

Audubon Outlook

Newsletter of the Lake County Audubon Society (LCAS)



To contact us:

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Articles:

Is That a Déjà vu Bird??

Bluebirds in Lake County

Electronic Field Guides

General Meetings

Libertyville Village Hall
118 W. Cook Avenue
Second Floor

Monday March 7, 7:30 PM
Prescribed Burns

Monday April 4 7:30 PM
Mushrooms

Monday May 2 7:30 PM
**Des Plaines River
Waterway**

Activities

Sat April 2, 2011
**Almond Marsh –
Welcome Back Herons**
Wednesday May 11, 2011
**Nature Walk –
Lake Minear Trail**
Wednesday May 18, 2011
**Nature Walk –
Brushwood@Ryerson**

General Meeting: **April 4 7:30 PM** Libertyville Village Hall

There's a Fungus Among Us – Mushrooms of Lake County

Speaker: Bob Kaplan, North American Mycological Society

Is it a delicacy or will it lead to your death? What's the difference between mushrooms and toadstools? Why does a shelf fungus attach itself to certain trees and not others? Are puffballs safe to touch let alone eat? Did you know there are 5,000 to 10,000 species of mushroom in northern Illinois?

Retired dentist Bob Kaplan learned about mushrooms through the Wisconsin Mycological Society nine years ago, and since then his interest and knowledge has led

him to give numerous presentations in Northern Illinois on mushrooms. His extensive power point presentation will reveal characteristics of mushrooms for identification, how they grow, and some specific species found in northern Illinois. He will bring samples of local woody fungi.

He is a Member of the North American Mycological Association and a volunteer steward for The Lake County Forest Preserve at Marl Flats off Fish Lake Road.

General Meeting: **May 2 7:30 PM** Libertyville Village Hall

Des Plaines River, From Wisconsin to Kankakee

Speaker: Ralph Frese, Chicagoland Canoe Base

Ralph Frese will give a presentation on the Des Plaines River Watershed that starts in Wisconsin and joins with the Illinois River near Kankakee. His multi media show will include the natural and human histories of the area.

Among his many accomplishments is founding the annual DesPlaines River Canoe Marathon, the three hundredth anniversary reenactment of the Jolliet-Marquette expedition of 1673, which has become a popular annual event for canoeists. A fourth-generation blacksmith, Ralph began building canoes in his blacksmithshop for his scout troop. This was the beginning of the

Chicagoland Canoe Base, now known nationwide as the most unusual canoe shop in the U.S.A. receiving visitors from around the world. Ralph gives illustrated lectures on the role of the canoe in Illinois history, on the water trails of the Midwest and the environmental state of these waterways. He has been the recipient of many federal, state and local awards and a National Award-Legends of Paddling. He was inducted into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame in 2006. Be sure to look at the You Tube video commemorating Ralph on his Lifetime Achievement Award at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXMIOM1ZzQ0>

Is That a Déjà vu Bird??

by Glen Moss

In the spring, a common question arises from friends of mine. Am I seeing the same bird I did last year at my feeder? Unless the bird has been banded, the question begs research that is difficult to assess. If a bird is associated with you from birth there is an increase in the chance it is the same bird. If it relied on you for food and water, imprinted on you because you hand fed it due to death of the parents or other considerations of mutual responses there is a fairly good chance the bird is your feathered kin.

Many people have stories of young hand fed birds, especially robins, returning in the spring to the home of the hand that fed them. Another factor, though, is how long do particular species live. This can be a tricky issue as well. Again, unless a bird has been banded and/or remains in a somewhat closed environment, the number of birds observed or tested is important. As the number of birds studied increases, findings will usually show longer living birds. It is said that if a bird, like a human, lives to a certain age the chances are good they live longer. This may not be particularly true, however, because birds continue to have many life-ending risks each year. Getting past "inexperience" for a bird does add to longevity. One report shows that the annual risk of being killed for small temperate birds is about 70%, meaning they may only live about 10 months.

Among the longest living birds in our area are Great Horned Owls, Ospreys, Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks. Life lasts into twenty plus years for these large birds. Mourning Doves have lived 31 years, although the ones by me seem to be the easiest catch for Cooper Hawks. Their appearance of inattentiveness to what goes on around them certainly makes them a target. On the other hand they are large and group together, which helps life expectancy. Some birds living into their teens are Hairy Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, Common Ravens, American Crows, Gray Catbirds, Northern Mockingbirds, House Sparrows, most Owls, Purple Martins, Northern Cardinals and American Robins.

You may want to make your own survey by counting species and number of dead birds spotted during the year. Volunteers in the Chicago area that have rescued birds and taken them to rehabilitators extend many birds' lives. Do you have a story of a returning bird or birds? Send it to Audubon (audbirds@aol.com) to be shared on our website.

Bluebirds in Lake County

by Jack Nowak

Spring is just around the corner, and with it the Eastern Bluebird will be returning to its nesting grounds. The bluebirds are one of the first migrants to nest. They are fairly hearty birds and don't fly as far south in the fall as some of the other migrants do. Some have even been seen staying here in Lake County in the mild winters, as long as they can find open water and berries to eat. I'm not surprised to hear that many people haven't seen a Bluebird in Lake County, since they are very timid, skittish birds. Much of their habitat has been lost over the years to development and clearing projects, making them even harder to find. The Bluebird is a cavity nester, which means they like to nest in something with a roof over their heads. This makes the Bluebird nesting boxes that you may see throughout the County a very likely home. The Bluebird habitat is one of scattered trees and mowed grass or ground cover, such as cemeteries, golf courses, parks, pasture land, and even backyards, as long as pesticides are not used in any of these locations. The Bluebird's main diet consists of grasshoppers, crickets and katydids; they like to perch up in a tree or on top of a post and pounce down on their unsuspecting prey.

Bluebirds will sometimes have two or even three broods a year. They start their first nest in late March or early April, depending on weather conditions. Inside their cavity or nest box they usually lay 4 to 5 light blue eggs in a cup-shaped nest that is made up of woven grass. The female incubates the eggs for 12 to 14 days. The nestlings will remain in the nest for 18 to 21 days before they fledge. It's a treat to watch both parents taking turns feeding the young and a great satisfaction to see them fledge out of a nesting box that you put up.

If you are interested in helping out the Bluebirds by putting up a nesting box or two, or being involved in monitoring a Bluebird trail which consists of many Bluebird boxes, there is a lot of information on the Internet to get you started. There is a Bluebird monitoring workshop offered at Volo Bog, Saturday, March 19th. See lakecountyaudubon.org site for link to sign up. Lake County Audubon also has cedar Bluebird boxes for sale at their general meetings: \$15 for members and \$18 for non-members.

It is important to know that anyone interested in setting up a Bluebird box needs to monitor it at least once a week during the nesting season, which usually runs through the end of August. Some of the reasons to monitor the box are:

1. Be aware of what species are using the nesting box. There are other cavity-nesting birds that also may use your box. As long as the entrance hole to the box is 1½ inches, birds such as Tree Swallows, House Wrens, Black-capped Chickadees, and House (English) Sparrows, will also be attracted. All birds except the House Sparrow and European Starlings are protected. You may and should remove these species. These two species are very aggressive birds and will kill or destroy other birds and their eggs. I've had House Sparrows go into nest boxes that were occupied by other birds, kill the female on her eggs, and build a nest on top of her. There are traps and tips on the Internet to remove the House Sparrow. If nothing else you must continually clean out the nest when House Sparrows start building one.
2. Check for signs of blowfly larvae, ants, mice, or predators that may affect the nesting.
3. Keep records of the activity in the box, such as when the eggs are laid, how many eggs, and how many birds fledge. Not only Bluebird data needs to be recorded; Chickadee and Tree Swallow data are also important. This information is valuable to the North American Bluebird Society (NABS). This is a non-profit organization that compiles data on bluebird populations in North America. There are nesting report forms available on-line from NABS. Lake County also has a Master Bluebird Monitor who collects all Bluebird Trail Monitors' year-end data. This information can be found online at lakecountyaudubon.org

I've been a Bluebird Monitor for over 5 years; I monitor a 22 box trail at Brae Loch Golf Course, and an 11 box trail at Almond Marsh. I also have two nesting boxes in my back yard which yield Bluebirds in one and Tree Swallows in the other almost every year. I've found it a relaxing and rewarding hobby, and have some great experiences and memories of bluebird families.

For more information on Bluebirds some good books you might want to review include: The Bluebird Monitor's Guide by Jack Griggs, Keith Kridler, and Cynthia Berger; The Bluebird Book by Don & Lillian Stokes; and the Bluebird Trails by Dorene Scriven.

Lake County Audubon Society Activities

April 2 (Saturday) Almond Marsh-- Welcome Back, Herons. The area is open from 8 am-12 noon. Entrance to parking is on the west side of Almond Road, ½ mile south of Rte. 120. In addition to the regularly scheduled Saturday volunteers, Lake County Audubon volunteers will provide hot chocolate and snacks for visitors for as long as the supply lasts. Binoculars and bird books are available for lending.

May 11 (Wednesday) Lake Minear Trail- 7:30-9 am--parking is available at the canoe launch on Oak Spring Road. LCAS will have binoculars and bird books to lend that morning.

May 18 (Wednesday) Brushwood @ Ryerson Woods FP -7 am

We will join Nan Buckard of the Lake County Forest Preserves for a midweek bird walk. Meet at the parking lot by the white house by taking the first left turn at the white gate. LCAS will have binoculars and bird books to lend.

June 15 (Wednesday) Cheese and Crackers with the Birds--Almond Marsh, 6 PM. Join us for our third annual family event.

Recently, there has been an explosion of new gadgets and electronic resources for birding. In the past two years or so, a number of “killer” birding applications have been developed for portable electronic devices. For me personally, the killer birding app was iBird. But in the past few months, a number of additional apps have also come on the market. Whether they are “killer apps” or not is yet to be determined.

iBird (www.ibird.com) is an electronic birding field guide application that runs on the iPhone or iPod Touch. But iBird is not the only electronic field guide. In the past few months, The Audubon Society, National Geographic Society, and a few other organizations have also released electronic field guides. (You can try the Audubon Field Guides for free without buying an iPod—instructions on this later).

So, what can an Electronic Field Guide do? With iBird running on my iPod Touch, not only do I have the usual content of a conventional field guide (photos, drawings, descriptions, range, etc.) but I also have recordings of the bird songs and can do electronic searches. The searches can be for a wide range of features from basic (size, range, color, etc.) to the very specialized (color patterns, head characteristics, song, song pattern, and more). As an example, the iBird list of small and very small birds “typically found” in Illinois in January returns 133 bird species.

Checking the “Habitat” to “Lakes, Rivers and Ponds” reduces the number to 40 species (down from the 924 species listed in North America). Checking the “Shape” to Duck-like reduces the number to 25 species. Then, touching “View” will bring up the information on each individual species within the selection. If interested in photos of the birds, you can touch “Photo” then go sequentially through the images of each species. This, of course, may be how one browses through a conventional field guide, but other sorting and viewing options are equally easy. One of the features I

especially like is having the iBird list that shows similar birds. Recently, I have been struggling to better identify birds by their call or song. After listening to the song of a bird, I can touch “Similar” and the app will bring up a list of similar bird songs. During the Christmas Bird Count, I listened to a Pileated Woodpecker out in the woods by the river. Checking with my iBird, after listening to the call, I touched “Similar,” and it brought up the similar call of the Northern Flicker. This helped us confirm that it was indeed a Pileated Woodpecker and not the flicker that we listened to. OK, what if I can’t afford an iPod? The iBird app was one of the first well-known electronic birding guides. In the past few months, the National Audubon Society has created their versions of electronic field guides. In fact, 10 free Audubon electronic field guides are online. In addition to Birds, Audubon also has field guides for Mammals, Butterflies, Reptiles & Amphibians, Fishes, Trees, and 4 other categories. Here is the good part: with a free registration at www.audubonguides.com, the entire field guide, including searches, is free to use on the Internet. Of course, they advertise that the application is available for download onto your personal electronic device at iTunes. But for now at least, the entire application in each of the 10 field guides is there for you to try out and use free. In addition to the electronic Audubon Guides, one of the best free Internet resources it to go to www.allaboutbirds.org. This site was conceived by and maintained by the Cornell College of Ornithology. And no registration is needed. In particular, when viewing birds, one can make a side-by-side photo comparison of similar birds (located at the bottom of the birding pages). This site not only has the traditional field guide content and bird calls but also contains a great amount of birding basics training resources. These provide guidance and suggestions for the novice and skilled alike. There is even a section of training videos (useful for the novice; entertaining refreshers for the experienced). Well worth a visit.

European Goldfinch sighting Board member Vic Taylor’s question about identifying a **European goldfinch**

(Description: black eye, sharp light-colored bill, red forehead, black cap and nape, white behind eye to cheek, black wing with yellow edge coverts and three white dots and, buff back, gray breast, black tail) in his yard brought this response from **noted bird expert Jeff Sundberg**.

Aren’t those interesting birds? The bright red face and big white facial stripe (great description, by the way) on what somewhat resembles an American Goldfinch really tells you it’s something different. European Goldfinches (*Carduelis carduelis*) have been seen occasionally in the area for a number of years, but they seem to be increasing recently. They are often kept in captivity, and the presumption is that these are either released birds or the descendants of released birds. I was birding in Waukegan last year during the winter and found a flock of at least 8 birds, which others also reported from the same general area. Ken Klick, Restoration Ecologist for the Lake County Forest Preserve District, has reported seeing several of them at the feeders by the LCFPD buildings at Almond Marsh.

They are the most frequently reported of several species that have been noted, all of them European and presumed to be escapes/releases. I heard a strange call in my Libertyville yard one afternoon in 2006 and started checking the trees nearby. I quickly found myself looking at a bird I’d never seen before. After a little research I found that it was a Greenfinch (*Carduelis chloris*), another European import. I only saw it for two days and haven’t seen it since.

If you see a bird like this with a plumage you can’t identify, noting the plumage is really important, but other structural factors will also help. Check the size, especially if it’s on a feeder so you can compare it to Chickadees or House Finches. Look at the bill, too; if you start wading through reference books you’ll want to have some idea where to start, so knowing if the bill was similar to a sparrow or a finch will help.

If you want to know more about the local history of European birds, a researcher named Julie Craves wrote a fascinating and detailed article that was published in *North American Birds* in 2008. You can read it online at <http://www.rrobo.org/pdf/EUGO-NAB.pdf>

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**Lake County
 Audubon Society**

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<http://www.lakecountyaudubon.org>

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Make checks payable to "**National Audubon Society**". Dues include \$15 for AUDUBON magazine. Please allow 4-6 weeks from receipt of payment to receive your first issue of AUDUBON. The National Audubon Society occasionally makes its membership list available to carefully selected organizations whose mailings you might find of interest. To have your name omitted from this list, please check here.

Mail your check and this form to:
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Bird House & Feeder Kits

Bird feeder kits will be available at each general meeting of the LCAS. The price is \$8 (members) and \$11 (non-members). Bluebird houses will be available for \$15 (members) and \$18 (non-members).

The Audubon Outlook is looking for a new Editor

- If you are interested in volunteering with a great society and have writing and editing skills, please contact us.