

Audubon Outlook

Newsletter of the Lake County Audubon Society (LCAS)



To contact us:

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Articles:

- PVC Pipes Death Traps
- Volunteering Outdoors
- A Murder of Crows
- Mill Creek Forest Preserve
- Conservation@Home

General Meetings

Libertyville Village Hall
118 W. Cook Avenue
Second Floor

Monday March 5, 7:30 PM

**Insects and Plants: an
Intricate Relationship**

Monday April 2, 7:30 PM

**The Future of Birds:
Are Continuing Declines
Inevitable?**

Monday May 7, 7:30 PM

**Plants of Concern:
Chicago Botanic Garden**

Activities

April 7, 8 AM to Noon

Welcome Back, Herons
at Almond Marsh. Bird
books, binoculars, and
refreshments provided.

May 9, 7:30 AM to 9:00 AM

Nature Walk at Old School
Forest Preserve. Home
schoolers especially welcome.

See our website for
an up-to-date listing
of birdwalks and activities.
www.lakecountyaudubon.org

General Meeting: **March 5 7:30 PM** Libertyville Village Hall

Insects and Plants: an Intricate Relationship

Speaker: Laura Rericha, Wildlife Biologist, Forest Preserve District of Cook County

This spring program will discuss the intricate and unique relationships that insects have with plants in the region and will include, but not be limited to, the following insect groups: weevils, leaf beetles, native bees, and ants.

Speaker Laura Rericha, a wildlife biologist for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County for eleven years, specializes in the ecology and taxonomy of plants and insects. Described as an “ornithological phenomenon,” Laura will

offer her unprecedented knowledge of birds, insects, and plants during this program.

Laura is also the coauthor, with Gerould Wilhelm, of *Flora of the Chicago Region: A Taxonomic and Ecological Synthesis*, soon to be published. This updated 5th edition will provide many additions and changes. Laura’s collaboration helped to make this book an amazing blend of floristic, faunistic, and geological observations.

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

The Future of Birds: Are Continuing Declines Inevitable?

Speaker: Donnie Dann

The topic of this month’s program will cover the main issues of bird conservation—both the threats and the efforts at confronting them. Today, a wide variety of threats are facing birds—including habitat loss, free-roaming cats, and collisions with glass, communication towers, and vehicles. Many local and national groups are working diligently to respond to these multiple threats, but there are ways that individuals can help.

Speaker Donnie Dann is passionately involved in an extensive list of environmental organizations including the Chicago Audubon Society, Illinois Audubon Society, American Bird Conservancy, American Birding

Association, The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, and Lake Michigan Wind Energy Advisory Council. He is also a current Advocacy Chair of the Bird Conservation Network.

Closer to home, Donnie helped secure grant funds for restoration of habitat at Foley’s Pond, a migratory bird hotspot in Highland Park. He monitors bird populations to census breeding and migrant birds, and monitors threatened and endangered species migrant populations at this and other local sites. Donnie has been a volunteer naturalist for the LCFD’s Ryerson Conservation District for more than 14 years, teaching environmental education to children.

PVC Pipes Death Traps for Birds by Diane Rosenberg

In 2010, Annette Prince, of Chicago Bird Collision Monitors, reported that fishing line receptacles installed by the Cook County Forest Preserve District were trapping and killing birds. PVC tubes had been installed at 12 lakes for fishermen to put their used hazardous monofilament line to keep it from being disposed of in open barrels. Ironically, the tubes, that were supposed to be protecting birds and other wildlife, turned out to be a deadly trap themselves. Birds, specifically Tree Swallows and Baltimore Orioles, entered the tubes to collect fishing line for nest making, became trapped and died.

Steve Silic and Jim Phillips of the Fisheries Department of the Cook County Forest Preserve solved the problem by retrofitting the tubes with covers that kept the birds out. Steve and Jim promised that each tube would be operational with a cover at the beginning of the fishing season, which coincided with the bird breeding season. Mary Lou Mellon, of Bird Conservation Network, organized a team of volunteers to monitor the monofilament line tubes at the lakes and to report on the condition of the tubes and their covers on a weekly basis. No bird fatalities were observed during the summer of 2011. Lake County Audubon plans to check with the LCFPD and find out if there’s any problem with our fish line disposal receptacles. Look for the follow-up in the next issue of *Audubon Outlook!*

Volunteering Outdoors by Don Wilson

There are many opportunities to volunteer, but this article is about the reasons for and benefits of volunteering in outdoor activities at state parks, forest preserves, and local parks.

You may not realize it, but Lake County is a beautiful county with many diverse habitats. The county has over 50 lakes; many creeks, streams and rivers that eventually flow into the Gulf of Mexico or Lake Michigan; a 30,000 acre county forest preserve system; one of the most diverse state parks in Illinois that is a remnant of pre-settlement Illinois; a section of Lake Michigan lake shore with a network of ravines along the shore; and numerous wetlands that provide homes and resting areas for migratory birds and nesting waterways.

What a gift it is to have these diverse places to visit, volunteer, and experience. If you haven't noticed the beauty of Lake County, then this would be a great way to familiarize yourself with the area in which you live. The following are some reasons that may encourage you to volunteer in an outdoor activity:

Opportunities to be engaged in a variety of outdoors activities. Some opportunities require physical labor such as removing invasive species by pulling or cutting. Other activities may be more scientific and involve making observations. Other activities, such as leading a walk, involve working with schools and children.

Family, group, partner, or individual activities. Depending on the activity, it can be done alone or as a group. Many volunteer activities can be enjoyed as a family. Fall seed collection is a good example. Seed collection is a walk in a prairie or woods collecting seed from native plants to be used for restoration. It provides an escape from the routine of everyday activities, TVs, and computers.

"Citizen Science." Volunteers who collect data for analysis, provide valuable information, and make discoveries can be considered citizen scientists. Activities include locating and counting plants and animals that may be rare, environmentally threatened, or indicators of an improving or degrading environment. Bird, amphibian (frogs and toads), butterfly, dragonfly monitoring, and River Watch are a few of the volunteer

activities available. A scientific background isn't required but rather a willingness to observe and collect data. Over time these volunteers may become "experts" in the area they are working in.

Promoting and improving your community's quality of life.

Many activities improve environmental quality or aesthetics of an area. Can you imagine what it would be like to not have areas where you can enjoy being outdoors?

Developing and learning new skills. Some skills are as simple as pulling weeds, cutting brush, building brush piles or dealing with unwanted plants. Other activities such as visual plant and animal identification, identification by sound such as for birds and frogs, catching aquatic insects and identifying are usually citizen scientist activities require some training. Some activities require the use of equipment like GPS units to mark and find the location of a specific plant, animal, or geographic structures.

Sense of achievement and identity. There isn't a better feeling than completing a brush clearing project and seeing how much brush was removed and how open the area is. The following year is a second sense of achievement and sometimes amazement when native plants and animals return to that cleared area.

Physical and mental health benefits. The physical benefits of labor are usually obvious but what about the mental benefits? A walk in a prairie, wetland, or woodland taking in the sounds, smells, and sights that you don't normally experience are good for the spirit.

Connecting with nature. See an abundance of life. Witness the food chain as you experience nature's interdependence from the soil and water to the plants that inhabit those areas to the animals that are dependent on plants and other animals for their survival.

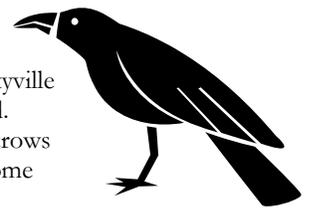
Most volunteers have at least one special reason for volunteering. Come out to one of the volunteer activities sponsored by Lake County Forest Preserve, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Chicago Botanic Garden, Chicago Wilderness, or River Watch, and find your niche.

A Murder of Crows – A recent communication by Dale Thomas

I received your email invitation last week and really hoped to attend **Something To Crow About** in Libertyville with Paul Sweet. Unfortunately, I had another commitment with the local Cub Scouts and could not attend. However, last Monday, Dec. 5th, at approximately 10 a.m. I looked out my back window and saw 8 to 10 crows making a lot of noise in a tree. The crows were all grouped together cawing, hopping, and flapping, with some diving about the branches of the naked maple they were inhabiting.

After I looked closer, I saw what the commotion was all about. They had a great horned owl surrounded. There are several known pairs of Great Horneds in the immediate area as I often see them or hear them at twilight or daybreak. The rare daytime sighting was unusual. The large owl was hissing and ducking the crows from a low branch, unprotected with no place to hide or take cover. After only about one minute, the magnificent owl flew off, gliding only a few feet from the ground in an attempt to escape the murder of crows. Of course, they all gave chase and in harassing pursuit of the owl.

The entire scene was quite remarkable to watch. I haven't seen many crows around in the past several years. This is in contrast to the 1980s when I can recall hundreds of crows gathering together in the treetops of my childhood backyard. I thought I would share the experience.



Mill Creek Forest Preserve Outdoors by Don Wilson

Mill Creek Forest Preserve, a 277-acre site, is located in Gurnee Township, north of Stearns School Road and Hutchins Road between Route 45 and Hunt Club Road in Warren Township. Along with two other preserves created in 2010 by the Lake County Forest Preserves, Mill Creek provides valuable wildlife habitat, trail connections, and flood protection.

Natural History

Primarily agriculture land with an earthen and concrete dam on Mill Creek in the southern half of the preserve. The earthen dam has been breached east of the dam and that is the current creek course. The creek and the surrounding area is glaciated with much glacial cobble in the river and the surrounding agricultural fields. Piles of stone gathered by farmers are common along the edges of the fields. The surrounding land is currently planted in either corn or soybeans.

Access

This forest preserve is undeveloped since it is relatively new, but limited parking is available at the end of Sand Lake Road west of Hunt Club Road, and east of Stearns School and Hutchins Road. The preserve is viewable from the edge of farm fields, old Sand Lake Road and paths.

Environmental Significance

The property's unique natural features include a scenic valley along the southern branch of Mill Creek. The southern branch originates in the Grayslake area and flows through Rollins Savanna, Fourth Lake Forest Preserve, and Grandwood Park before entering the valley of this preserve. The creek later merges with the north branch, also known as Dutch Gap Canal, which originates in Bristol Township, WI. Mill Creek eventually combines with the Des Plaines River in Wadsworth Wetlands Preserve.

Situated on the slopes of the Mill Creek preserve's stream valley are oak groves with scattered hickory, ash, black cherry, and maple trees that provide habitat for many species of wildlife. These woodlands are relatively free of invasive species and appear as though the land has been managed to control them. The flow in the creek is swift even in the fall. The view of Mill Creek looking south from Sand Lake Road would make one think they were in a remote area as the creek sparkles and gurgles as it flows over the rapids and log jams.

In the middle of the prairie, the middle of the preserve, north of Sand Lake Road, is a prairie, possibly a pasture at one time. Urban sounds are almost non-existent and no signs of development are visible. Paths were mowed previously that give the appearance of a wagon wheel. Several ravines meander from the fields and prairie into Mill Creek throughout the preserve.

Great Blue Herons have nested in the area south of the old dam not far from Stearns School Road. There are currently 14 nests in the creek bed and the adjacent white pines along the west shore of the creek. It is not certain that this was an active nesting site in 2011 but had been in 2010. At the north end of the preserve, and adjacent to the creek, is a pond that appears to have been a waterfowl resting area this fall. There is also an obvious active beaver dam to the south of the pond.

Future Benefits

This property would provide further protection to Mill Creek and the surrounding floodplain and allow for the creation of wetlands to help reduce the impact of storm water. The land also offers excellent potential for oak and prairie restoration on the slopes of the valley and stabilization of the stream corridor, which would enhance water quality and improve habitat for fish species like the Iowa darter.

Conservation@Home by Sarah Surroz

Eco-Friendly Lawn and Garden Program Comes to Lake County— Free property consultations offer tailored advice on how to get started

Lake County residents now have access to the popular Conservation@Home program, which supports eco-friendly lawn and garden practices. Administered by the nonprofit Liberty Prairie Conservancy, the program offers free consultations that keep each property owner's goals and resources in mind while offering suggestions. In most cases, property owners can retain the present character and beauty of their landscaping while incorporating simple modifications that support clean water, rich soil, and resilient ecosystems. For those interested in certifying their properties as eco-friendly, many choices are available to achieve the necessary 100 points. To honor qualifying landowners' efforts, they are presented with a free yard sign and free one-year membership to the Liberty Prairie Conservancy.

National and regional trends demonstrate that people have an increased desire to be good stewards of their properties. People recognize the connection between healthy land and healthy communities. Here is a way individuals can make significant on-the-ground contributions through relatively simple steps that don't compromise the beauty or function of their landscapes, and even lead to savings in time and money. With the richest biodiversity in the state and a strong tradition of support for wildlife habitat and land and water resources, Lake County is a particularly appropriate setting for such a program.

Visit www.libertyprairie.org, email info@libertyprairie.org or call 847.548.5989 to sign up for a free consultation or to schedule a free presentation on the topic for your civic club or group.

Over 1,000 properties have been certified in DuPage, Kane, Kendall and Will Counties by The Conservation Foundation, creator of the Conservation@Home program. In Lake County, the program is funded by The Grand Victoria Foundation and administered by the Liberty Prairie Conservancy, a nonprofit group that helps to preserve and steward natural areas, farmland and landscaped properties throughout Lake County.



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**Lake County
 Audubon Society**

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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).

Can you name the top 10 birds counted in 2011?

Yep, the cardinal is on the list! This year, the Great Backyard Bird Count takes place starting Friday, 2/17, through Monday, 2/20. For details and the top 10 birds of last year, visit www.birdcount.org.

