by October 1 for pickup October 18.

Pickup will be at the former Marshall Field store in downtown Park Forest from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

Although TCAS tries to offer the most competitive prices possible, prices are up this year. Acres of farmland previously growing birdseed have been planted with corn and other crops because of the demands for biofuels, and spring and early summer flooding in much of the Midwest farming area has also reduced crop acreage.

The birdseed sale is one of TCAS' primary funding projects. Proceeds go to help fund the grants program, which helps promote conservation and environmental education, especially education for school children in the South Suburban area.

THORN CREEK NATURE PRESERVE CELEBRATES THIRTY YEARS

Thirty years ago, after years of work and struggle, the Thorn Creek Nature Preserve was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve. The original dedication preserved just 500 acres of Thorn Creek Woods, but today it includes just under 1000 acres of preserve and buffer lands.

Protecting Thorn Creek Preserve from future development has created the fifth largest nature preserve within the Illinois Nature Preserve system. Not only did the dedication mark the beginning of land preservation, but it also marked an ongoing commitment to public education and recreation for its thousands of visitors over the last 30 years.

Throughout the years volunteers have helped to shape the preserve and nature center into what it is today. In the beginning all trail work was done by the Youth Conservation Corps (YCC). For several summers, teenagers participating in the YCC program worked clearing trails, building bridges, painting the nature center and designing displays. Other volunteers staffed the center and provided programs to the public and school groups. Today, the Nature Center is staffed by two paid employees and also enlists the help of several dedicated volunteers.

Programs continue to be offered on a year-round basis to the public as well as to schools. Trail work days fill the summer months. Displays fill the walls of the center, and the children's area remains as popular as ever. Thanks to a grant from Thorn Creek Audubon, this year will see improvements to the bird viewing station as well.

Thorn Creek nature Center and Preserve are gems within the Chicagoland area. The staff at the center encourages everyone to visit throughout the year. Take a walk in the woods. Participate in a program. Bring children, grandchildren or a school group to the center. Donate time volunteering.

The Nature Center is located at 247 Monee Road, Park Forest, phone 708-747-6320. It is open Thursday through Sunday noon to four, and trails are open daily from dawn to dusk. Stop by and let nature be your guide.

Tara Janisch

FINE WEATHER FOR PRAIRIE WALK

It was an unusual morning for early August in the Chicago area. The weather was very much April-like, clear, cool and calm. There was a light morning haze over one of the most outstanding prairie remnants in Northern Illinois. If you didn't notice I-57 directly to the east and the houses on the other three sides of the Prairie, you could easily get lost in its sights and smells.

Soon the crowd began to arrive, numbering fifteen, mostly TCAS members. The walk was led by John Denk, an early volunteer to the Markham-Gensburg Prairie. John is also a regular volunteer for the Bartel, Grassland, website master for Bartel, and a photographer as well as a plant and mushroom expert. The flora was great and the fauna was sparse.

Half the group retired to the local McDonald's for food and a preview of September's TCAS monthly program by Glyn and Sylvia Dawson. Their six month stay in Australia will be the basis for a fine program to start the TCAS year.

Dick Riner



TREE SWALLOWS THRIVE ALONG THE BLUEBIRD TRAILS

This report includes results for the 2008 nesting season up to August 1, at which time the tree swallows are through with nesting activities and their young have already fledged. It has been a banner year for the swallows, the best we have observed in the past ten years. The other species which are still competing for the chance to use one our 102 nesting boxes along the four Thorn Creek Audubon bluebird trails have not been as successful.

Along all of the trails, bluebirds have suffered the most, due to predation and strong competition from the aggressive house wrens, tree swallows and house sparrows. House wrens are still doing fairly well, with 52 eggs and young still in their nests; bluebirds, however, have only 12 eggs and young in their nests.

As of August 1, 2008, bluebirds have laid 90 eggs and fledged 51 young; in comparison, by September of 2007 they had laid 131 eggs and fledged 89 young. Tree swallows have laid 203

eggs and fledged 118 young, compared to last year's 173 eggs and 84 fledglings. House wrens this year have laid 137 eggs and fledged 47 young, compared to last year's 170 eggs and 94 young.

And so, perhaps 63 additional young bluebirds from our trails will be migrating south this fall, thanks to the careful monitoring job our 28 faithful bluebird volunteers have done this summer.

Aura Duke

REGIONAL ELECTIONS RESULTS IN

In elections completed on July 1, Audubon chapters in three election regions selected nominees for positions on the National Audubon Board of Directors. The names of the following candidates will be placed on the slate of nominees to the board, to be voted upon at the annual meeting of members in January, 2009: Central Great Lakes Election Region: Alan R. Dolan. Mid-Atlantic Election Region: Caroline Coe. Northwest Election Region: Marina Skumanich.

BATS INSPIRE GOOD GRADES AND A SONG

Can a little brown bat inspire good citizenry, better grades and a song? The answer is a resounding yes! School District 163 fifth graders discovered that little brown bats are important residents in our human community. *Myotis lucifugus* (the Little Brown Bat) eats harmful insects. One bat can eat thousands of mosquitoes in one night.

Students began by studying the natural history of bats. The schools' bulletin boards were festooned with student-authored bat fact dissertations. These students became mentors for second graders, creating bat journals designed for second grade readers.

Students then became carpenters, each fifth grade class building a bat house. Thorn Creek Audubon Society provided the bat house design, wood, nails and stain. ME4E (Multidisciplinary Education for the Environment) provided the bat curriculum and instruction.

During the bat house construction, a group of fifth grade boys became so inspired that they wrote a rap song called "Myotis lucifugus," which they performed at a District 163 School Board meeting. The lyrics describe the benefits of living with little brown bats in the Park Forest community.

This spring the Parks and Recreation Department erected the tall wooden bat houses in the Central Park Wetland. Students will visit the bat houses and study the wetland as a bat habitat. They will use high-tech scientific equipment such as GPS units and a digital microscope (provided by a TCAS grant) to gather baseline data for future students.

TCAS, Park Forest Parks Department, ME4E and District 163 students, teachers and administrators are working together to enhance wildlife habitats at the wetland and the schoolyards.

Yes, the little brown bat is truly an inspirational creature.

Michelle O'Connor

FIELD NOTES

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

JULY

Cooper's Hawks nesting in worth back yard fledged one chick.

Dick Thomas

A very demanding Cowbird fledgling on her Crete patio being fed by a Chipping Sparrow, several times. Also 3 Chickadees (a pair and a young one) and a young Cooper's Hawk.

Kathy Bader

AUGUST

8/1 A pair of Monk Parakeets at State and 26th Street in Chicago Heights. Also young Downy woodpeckers at her Crete peanut feeder.

Mary Anne McLean

8/3 A Kestrel sitting on phone wires several days in a row, a hummingbird feeding on her hostas, a Downy Woodpecker at her safflower feeder and a Great Blue Heron flying over. Also several times, a pure white rock Dove on telephone wires.

Anne Rosen

8/10 A Nashville Warbler at the southeast corner of Richton and Crete roads in Crete.

Mary Anne McLean

FREE WILDLIFE EXHIBITS AVAILABLE FOR CLASSROOMS

Four colorful tabletop exhibits on Illinois wildlife, prepared by the Illinois Audubon Society, are available at no cost to teachers and other educators. The displays feature the following topics: The Silent Flyers -Owls of Illinois, Butterflies and Moths, Amazing Bats, and Amphibians of Illinois. Each free-standing exhibit includes a packet of related educational flyers with activities, games and puzzles that teachers can copy for use in their classrooms. The exhibits may be checked out by contacting Plum Creek Nature Center at 708-946-2215, located at 27064 South Dutton Road, Beecher, IL 60401.



Thorn Creek
AUDUBON SOCIETY

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

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THORN CREEK AUDUBON OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS		
President: Al Thomas	957-9847	wooduck_1999@yahoo.com
Vice Pres: Dick Riner	720-5683	dickriner@sbcglobal.net
Treasurer: Sidney Duke	748-6407	auraduke@aol.com
Secretary: Terrie Spillers	748-1745	hillbrit@comcast.net
<u>Directors</u>		
Michelle O'Connor	845-0083	moconnor07@yahoo.com
Jim Murphy	672-4823	murphyjames823@aol.com
Dory Grosche	481-3166	dorygro@sbcglobal.net

Membership Chair	Sue Putnam
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NEWSLETTER STAFF
<i>Editor: Joan Crabb Database: Sue Putnam</i>
<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>
<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.</i>
We welcome editorial proposals and submissions. Please direct all correspondence to: Joan Crabb, Editor, 201 Krotiak Rd., Park Forest, IL 60466 708-481-4962, jbcraab7@att.net website -thorncreekaudubonsociety.org