

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

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Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

THE TROUBLE WITH MIXED MARRIAGES, PART III: THE AWAKENING

By Eleonora di Liscia

As you may know, I am afflicted with a non-birder family. Or they would say they are afflicted with me.

I am quite certain that my husband deliberately rear-ended that car on Lincoln Avenue because I forced him to go to Montrose one spring. It was subconscious, I'm sure.

There was that brief moment when I took my daughter to see the Bald Eagles at Starved Rock, and she said, "Mommy, I want to go birding with you." That lasted to the end of the parking lot. When I took them to see the Long-eared Owls roosting in a South Loop schoolyard a few years ago, my daughter caused me to wonder whether she had been switched at birth by saying, "Owls are boring."

Still, my husband suggested we could go to Ecuador knowing full well what he was in for. One of my idiosyncrasies is that I will not sleep apart from my husband, so going on group bird trips by myself is out. Some of you have insinuated that I am psychotic. Yeah? So what? If he doesn't mind, why should you?

So I arranged a private family tour through the fabulous Tropical Birding. We made our own itinerary with professional bird guides for me.

When we went to Trinidad, my guide took me to Asa Wright, an isolated bird preserve and lodge. At the time, I thought, I'm glad I didn't make my family stay here. They would have killed themselves. But now my daughter was 16 instead of 13, and I said, "We're staying in the cloud forest for three days. Deal with it."

So we went to Ecuador in June, and a wonderful thing happened. My family seemed to enjoy it! Not just Ecuador, but the birds!

After a day in Quito, my guide, the incomparable Jose Illanes, picked us up at 5:30 a.m. Those who know me know I hate morning. But in Ecuador, I learned two important things: 1) It's much easier to get up at 5 a.m. when you go to bed at 10 p.m. 2) It's much easier to get up at 5 a.m. when you are going to see terrific birds.

Our first destination was Yanacocha, a temperate forest. It was my husband who first spotted the Sword-billed Hummingbird. I didn't get mine until the end of the trail. He got the Mountain Velvetbreast, a hummingbird with black belly and curved bill. I missed it.



You never forget your first Motmot. Photo by Eleonora di Liscia.

At the Tanadayapa Lodge, my husband voluntarily watched the busy hummingbird feeders. When I pointed out the bizarre Red-headed Barbet, he happily came over to see.

One evening, Jose suggested we look for Lyre-tailed Nightjar, a nighthawk-like bird with tail feathers 3 or 4 times the length of the body. Both my husband and daughter were eager to come. I think my daughter just wanted to get out of the lodge, and she liked riding on the bumpy, bumpy roads. Jose located the bird's dangling tail across the road, then beamed a flashlight through the darkened trees. The bird's eyes glowed like little pink orbs. My daughter peering through the scope displayed more enthusiasm than we had seen in several months. She actually gasped, and said something like, "Cool!"

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THE AWAKENING CONTINUED FROM COVER

At Milpe, another cloud forest locale, my husband nudged me aside for a turn at the scope to see the blue and black Swallow Tanager. Later, he left to entertain my daughter at a nearby town. When I showed him a picture of the Pale-mandibled Aracari he had missed, he was so disappointed, I felt sorry for him.

While Jose and I stood under a shelter searching through the rain for birds, my husband came over to tell us, "There's a lot of activity in this tree over here!"

"My God!" I said to Jose. "He's sounding like a birder."

One of my husband's favorite sightings was the Spotted Nightingale Thrush. The thrush, a robin-like bird with black-spotted yellow breast, had eluded Jeremy, a South African volunteer at Tandyapa. Jose bet Jeremy a beer that he could get him the thrush. Sure enough, Jose, better known as "God," quickly located the bird, which looked electric with its red eye ring and raised black head feathers. That evening at Tandyapa Lodge, Jose proudly brandished his beer saying, "Do you know what this is?"

The next day, we were due to return to Quito, but would drive past to Antisana, a dry paramo tundra-like reserve. I suggested

my family might prefer being dropped off in Quito. "But I think your husband really wants to see the Andean Condor," Jose said. And he was right, so they came and they saw. Another highlight was the frequent Carunculated Caracaras, black and white hawks, foraging the grassland.

The next day, I excused my family from traveling to Papallacta, a wet paramo grassland that resembles a high-altitude mossy rock garden. In the van, Jose said, "Your husband said he's interested in going to the Amazon." Jose is from the Amazon and after talking to him, my husband now wants to go. "Really? Wow!" I said incredulously.

The next day, an English bookseller in Quito who had spoken to my husband earlier told me, "Your husband said he wants to come back to Ecuador." All I can say is "Yay!"

Do I think this means a lifetime of companionship on Chicago birding trails? Well, let's not get carried away. But for one special moment, I was able to share one of the things I love best with my husband.

My husband's conclusion: "While 90% of the birds in Chicago are uninteresting, 90% of the birds in Ecuador are interesting." Of course, I don't entirely agree, but if it gets me a ticket to tropical birding, honey, it's all yours.



My nonbirder husband was so disappointed to miss this Pale-mandibled Aracari that I genuinely felt sorry for him. Photo by Eleonora di Liscia

CHANGES COMING TO NORTHWESTERN: By Libby Hill

"Northwestern is preparing to construct a new lakefront building that will make a dream come true and be a magnet for showcasing visual arts, theater, performance, music and dance. The new home of the Bienen School of Music and the School of Communication - scheduled to open by September 2015 - will be located on the southeast corner of the Evanston campus, affording spectacular views of Lake Michigan and the Chicago skyline." (New Heart for the Arts, Spring, 2012 Northwestern News.)

In addition to the new music building, NU will be constructing a Visitor Center/parking garage, also with spectacular views.

This building project will radically change the south entrance to campus. The sailing beach that we have birded on our migration field trips will disappear. The large stand of trees north of Clark St.

beach will be largely removed. The eastern third of the parking lot we use for parking will become "an open space amenity that can become a focal point for special events and recreation." The boathouse will be moved to the west. The city's bike path around Clark St. Beach will be rerouted. The estimated area of trees and dunes to be affected is a little over one acre each.

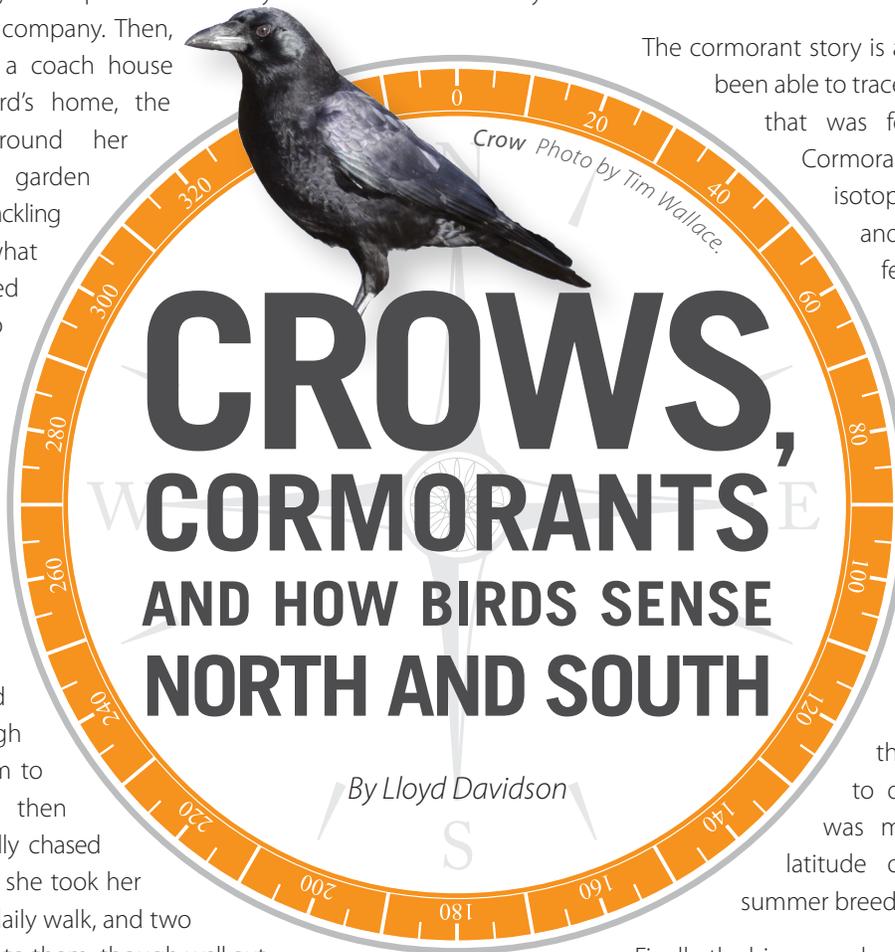
ENSBC and Audubon of the Chicago Region have been working with Evanston and NU to replace the lost bird habitat. Of extremely serious concern, both new buildings feature extensive south-facing glass facades. We have recommended that Northwestern consider redesigning the Visitor Center building to lessen the impact (literally) on migrating birds, as millions of birds use the lakefront flyway in spring and fall.

First, a story about Crows and the remarkable experience a friend reported having with them recently.

While walking her dog home after a walk in Southeast Evanston in late May, she suddenly found that a flock of crows began following and flying ahead of the two of them and landing on telephone wires. They didn't attack at all but simply kept her company. Then, she neared her home, a coach house in back of her landlord's home, the flock congregated around her landlord's net-covered garden and made quite a loud cackling clamor. Wondering what they were so excited about, she went over to investigate and discovered that two crows had become trapped inside, one of which had clearly been there for some time as it had badly battered wings. With some effort she was able to pull a couple of stakes up and lift the netting enough to make a hole for them to escape. Her landlord then came out and successfully chased them out. The next day, she took her dog out again for their daily walk, and two crows landed quite near to them, though well out of reach, and accompanied them for some distance. One of these she recognized because of its badly battered wing feathers and she surmised that its companion was likely the companion that had been trapped with it.

Crows are recognized to be one of the smartest bird species, some capable of even inventing and using tools. They can also not only

remember enemies for years but are able to spread such knowledge to their colleagues. As far as I'm concerned, this anecdote is simply one more confirmation of their high intelligence. Her story appears to me to be as good an example of cross species communication as any I've heard.



The cormorant story is about how scientists have been able to trace the origin of the mercury that was found in Double-crested Cormorants in Canada. Hydrogen isotope ratios vary by latitude and get incorporated into feathers as they grow, as does ingested mercury. However, feathers grow continuously so unless you know how old a particular feather is, it's impossible to tell when a more concentrated band of mercury originated in it. However, by correlating the mercury concentration with the hydrogen isotope ratios in the feathers, they were able to deduce that the mercury was mainly picked up in the latitude of Lake Winnipeg, their summer breeding ground.

Finally, the big news about birds this month was the discovery of how pigeon brains are able to encode the information on Earth's magnetic field that allows them to navigate during migration. This work was done in a brilliant set of experiments by L-Q. Wu and J.D. Dickman at Baylor College of Medicine, who have finally identified cells in the pigeon brain that are tuned to specific directions of the magnetic field. You can read a full report of their discovery in this NY Times article: <http://tinyurl.com/c4g7n7y>

FAREWELL TO IRV LEMPERT By Joel Greenberg

If it takes something less than a village to run a bird club, it still takes a dedicated core. Most of the people who work to keep the club strong are well known among members, but Irv Lempert was unique in providing vital help with membership and treasury matters without seeking any recognition for his efforts. Ruth Lempert did serve on the board for many years, but Irv was her partner. When they moved to Oregon, the bird club lost two dedicated friends. Ruth recently informed us that Irv passed away on August 31, 2011. We are both deeply saddened and reminded of the valuable contributions Irv made to the club. Our heartfelt condolences to Ruth and the rest of the family.

RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP NOW!

If you are among the few who have not renewed, please do it NOW! We are sending the current Bird Calls and the Directory as a courtesy and hope to hear from you soon.

PROGRAM NIGHTS

All programs are held on the fourth Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at the Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd., Evanston, IL. Free admission, parking and refreshments. For more details on programs, check our website at www.ensbc.org.

PLEASE NOTE THE SEPTEMBER MEETING HAS BEEN MOVED TO OCTOBER 2, 2012.

October 2, 2012: "The Birds of Jo Davies County." Rick Remington will share his favorite birding spots as well as photos of the diverse birds such as Bald Eagles, Trumpeter Swans and White Pelicans that inhabit this amazing area tucked into NW Illinois. This beautiful land untouched by glaciers in the last ice age, borders Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois and includes that major migrating flyway, the Mississippi River.

October 23, 2012: "Studying Birds in Africa's Albertine Rift: Challenges and Successes of the Field Museum's Bird Division." The Field Museum's collaborations in the highlands of the Albertine Rift--a lush, densely populated region that extends from southern Sudan to northeast Zambia and includes some of the world's largest lakes--go back more than twenty years and have included fieldwork in Uganda, Rwanda, Congo, and Burundi. The region's forests are best known for their populations of gorillas and chimpanzees, but they also contain more than forty endemic bird species. Field Museum curator John Bates will share his recent experiences in eastern Congo, which includes finding a bird that hadn't been seen in nearly fifty years and fleeing the forest because of rebel activity.

November 27, 2012: "Dragonflies & Damselflies of Chicagoland: A Macro-Photographic Journey through the Life History of Odonates." The order Odonata dates back over 325 million years to a time when dragonflies with two and a half foot wingspans filled the air. Today these successful aquatic insects represent a diverse group of animals with a complex life cycle. Marla Garrison, Biology Faculty at McHenry County College and author of Damselflies of Chicagoland: A Photo Field Guide (published online by the Field Museum of Natural History), offers an image intensive, up close and personal, presentation of this intriguing, and visually splendid, group of insects.

FIELD TRIPS

NEW WEEKEND GETAWAY TRIP!

AUG 24, 25 AND 26, 2012:

Shorebirds of Central Illinois River Valley, Emiquon, Globe Tract, Thompson Lake, Chautauqua NWR and Elsewhere near Havana, IL. Trip departs Saturday morning 6:00 a.m. from the Dixie Truck stop in McLean, Illinois, just south of Bloomington, IL off I-55. Recommended Friday and Saturday overnight stays at Super 8 Motel. Approx. cost \$80-100, including lodging based on double occupancy. Target species: Red-necked Phalarope, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet and up to 17 other possible shorebirds, as well as Eurasian Tree Sparrow and other migrants. Some moderate walking involved. Limit: 15 participants. We'll be carpooling and driving to shorebird locations. If you've never seen the Nature Conservancy's Emiquon Nature Preserve--this trip is for you! Reservations required by contacting leader: David B. Johnson, 224-567-9650 or by email at djohnsoda@comcast.net.

SATURDAYS: SEPTEMBER 29 AND OCTOBER 6.

Northwestern University Campus! The NU campus has long been a stopover for migrants of all kinds headed south. Park on the lakeside of the upper deck of the south parking lot off of Sheridan Rd. and Clark St., north of Clark St. beach, at 8:30 a.m. Leaders: Sue Robert and Libby Hill.

NOVEMBER 18, SUNDAY

Jeff Sanders' 43rd Annual Fall Specialty Trip! North Shore Lakefront. Includes Northwestern, Gillson Park, Maple Park, Tower Road Park, Park Ave., Rose Beach in Highland Park, and other areas as time permits. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Northwestern University beach. Go east on Lincoln St. from Sheridan Rd., turn south past the giant fitness center, then turn east (left) and go almost to the end. Bring scopes and dress for cold lake wind. Leader: Jeff Sanders.



Carunculated Caracaras practically litter the paramo. Photo by Eleonora di Liscia.

PROJECT PASSENGER PIGEON FLIES ON THE WEB!

By Joel Greenberg

Project Passenger Pigeon (P3) now thrives in cyberspace! The new and improved web-site is up and running. In case you haven't visited lately, please check out our many updates at <http://passengerpigeon.org>. This site provides information on passenger pigeons in every state, accounts of species currently in trouble, poetry and

stories about passenger pigeons, links to the web-sites of all P3 participants who engage in outreach, access to the documentary trailer, P3 speakers bureau, participating artists, and many other features. We continue to improve and add to the site: a calendar is in the works so that all P3 events can be listed and promoted. Please feel free

to send contributions or comments to projectpassengerpigeon@gmail.com.

P3 also now has a Facebook Page! Please help our "Likes" grow by sharing the link and spread the word! <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Project-Passenger-Pigeon/417970044904114>