

Audubon Outlook

Newsletter of the Lake County Audubon Society (LCAS)



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Articles:

Almond Marsh Update

Avian Safety Goggles

IBET

Creating a Sense of Wonder

General Meetings

Libertyville Village Hall
118 W. Cook Avenue
Second Floor

Monday, Oct. 3, 7:30 PM

The Early Bird Catches the ...Gene

Monday, Nov. 7, 7:30 PM

Illinois Birds: a Century of Change

Monday Dec. 5, 7:30 PM

Something to Crow About: the Amazing Comeback of Crows

Activities

Wednesday, October 12
9-11 am

**MUSHROOM WALK
with Bob Kaplan at
Daniel Wright Woods**

Meet at the parking lot.

General Meeting: **Monday, October 3, 7:30 PM** Libertyville Village Hall

The Early Bird Catches the...Gene

Speaker: Shannon Hackett, Head of Field Museum's Bird Division

Phylogeny: what on earth does it mean? For example, falcons are more closely related to Will recent discoveries about bird parrots than they are to hawks and eagles. relatedness result in rewriting bird field “Despite the contributions birds have made to guides? Shannon Hackett, an Associate science in general, until recently we had a very poor understanding of how the major lineages of Curator in the Department of Zoology, and Head of the Field Museum's Bird birds are related to each other,” Dr. Hackett states. Division, will update attendees with her latest research. It's part of a five-year study now we're in a time when we should question everything, because for the first time we have the change over time. She uses DNA tools to answer these questions." Bird specimens from the Field Museum collection will follow Shannon's power point presentation. For more information: <http://lat.ms/12POOk>; <http://bit.ly/n5SYRS>;
<http://bit.ly/poWd3N>

General Meeting: **Monday, November 7, 7:30 PM** Libertyville Village Hall

Illinois Birds: a Century of Change

Speaker: Jeff Walk, The Nature Conservancy

Jeff Walk will give a presentation on *Illinois Birds: a Century of Change*. Jeff participated with a team of ornithologist colleagues at the Illinois Natural History Survey to conduct the third in a series of standardized surveys of Illinois birds over a century's time. Their work resulted in a book of that title that contains 100 years of data as well as many pictures. Dr. Walk is the Director of Science for the Illinois Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

He received his Ph.D in 2001 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign studying grassland birds, and authored the recovery plan for greater prairie chickens in Illinois. He was an assistant professor at the University of Dubuque from 2001-2003, then returned to Illinois to draft the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan as a research scientist for Illinois Natural History Survey. Jeff serves on the Board of Directors for the Illinois Audubon Society.

Almond Marsh Update by Jack Nowak, Membership Chair, Website Manager

The rookery was again a success this year with the number of heron eggs hatched. Eleven of the platforms produced 30 young, and the tree nests produced 32 young. There was also an abundance of Cormorant young this year.

Unfortunately, there was much storm damage as well. On May 29, when all the young were in the nests, I counted a total of 40 nests, platforms and trees. When the strong winds came through in mid-June we were down to 32 nests, which included both trees and platforms. We also lost one platform when a tree fell on it and knocked it down. A lot of the young were fledging at this time and were able to get down to logs floating in the water. But the storm on July 11, with up to 70 mph winds, took a bigger toll on the rookery. When I went out to check on the nests, I counted only 10 tree nests left. The 11 platforms were still standing, but there weren't any birds left in the nests. Luckily most of them had already fledged, but they were still dependent upon their parents for food. Again, I saw many young on logs at the bottom of the nests, but there is no way of telling the amount of loss due to the storm damage. We'd like very much to work with the Forest Preserve again this winter to erect more platforms for the damaged rookery.

Reprinted with permission from WildBird Magazine July/August 2011.

I eased my car down the snow-dusted road, intently scanning the eagles on a blustery winter day at Upper Klamath National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, there to study raptors, I hoped to photograph the various ages of Bald Eagles that gather at the refuge to feed on a bounty of wintering ducks and waterfowl. Ahead I saw a massive shape perched on the roadside fence—my chance to photograph a perched adult Bald Eagle. As I pulled the car alongside the bird, it barely noticed my presence, just eying me casually returning to its scrutiny of a nearby flock of Tundra Swans.

I stayed in the car and used it as my photography blind, shooting from the open window. The eagle hopped onto a sprinkler head to get a better view of the swans and simultaneously gave me a better opportunity for photography. After five minutes with the bird, I happily drove off in pursuit of several nearby Rough-legged Hawks. Upon returning home and reviewing my photos, however, I felt shocked and dismayed to find that most of the eagle shots were marred by the dreaded third eyelid.

This gossamer shield, known as the nictitating membrane, helps birds clear their eyes of dirt, dust and debris. For many wildlife photographers, the nictitating membrane can turn a majestic bird into a possessed-looking avian sub-demon. There's nothing worse than nailing the shot of a hawk in flight with everything perfectly in focus, only to find later that the milk white membranes covered the birds' striking eyes. Most birds have nictitating membranes, but it appears especially obvious in birds of prey. Why might this be? Raptors rely heavily on eyesight; they need their famously powerful vision to hunt prey, so have to keep their eyes in good condition.

Like many raptors, Rough-legged Hawks sit high on perches and scan the surrounding terrain for prey, often during inclement weather such as high winds, rain, and snow. These conditions expose their eyes to the worst of the elements, and they use the nictitating membranes to regularly sweep debris from their eyes. An accipiter crashing through dense tangles in pursuit of a land bird could easily scratch its eyes on a branch. A Red-tailed Hawk grappling with a snake requires safety goggles to offer some measure of protection. A Peregrine Falcon in high-speed pursuit of its prey can get dry-eye due to air passing over its eye at nearly 200 mph. The nictitating membranes handle all of these scenarios.

Unlike human eyelids, nictitating membranes close to protect the eyes yet still allow reasonably good vision. While our eyelids move up and down, the nictitating membranes move horizontally across the bird's eyes, sweeping from the front to the back. Birds generally don't blink like humans do; instead, they blink with the nictitating membranes, which moistens their eyes while clearing debris. Birds use their other eyelids when sleeping—and mostly close their eyes from the bottom eyelid upward.

In addition to birds, many reptiles and some fish, notably sharks, have prominent nictitating membranes. Perhaps you've seen the slow-motion images of Great White Sharks attacking their prey with cold black eyes that appear to roll back into their heads and expose the whites below. In reality, you're seeing the white nictitating membrane being activated to protect the shark's eyes during the attack. Most mammals have just vestigial nictitating membranes, visible only if you pull back the other two eyelids. Next time you're photographing birds and have the chance to observe one up close, take lots of photos. You'll probably capture the bird mid-blink, and you can see for yourself how the nictitating membranes help birds keep their eyes in top shape. See a photo at <http://bit.ly/nDo4Po>.

IBET

No, the term above has nothing to do with gambling. It's an acronym for Illinois Birders Exchanging Thoughts. To quote their website, "IBET is an e-mail list for the discussion of wild birds and birding issues relating to IL. Its mission is to promote the JOY of birding by keeping members updated on rare and interesting birds and birding opportunities."

You sign up and become a member by creating your own yahoo address and password, waiting about a week—or less—for acceptance to this group. It's a great way to have some of your birding questions answered by local experienced birders who might share special sites for viewing rare birds. For more information, go to <http://yhoo.it/9tk5BN>



Rachel Carson's *The Sense of Wonder* (1998) is an inspiring book about stimulating a child's inborn curiosity and love for nature so that it will carry over into adulthood. The book is based on Carson's experiences with her young nephew in Maine exploring the shorelines, forests, fields, plants and animals that inhabited those areas. Carson and her nephew also watched sunrises, sunsets, clouds, moonlit nights, moonless nights, starry nights, and seasonal storms. Her basic premise is: "If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in." She also encourages us to share nature and explore the natural world with feelings and emotions, using all of our senses, having fun without trying to teach or explain. Being an expert about nature is not a requirement. Being aware and having the ability to point out the obvious is all that is needed.

When my own children were young, we explored the world of Illinois Beach State Park. It was fun and I have great memories. I probably spent too much time trying to teach my children, though, since I was just learning how to identify plants and thought they should learn, too. Now that I have grandchildren, I have a second opportunity to be a companion to my grandchildren discovering the mystery of the world we live in. They range in age from 3½ to one year old. Several of them are at the "WHY" stage. No matter what you say to them, they answer with "WHY?" Although I am not really trying to teach them, it does motivate me to know or find the answers to their questions so that I can answer them when the time comes. Not always knowing the answers to those never-ending questions has rekindled my own curiosity of the mysteries of earth, water, and sky. It has also made me realize that through nature the land and everything living is connected.

From the time each grandchild was born we have been observing nature. Initially it was just looking out the window watching the birds at the bird feeder. As they grew, we spent time outdoors. They were either in a stroller or a wagon and I would point out things I saw around the neighborhood. Winter activities revolve around filling and watching bird feeders. With spring we continue to watch birds but also look for signs of spring and listen for the songs of frogs and birds. As summer approaches, we watch, and if we can, catch frogs, tadpoles and turtles. With summer, more trips are made to the lake to observe fish, birds, turtles and dragonflies as well as "swim". I even canoed with one of my grandsons who was only two at the time. What I thought was going to be a half hour trip turned out to last 2½ hours as we paddled around the shoreline, anchored in the cattails, and splashed each other. It also changed his name for me from BaBa to BaBa Canoe. In the fall we continue watching and listening for birds. Occasionally we visit a local state park to visit the nature center and pull/disperse the seeds of native grasses. As Rachel Carson did with her nephew, we watch sunrises, moonrises, sunsets and thunderstorms.

Being a child's outdoor companion is a very rewarding experience. As the child grows older, time spent outdoors includes conversations and of course more questions. It refreshes your own appreciation for the natural world, gives you a child's perspective on that world, and will establish memories in the child that will last into adulthood. With those memories, hopefully their interest in the natural world will grow and they will become stewards of the earth.

Rachel Carson is also the author of *Silent Spring* (1962) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955).

Don is a LCAS board member/Field Trip Chair, steward of Illinois Beach State Park and co-steward of Almond Marsh.

Lake County Audubon Society General Meeting Schedule 2011-2012
7:30 pm, Libertyville Village Hall, 118 W. Cook Street, 2nd floor

- Oct 3: "The Early Bird Catches the....Gene" Shannon Hackett, Field Museum
- Nov 7, "Illinois Birds: a Century of Change" Jeff Walk, The Nature Conservancy
- Dec 5: "Something to Crow About" Paul Sweet, College of Lake County
- Jan 2: no program
- Feb. 6 "Guess Who's Coming to Your Backyard" Seth Magle, Lincoln Park Zoo
- Mar 5: "Insects and Plants, an Intricate Relationship" Laura Anchor
- April 2: "Plants of Concern" Chicago Botanic Garden
- May 7: "The Future of Birds: Are Continuing Declines Inevitable?"
Donny Dann



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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

- Interested in volunteering with a great organization? Have writing and editing skills? Please contact us at audbirds@aol.com. Thanks!