



DECEMBER 2021 – JANUARY 2022

NORTHWEST ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

A chapter of the National Audubon Society



Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*

The Rough-legged Hawk spends the summer capturing lemmings on the arctic tundra, tending a cliffside nest under a sun that never sets. Winter is the time to see this large, open-country hawk in southern Canada and the U.S., where it may be perched on a pole or hovering over a marsh or pasture on the hunt for small rodents. Found globally across northern latitudes, this species occurs in both light and dark forms.

www.nwilaudubon.org

NIAS MONTHLY PROGRAMS

Join us the first Tuesday of every month, September through May. All of our programs are open to the public.

Please note: schedule and location of programs are subject to change due to COVID-19 restrictions; please see newsletter and website for up-to-date information.

Most programs are held at the St John United Church of Christ, 1010 Park Blvd., in Freeport.

Most programs begin at 7 PM with announcements, followed by the program at 7:30 and then refreshments.

Check the current newsletter or our website nwilaudubon.org for specific monthly details, special events or any changes to the usual time and place.

Please join us!

INSIDE THIS NEWSLETTER:

2. Calendar Considerations
3. Programs, Events and Field Trips
4. Conservation Committee Open-land Birding
5. Christmas Birdcount
6. Birdathon Update
7. NIAS 50th Anniversary
9. Thank You!

About Bird Information:
birds.cornell.edu

Bird Photo: Tom Koerner/USFWS

BIRDS AND CATS: A BAD COMBINATION

According to the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), predation by outdoor cats is the number-one direct, human-caused threat to birds, resulting in approximately 2.4 BILLION bird deaths in the United States every year. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists domestic cats (*Felis catus*) as one of the world's worst non-native invasive species. Cats have contributed to the extinction of 63 species of birds, mammals, and reptiles in the wild.

Cat owners may feel that their outdoor cat is not causing harm, especially if they do not see their cat directly killing a bird. However, cats have the instinctive behavior of being a predator. Watch your cat play with their toys – this demonstrates the predatory behaviors. Even well-fed cats that are allowed to go outdoors will continue this predatory instinct and hunt for birds and other wildlife, even if they are not going to consume the prey. The presence of cats near nesting sites will also cause stress to birds and have been shown to lead to decreased nest success and reduced health of chicks.

Domesticated cats are safer inside. The average life expectancy of an outdoor cat is 2-5 years, while an indoor cat can live more than 15 years. Millions of cats get hit by cars or can be found in the engine of cars to keep warm, but get killed when the car starts. Cats are also injured by other cats, hunted by wildlife, and can be abused by humans. Cats are also at risk for acquiring diseases from other cats such as rabies, feline leukemia, distemper, mange, fleas, parasitic worms, and ticks, some of which can be transmitted to humans.

Trap, Neuter, Release programs (TNR) often claim to be a solution to feral cat problems in cities, but the American Bird Conservancy and our chapter do not support TNR programs. These programs are designed to catch cats, neuter them, and release the cats; however, peer-reviewed research indicates that the colonies persist, maintaining cat populations to remain in the wild to continue to cause harm while also perpetuating the behavior of humans to continue to feed and support feral cats. Outdoor cats are linked to diseases that can be spread to humans, including Toxoplasmosis, Rabies, and Cat-scratch disease.

Pledge to keep your cats indoors! You can provide them with window shelves to look outside, provide them with countless toys indoors – they love cardboard boxes! Plant kitty grass indoors so your cat can graze. Use an outdoor cat enclosure, such as a “catio” or screened porch. Spay or neuter your cat as soon as possible and provide routine veterinary care.

Whether you are a cat owner or not, we encourage all of our members to be responsible to prevent the cycle of cat overpopulation. Here's how:

- Support local cat control and protection plans that are supportive of bird populations.
- Support legislation that require cat owners to register their cats and prevent them from roaming.
- Contact your local city/county council member and provide information about the ineffectiveness of TNR programs – your voice matters!
- Do not dump unwanted cats – take them to local animal shelters.
- Do not feed unowned or feral cats.

For more information, please visit our source at <https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/cats-and-birds/>

PROGRAMS: TO ZOOM OR NOT TO ZOOM, THAT IS THE QUESTION.

The NIAS Board has determined that we will Zoom all programs through the January 2022 program. At that time, we will determine where we are at with COVID and determine what will take place in the following months. Please email nwilaudubon@gmail.com if interested in the program and a Zoom link will be sent out a week before the program date.

– Don Miller, Program Chair

CALENDAR CONSIDERATIONS

- M** Meeting
- F** Field Trip
- S** Stewardship
- P** Program
- E** Event
- O** Other



Due to the uncertainty of future cancellations associated with COVID-19, please check our website calendar before any scheduled event or call any leader on the event. If you would like to be notified by email, please send a message to nwilaudubon@gmail.com to be placed on an email contact list.

P December 7 – Monthly Program, presented via Zoom. Please email nwilaudubon@gmail.com if interested in the program and a Zoom link will be sent out a week before the program date. See page 3 for details.

It was decided to move the Conservation Committee meetings to Wednesday evening at 6:30 PM.

M December 8 – Monthly Conservation Committee Meeting at 6:30 PM via Zoom. This meeting is open to anyone interested in conservation. Contact nwilaudubon@gmail.com if you are interested in joining this group.

P January 4 – Monthly Program, presented via Zoom. Please email nwilaudubon@gmail.com if interested in the program and a Zoom link will be sent out a week before the program date. See page 3 for details.

M January 5 – Monthly Conservation Committee Meeting at 6:30 PM via Zoom. This meeting is open to anyone interested in conservation. Contact nwilaudubon@gmail.com if you are interested in joining this group.

E January 19 – Other Side of the Hill film viewing and discussion at 7 PM via Zoom. See page 3 for details.

F January 20 – Tracks, Trails, Signs and Scats Field Trip. See page 3 for details.

F January 22 – To Build A Fire, field trip. See page 3 for details.



NIAS field trip to Wilson Prairie near Pecatonica on September 21st. (above) Led by Don Miller (a great storyteller). All enjoyed this blustery day at a beautiful site! Attendees were Don Miller, Mary Blackmore, Paul Brown, Candy Colby, Keri Rainsberger, Ann Straight, Molly Doolittle and Kara Gallup. | photo by Kara Gallup

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COVID-19 Precautions: Be sure to bring your face covering for when you are unable to social distance. Additionally, optical equipment, including spotting scopes, may not be shared.

“September 20th ‘almost full moon’ campfire at Silver Creek. Judy and Mary roasting marshmallows, under a beautiful moon and very warm evening.” (below) | photo by Kara Gallup



“We had a beautiful night for a campfire last Wednesday (9/8/21) the stars were incredible and the fire, as usual, perfection.” Mary talks to the group about the prairie. Anne Straight, Harlan and Judy Corrie, Bob and Carol Curtis, Paul Brown, Mary B., (Kara Gallup) “and a bit later, John and Anita Neinhuis joined us”. | photo by Kara Gallup

PROGRAMS, EVENTS AND FIELD TRIPS

Monthly Program:

THE HOW'S AND WHY'S OF WINTER BIRDFEEDING

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 7TH
ZOOM STARTING 7:00PM**



Join Cathy and Dave Ott from Rock Valley Garden Center to learn the basics of feeding wild birds during the winter months. Discover how to be the most popular “restaurant” in the neighborhood for your feathered friends. There will be takeaways for the beginner as well as the seasoned birdfeeding enthusiast. Topics covered will include types of feeders, types of food, keeping unwanted critters away, care/maintenance, water sources, and other common questions. They also will introduce the Cornell Feeder Project and how you can be a part of that. Winter birds are coming your way!

Dave and Cathy have operated Rock Valley Garden Center on Bell School Road in Rockford, IL for 37 years, yep 37! It is one of the Illinois premier garden centers. They specialize in everything from your everyday annuals to high tech Hydroponics. From fish to beautiful budding Lilacs, from fresh bird seed to thousands of bird feeders... and that is just a portion of what they do.

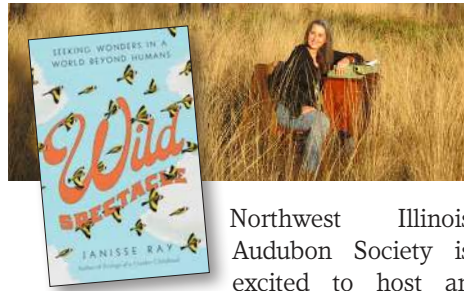
Check them out at:

*rockvalleygardencenter.com
85 N. Bell School Road, Rockford, IL
815-398-1937*

Monthly Program:

JANISSE RAY, WILD SPECTACLE: SEEKING WONDERS IN A WORLD BEYOND HUMANS

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 4TH
ZOOM STARTING 7:00PM**



Northwest Illinois Audubon Society is excited to host an evening with Janisse Ray. Janisse is an American writer whose favorite subject is the borderland of nature and culture. Ray has won an American Book Award, Pushcart Prize, Southern Bookseller Awards, Southern Environmental Law Center Writing Awards, Nautilus Award, and Eisenberg Award, among others; and has been inducted into the Georgia Writers Hall of Fame. Her first book, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, was a New York Times Notable Book. Her eighth book, in which she will read and tell stories was released in October 2021, *Wild Spectacle*. Ray repeatedly sets out to immerse herself in wildness, to be wild, and to learn what wildness can teach us. She lives and works inland from Savannah, Georgia.

MOVIE NIGHT – OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL

**WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 19TH
ZOOM STARTING 7:00PM**

The Conservation Committee will be offering a screening of *Other Side of the Hill*, a 30 minute documentary that explores the impacts of a changing climate in rural America. The film amplifies the voices of rural communities often left unheard, and shines a light on stories of progress and hope. In a time of perceived cultural divide between rural and urban, left and right, young and old, we discover common ground in an urgency to address a changing landscape. The screening will be offered

as a virtual event with a link provided for those interested in seeing the film and participating in the discussion after the film.

Contact nwilaudubon@gmail.com to get the link for the viewing of this film and the discussion.

TRACKS, TRAILS, SIGNS AND SCATS FIELD TRIP

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 20TH
10:00 AM TO 12:00**

*Oakdale Nature Preserve, 4433 S. Cranes Grove Rd., Freeport, IL
Coordinator: Richard Benning
815-865-5279*

This will be a walk looking for tales left in the snow, mud, leaves or whatever medium is present at the time. It is important that participants dress for being outdoors, and waterproof insulated footwear is a must. We will meet at the parking lot near the Mogle Center. Call the number listed above to pre-register for this event.

TO BUILD A FIRE

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 22ND
10:00 TO 11:00 AM**

*Oakdale Nature Preserve, 4433 S. Cranes Grove Rd., Freeport, IL
Coordinator: Adam Moderow
815-541-5842*

A campfire is an imperative part of enjoying the outdoors for many people. It can also be a necessary one. When it's cold and you're in the wild, the knowledge of how to build a fire can be a vital difference in how the day turns out. During this demonstration, we will talk about strategies for building a fire in the winter, and how to manage it properly to keep you and the nature around you safe. Dress warmly. We anticipate not needing masks but please have one with you should guidelines change. Meet by the Mogle building, just off of the parking lot.

Contact Adam Moderow at adamoderow@gmail.com or at 815-541-5842 to register in case it becomes necessary to limit the number of participants.

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE NEWS

REDEFINING “COMFORT FOOD”

When someone says the words “comfort food” what foods come to mind? If you ask 10 people to name 3 comfort foods you would likely end up with a list of 25-30 different foods because the definition of comfort food according to Merriam-Webster is: food prepared in a traditional style having a usually nostalgic or sentimental appeal. We all have diverse backgrounds that define which specific foods are our comfort foods.

How about if we give the words comfort food a new definition? Comfort food could be defined as foods grown in an environmentally friendly manner that minimize greenhouse gas emissions. Eating these foods would give you comfort knowing that you are decreasing greenhouse gases and therefore minimizing impact to the environment. Let’s talk about some of the foods that might be listed if we use this new definition. Like the Merriam-Webster definition of comfort foods, different people would list different foods

as comfort foods, but not because of our diverse backgrounds but instead because of our geographic location and taste preferences. Using the new definition, comfort foods would be grown locally with minimal packaging or processing and require minimal land use compared to the nutrition provided. Most foods purchased at the local farmer’s market are examples of this. Several grocery stores in our area are also now carrying locally grown produce with minimal packaging. Fall is a wonderful time of year to visit the local farmer’s market to purchase winter squash, peppers, apples and so many other fresh vegetables. Incidentally, getting out and talking with the local growers at the market is a wonderful way to learn more about the foods that you eat and learn about how the foods are grown. If you look for items that are organic or indicate no/minimal chemical pesticides, you can take comfort knowing you are doing what is best for the environment.

Lentils and dried beans are environmentally friendly comfort foods that are nitrogen-fixers. This means the plant will not

deplete the soil of nitrogen but instead will leave the soil richer thus minimizing the need for adding fertilizers that can require significant resources from the environment. Lentils and dried beans are a good source of protein that require very little land to grow compared to other protein-containing foods like beef and pork.

According to the 2021 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released in August, total greenhouse gas emissions from food systems accounts for about 21-37% of total greenhouse gas emissions. Decreasing intake of meat and increasing intake of vegetables and fruit is suggested as the primary method to decreasing total greenhouse gas emissions from our food systems. We can all take comfort in knowing we can minimize our impact on the environment by putting less meat and more vegetables and fruit on our plate.

Meatless recipes may be found at the Meatless Monday website:

mondycampaigns.org/meatless-monday

ENJOY OPEN-LAND BIRDS THIS WINTER

Every winter we are treated to the appearance of birds that nest farther north but migrate to our area when the weather chills. Like last year, our tradition of scheduling open-land birding field trips will be put on hold due to pandemic carpooling restrictions. We encourage you to do a little cruising on your own in search of these fascinating birds.

The Species – Horned Larks, Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs, along with an occasional Snowy Owl and Rough-winged Hawk. While Horned Larks do nest in our area, the big numbers of this species occur in the winter as northerly nesting birds move south.

The Habitat – These species can be found primarily in open-lands that were pre-

settlement prairie. Larks, buntings and longspurs are chiefly seed eaters in winter, feeding on waste grain and weed seeds in harvested fields, field entrances, pastures, swaths of spread manure and roadsides. They also are attracted to gravel roadsides for grit. Roadside observations are more easily made than field observations and are most numerous if snow covers fields. Note: small flocks of birds on roadsides adjacent to woodlands most often are American Tree Sparrows and Northern Juncos, both also winter visitors.

The Locations – We have had good luck slowly cruising country roads, using our vehicles as blinds, in the area where Stephenson, Carroll and Ogle counties meet, but observations have been made

in many other areas as well. A few favorite roads are Prairie Dell, Fork Creek, Brookville, Coffman and Maple Grove.

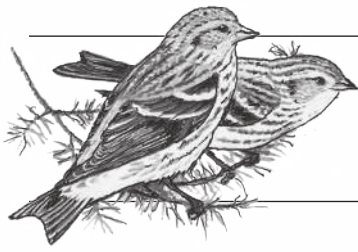
The Preparation – Study these species in your field guide and especially note behaviors, i.e. Rough-legged Hawks can be seen to hover, reminding you a really big kestrel. None of the birds are colorful so keep in mind distinct light or dark field marks, i.e. the white patches on the wings of Snow Buntings, more evident when they fly.

Most of all, have fun with your explorations. You’ll often see birds you weren’t looking for like Bald Eagles and Wild Turkeys, as well as a variety of mammals. Open-land birding typically requires a bit more patience, but the observations can be spectacular, and the experiences are some of the best I’ve had. You never know just what you’ll see and where you’ll see it on an open-land birding adventure.

– Mary Blackmore



Snowy Owl, by Patty Weik



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

It's time once again for the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society to participate in the annual Christmas Bird Count. This will be the 46th time that our chapter has taken part in this endeavor to take one-day snapshots of types of bird species and numbers of each in approximately 2500 count circles throughout the Western Hemisphere. Our local count day is planned for December 18, 2021.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will again cause this year's CBC to be carried out with safety measures in place. All state and local guidelines must be adhered to. Field counters will only be allowed to be with other "in-house" family members while in a vehicle. Social distancing is required during any outside birding, and if this is not possible then masking is mandatory. The local compiler will assign territories to certain individuals and family units.

The pandemic should not affect participating in the CBC as a feeder counter as long as you stay in your house with only other family members. To be a feeder counter you must be within our official count circle which extends seven and one-half miles out from its center in Read Park in Freeport. The information below tells about being a feeder counter and includes a form to fill in with your observations.

Anyone who wishes to be a feeder counter, or has questions about this year's Christmas Bird Count, should call the local compiler, Richard Benning at 815-865-5279.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT FEEDER COUNT PARTICIPATION

Participating in the CBC as a feeder counter can be a rewarding way to be a citizen scientist. Your observations will be included with our local data. You must be sure that your feeders are in our official count circle which is described above. If you are not sure that you meet this requirement call Richard Benning at the number listed above. You must do your counting on the day of our local count, December 18th.

It is asked that you spend at least a cumulative (not necessarily all at once) two hours doing your feeder observations on the day of the count. You don't have to be glued to the window watching every bird for every minute. Just check your feeder often during the hours you are counting. Then complete the form included here and mail it as indicated. Each species that you observe should include the largest number of that species seen at any one time. For example, if you see eight juncos at 8:30 a.m. and eleven juncos at 9:45 a.m. the number you should record is eleven because that is the largest number of juncos seen at any one time.

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

<input type="checkbox"/>	Mourning dove	<input type="checkbox"/>	American Tree Sparrow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-headed Woodpecker	<input type="checkbox"/>	Song Sparrow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-bellied Woodpecker	<input type="checkbox"/>	White-throated Sparrow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Downy Woodpecker	<input type="checkbox"/>	White-crowned Sparrow
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hairy Woodpecker	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dark-eyed Junco
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Flicker	<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Cardinal
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blue Jay	<input type="checkbox"/>	Purple Finch
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Crow	<input type="checkbox"/>	House Finch
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-capped Chickadee	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pine Siskin
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tufted Titmouse	<input type="checkbox"/>	American Goldfinch
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-breasted Nuthatch	<input type="checkbox"/>	House Sparrow
<input type="checkbox"/>	White-breasted Nuthatch	<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brown Creeper	<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)
<input type="checkbox"/>	European Starling	<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)
<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)	<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)
<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)	<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)
<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)	<input type="checkbox"/>	(other)

MUST BE COMPLETED ON DECEMBER 18TH

Please mail form to: Richard Benning, P.O. Box 11, Davis, IL 61019
NO LATER THAN December 21st THANKS!

2021 BIRDATHON FUNDS DISTRIBUTED

Birdathon 
Your money goes where the birds go

41
YEARS

This year's May Birdathon raised over \$2800, an increase from last year. Considering that we still were experiencing pandemic-related limitations, we are very pleased with this result. The funds raised were distributed to organizations that work to protect birds and the habitats they rely on. Our chapter retained 30% of the funds raised to assist with our many programs and activities.

Many thanks go to both the Birdathon birders and individuals who sponsored one or more birders. Their generosity provided much needed funds for bird protection projects in both wintering and nesting areas, as well as migration routes.

We all look forward to the 2022 Birdathon!

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED INCLUDE:

- Northwest Illinois Audubon Society
- National Audubon's Mississippi River Initiative
- Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin
- Belize Audubon Society
- Stewards of the Upper Mississippi
- Sand Bluff Bird Observatory



"Write your own caption"!

During a recent stewardship day Paul Brown became covered in the sticky seeds of a *Desmodium* spp. giving Merry Blake, Mary Blackmore and Judy Corrie a chance to collect more seeds. | photo by Kara Gallup

MAKE SURE YOU CHECK OUT THE UPDATES TO OUR WEBSITE!

We have new web pages that share information about native plants, reducing threats to birds, and climate change. | nwilaudubon.org

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Ronald Weis - Davis
Robert Rutkoske - Egan
Glenn and Laurie Gungel - Freeport
Johnny Bernard - Freeport
Beverly Huyck - Freeport
Teresa Winter - Freeport
Norman Heyen - Freeport
Keith Eikstant - Lena
Frances Van Oosten - Polo



**Nest of *Dolichovespula maculata*
Bald-faced Hornet**

Taken at Elkhorn Creek Biodiversity, a first, this October. | photo by Paul Brown

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF NORTHWEST ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

The Northwest Illinois Audubon Society, originally named Stephenson County Audubon Society, was formed on June 10, 1971 and chartered in 1972 as a Chapter of the National Audubon Society. We wanted to celebrate our amazing 50 years as a chapter by showcasing past accomplishments, stories, and photos from the beginning in the newsletters for this year and honoring the many people that were significant in the establishment of this chapter. Many of the stories you will see will come from a scrapbook containing newspaper articles from 1971-1981 and from current Audubon members.

Please enjoy this last edition of looking back at our first ten years of a chapter. But the celebration is not over! We hope to have a 50th anniversary celebration soon and look forward to many more years!



Dan and Tom Kubitz

Because this is the time of year when our chapter participates in the Christmas Bird Count, we looked back at an enjoyable article about one of the first planned Christmas Bird Counts and its cancellation due to poor weather for the data collectors. Despite the lack of volunteers, president Tom Kubitz still ventured out to Read Park Pavilion on his own to collect informal data joined with an aptly-named Journal-Standard reporter Duncan Birdsell. One of Tom's first stops was to the household of Harlan Corrie, where he counted a Northern Flicker and Dark-eyed Juncos (which Tom described as the smartest

sparrows). He had fallen twice during the census count and cracked his binoculars in one of his falls, but ended up having a good number of juncos, American Robins, Purple Finches, American Goldfinches, Black-capped Chickadees, Blue Jays, nuthatches, titmouse, five kinds of woodpeckers, and hawks.

In 1979, monthly programs featured: "Duck Decoy Hobby" by Robert Spaeth; "Bird Adventures" with Emma Tucker about her visits to Cornell University's Laboratory of Ornithology at Sapsucker Woods, Pelee Point in Ontario, Delaware River in Maine, and Jasper-Pulaski National Wildlife Preserve in Indiana; "Fisheries Management and Conservation at Lake Le-Aqua-Na" with Alec Pulley; the films "Lion Pride" and "Home of the Harrier" by wildlife photographers Cleveland and Ruth Grant; "Pros and Cons of Nuclear Energy" with Dr. A. David Rossin from Com Ed and Peter Cleary from Citizens for Better Environment; and "Wildflowers, Our Heritage" with Elda Goodmiller.

In 1980, programs included: "A Flatlander Goes West" by Keith Blackmore; "A Prairie is a Special Thing" by Mim Berling, one of the founders of Sinnissippi Audubon Society; and Hazardous Waste Problems in Illinois" by David Ebbert of the Illinois Environmental Council.

And finally in 1981, ten years after the start of the chapter, programs included: "Energy: The Catalyst for Cultural Change" by Dr. Nelson Sartoris; "Resource Conservation: A Focus on Wisconsin Wetlands" by Charles Luthin; and "A View of the Universe" by Dr. Jeff Davidson.

It is clear that in 50 years, the Stephenson County Audubon Society, eventually renamed to Northwest Illinois Audubon Society, excelled in educating the public, connecting people with nature, and inspiring people to become better stewards of the planet. We are not a successful chapter without our dedicated members -- we are glad you are a part of our past, present, and future!

STORIES FROM OUR MEMBERS

Dan Barron, La Crosse, WI

NIAS member since 2008

Newsletter/layout support – 2014 to present



Anemone patens

On the first heated afternoon of a slow moving spring

Guided by the knowledge of sensible mentoring

A rocky hill climb to reveal hundreds of rare sightings

The scarcity of such is worrisome

Now, here, in the strong gusts of wind I understand

Only 5 acres remain in a 100 square miles, or more

Just as endangered as the rainforest or coral reef

More so, extinct

Development plows on

But the Pasque Flower dances

At least in this small place

In 2007, I moved out of my small apartment in Chicago to work with my parents at their print shop, Freeport Press. Leaving the city afforded me opportunities to pursue a list of "shelved" interests, starting with gardening and beekeeping. The experiences of both quickly ushered my curiosities toward what I now know is referred to as ecology. That said, having no formal background

(STORIES FROM OUR MEMBERS Continued)

in biology I felt lost in the natural world. Almost everything was unknown, and I didn't really have anyone to guide me.

After a few months, I became involved with the Stateline Beekeepers Association, where I met a spectrum of interesting people. Most of these folks were passionate about keeping honey bees (*Apis mellifera*), and some talked about organic gardening, but only a few discussed broader ecology and environmental issues. One of these people was Terry Ingram, who frequently spoke of native plants, birds and pressures from humans such as pesticide use. At this time I also met John Walt, who mentioned a group called the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society (NIAS).

My work days in the print shop were accompanied by WNIJ (our NPR affiliate), including their occasional "calendar of events". One Tuesday afternoon, I heard an announcement for a live owl presentation at St. John United Church of Christ, happening that evening. I decided to attend and took a seat near the back. The program opened with announcements, which certainly must have included field trips, past work sessions and future volunteer opportunities. All of which circled around "ecology", though I didn't really know that yet. Of course, the program was fantastic – especially as I had never experienced any bird up-close. This seemed like more than a group of birders – rather, a group of people who enjoyed each others company. Together we delight in rare sightings, seasonal visitors and familiar friends.

I attended most of the NIAS monthly programs, but didn't experience my first field trip until one of Keith and Mary Blackmore's prairie hikes. I'm fairly sure that our destination was the Freeport Prairie, in search of something called a "Pasque Flower", or "*Anemone patens*" (Keith was very specific about the pronunciation "pah-tenns"). As we got out of our cars, the group entered the preserve through a narrow, crooked gate. We were informed that this small property was a remnant of, what only a few hundred years prior, had covered much of Illinois (most in the group knew this, but I did not). Cresting the slope, I started to see short, delicate flowers dancing in the wind. There were hundreds of them, if not thousands. I got

down low to look at one more closely and was amazed to see that the entire stem was covered in short, dense hairs – the pale pink petals thin as tissue paper. This is what we had come to see. Thirteen years later, I am still amazed by the ephemeral beauty of *Anemone patens*.

Finally, I recall an invitation to attend an issues discussion. This introduced me to, for the first time, structured conversation around a particular topic while sitting in someones' living room. We had been given an article to pre-read (homework), which guided the discussion, as well as possible actions or resolutions. Later, was the inclusion of un-structured conversation (hour two), which allowed folks to share or workshop a variety of social or environmental issues. I remember the warmly lit room, and our engagement in the conversation, learning together and growing. This opportunity provided a space for the typical "back row" attendee, as there weren't any rows at all. Our participation felt natural and unforced, more so, welcomed.

These memories represent just a few of my early NIAS experiences. Of course, I could also mention the "Carbon Diet", "Food for Thought", work sessions, campfires or our wonderful banquets, but I won't take up any more space for now. These examples highlight important themes which seemingly lend themselves to the success of our group. First, is that of sustained education because the natural world is infinitely complex and interconnected. To learn about one issue, one species or one ecosystem instantly leads to an intertwined coexistence of countless other factors. In this way, something as complex as "biodiversity" can be experienced and appreciated firsthand. Second, without communal participation of the curious/invested, many of us would feel as I did when starting out, "lost in the natural world". It is the collective experience which NIAS builds, connects, supports and inspires. Through uncompromising curiosity, we are afforded something that seems exceedingly rare in adult life, the opportunity to stop, look and wonder. •

BIRDSEED SALE SUCCESSFUL

"Smooth Sailing" was the operative phrase for this year's birdseed sale as we completed our annual fundraiser with very few glitches. The members of the Birdseed Sale Committee – Tim Smith, Chris Kruger and Mary Blackmore – are grateful to all of our volunteers and customers for their cooperation and the purchases they made. We distributed nearly 14 tons of product! Our profit of over \$4000 will be used to fund our many programs, activities and publications. As was the case last year, the few extra bags of seed that we ordered already have been sold.

The sale would not have been possible without our team of dedicated volunteers who participated in seed distribution and delivery, ear corn bagging, order processing, flier creation and mailing, and sale planning, coordinating and follow-up: Tim and Teresa Smith, Mary Blackmore, Chris Kruger, Lynn Feaver, Richard Benning, Nancy and Randy Ocken, Bob and Kara Gallup, Adam and Juliet Moderow, Bob Curtis, Don Miller, Rex Sides, Leo Vaccaro, Paul Brown, Merry Blake, and Dan Barron. Thank you so much!

Many thanks go to the folks at O'Mara Transport Company for not only providing our main pickup site, but also using their forklift to assist us in staging the many pallets of seed. Thanks also go to Audubon members who hosted our regional pickup sites: John and Kay Day, Anne Straight, Chris Kruger and Jeremy Dixon.

Special thanks go to Randy and Nancy Ocken for donating their ear corn, already picked and in their crib. Our rainy week began when we were preparing to pick corn in the field, making that task next to impossible. Thanks also go to Cub Foods of Freeport for donating bags for the ear corn.

Be sure to remember the "money-back guarantee" stated in the sale flier. If you discover any seed spoilage in your bags, call Mary at 815-938-3204 and we will provide you with a refund.

Between concerns about the pandemic and supply chain issues, we were indeed fortunate to have had a successful sale. Thank you again to everyone who contributed to that success. •

Would you like to join Audubon as a NEW Member or give a GIFT membership? *Two types of membership are available:*

1. Northwest Illinois Audubon Society and National Membership
includes this local newsletter, local mailings and the national "Audubon" magazine.

_____ National Membership \$20

All renewals for national memberships need to use the national membership form.

2. Northwest Illinois Audubon Society Local only Membership
includes this newsletter and other mailings from our local chapter.

_____ Local Only \$15

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Birdseed Sales Volunteers

Volunteers Bob Curtis, Adam Moderow, Don Miller and Mary Blackmore, from our 2021 annual bird seed sale pose for a quick photo. | photo by Paul Brown

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR MEMBERSHIP?

Contact Teresa Smith at 815-238-3963 or timtreetsmith@gmail.com

THANK YOU!

Mary Blackmore and Judy Corrie for providing s'mores supplies for our campfires.

Mary Blackmore for organizing the campfires at our preserves.

Fall seed collecting at both our preserves: Mary Blackmore, Kara Gallup, Judy and Harlan Corrie, Paul Brown, Don Miller, Anne Straight, Nancy Ocken, Rebecca, Dale and Aaron Anderson, Pam Richards, Carol Redmore, Anita Nienhuis, Teresa Smith, Merry Blake, Molly Doolittle, and Keri Rainsberger.

Lynn Feaver for mowing firebreaks at our Elkhorn Creek preserve.

Tim Smith for winterizing our mower and for chainsawing downed trees off trails at both of our preserves.

Shey Lowman for creating the activity calendar every two months for our website.

Patty Weik for sharing photographs to be used in updates to our website.

Barry Treu from the Freeport Art Museum for donating a portion of his final sales from the Endangered and Threatened Bird collection to be used for habitat restoration in our area.

**Northwest Illinois
Audubon Society**

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