

Bird Calls



Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

December 2009 www.ensbc.org

WHAT'S IN A COUNT?

By Eleonora di Liscia

While most of us may stumble out of bed on a cold Christmas Count morning, Count leaders begin their preparations sometimes weeks in advance.

The 49th Chicago-North Shore Christmas Count will take place December 26, 2009. Anyone wishing to participate this year should contact *Tim Wallace at 847-548-2654*. For the feeder count, contact *Eleonora di Liscia at 847-679-1936*.

Throughout the year, Count organizer Joel Greenberg keeps his eye peeled for possible recruits. Joel has

North Shore Count, not including feeder watchers, which may number another 15 to 20.

The North Shore Count contains approximately nine or ten main target areas and six sub-areas within a 15-mile diameter circle centered on I-94 and Dundee Roads.

"The Circle was moved to take in more of the lakefront," said Joel. "There is a fair amount of the circle in the lake, but we've never gotten anyone with a kayak to do a count."

The North Shore Count customarily takes place on the Saturday between Christmas and New Year's. The day remains constant to avoid conflicts with the many other Illinois counts.

On Count day, leaders track the hours and miles covered by their participants.

"The minimum hours required for a count in temperate latitudes is eight continuous hours, but



Winter Finches - photo by Tim Wallace.

participated in the Count since 1967, missing only one year to go birding in southern Texas (and who can blame him!). Several weeks prior to Count day, Joel contacts the leaders of the various Count areas to see if they have the volunteers needed to cover their territories. If not, Joel calls potential recruits to pitch in. About 30 to 40 birders participate in an average

you have people who start before light to do owling, and people who start out late," said Joel. "Some plant themselves at the lakefront. Some of us stop for lunch, and some of us don't."

At sundown on the Count day, all participants are welcome to a potluck at ENSBC Vice President Libby Hill's home. Jim Ware, ENSBC President for

MAZATLAN'S FIRST BIRDING FESTIVAL

By Dave Johnson

As the snow swirled around, our plane, sprayed and re-colored with de-icer, took off on last January from the only departing runway at O'Hare—leaving a snowstorm and -12 F temperatures behind. Eight ENSBC members headed to bird at Mazatlan's first birding festival in Sinaloa, Mexico. The festival highlighted the very local, highly endemic, Tufted Jay and a newly created Tufted Jay Preserve tucked away in the Sierra Madre mountains at 6800 feet. (Yes, I always think of Humphrey Bogart when mentioning these mountains.)



Mountain Trogon, Tufted Jay Preserve - photo by Rick Sanders.

As our plane descended towards the Mazatlan airport, Wood Storks flew in formation beneath it—a nice start to our birding trip. Once we landed, the group around the rental van quickly found Mangrove Swallows and Sinaloa Crows. Then, we were off to Daniel's hotel at Copola, a small former Mexican mining town at the foothills of the Sierra Madres, for two nights.

From Concordia, we drove east through scrubby thorn forest. Some trees even had trunks covered completely with thorns. Many of the trees were actually large branching cacti. Prickly pear cacti were a major part of the undergrowth. We viewed striking Black-throated Magpie-Jays along the way. These are some of the most spectacular birds we saw. They are blue, white, and black birds about the size of Magpies, with very long tail feathers which flow like streamers behind them as they fly.



Eared Quetzal, Tufted Jay Preserve - photo by Rick Sanders.

The first evening we would tally our first and only Black-vented Orioles, Cinnamon and Beryline Hummingbirds and Greater Pewee around our hotel. The hotel restaurant

Prairie Warbler by Nancy Halliday

WHAT'S IN A COUNT? CONTINUED FROM COVER

1974-75, initiated the evening meal, which he and his wife provided.

"He said, 'I don't want my counters to stop in the middle of the day to prepare a casserole.' So this was a way to make the counters more efficient, so they wouldn't have to spend time preparing food," said Joel.

To ready the meal, Libby inventories paper goods needed for the dinner about a month in advance. She also provides the turkey.

"Many people comment about the irony of us having a turkey. What are we supposed to have? Bison?" Libby said.

At the potluck, leaders call off birds they encountered in a series of four rounds. First round birds might include Mallards or Starlings, while fourth round birds might include Black-crowned Night Herons or Glaucous Gulls.

"We do a round by round count, starting with the most common and then building to the least common birds to get the most suspense," said Joel.

Once the Count is completed, Club President Tim Wallace compiles the data and submits it to the National Audubon Society. Each compiler inputs the data on the NAS website, and then sends the paper documentation to the Illinois Ornithological Society.

"Compiling a CBC is not hard, just time consuming. All the bird info from the various groups involved in the compiler's circle has to be obtained and then put into the format needed by National Audubon, who is responsible for obtaining the info from all over the country and putting it in comprehensible form," said Wallace.

After the bird info is compiled, Wallace must also account for numbers of people and monies paid. Each participant is supposed to contribute \$5.00.

A most unusual Count sighting for the North Shore was a Sage Thrasher in the late 1960's found at Crow Island in Winnetka. Other rarities included Black-backed Woodpecker, Pine Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Virginia Rail and Black-legged Kittiwake.

The North Shore Count boasts the highest total of species in northern Illinois with a total of 91. A blizzard in the early 1970's suppressed Count totals to a low in the 50s.

Some changes over the Count's 49 years include the loss of a favorite conifer tract on Waukegan between Half Day and Old Mill Roads.

Jeff Sanders, who has participated in the Count since 1963 except for two misses, captains the Techny area in Northbrook and a small piece of lakefront. In the last few years,

Sanders has seen most of the Techny area swallowed by development.

Joel recalls an even more surprising turn of events.

"Another big change became apparent on our walk along the west fork of the North branch of the Chicago River from Deerfield to Lake Cook. The river's actual channel was changed. They moved it so they could build houses. In terms of something you don't expect to change, you don't expect a river to change," said Joel.



Common Redpoll - photo by Tim Wallace.

CONSERVATION COLUMN:

COOK COUNTY BOARD SEPARATION: SB-176 BY BRIAN HERRIOTT

The Friends of the Forest Preserves is currently behind an important initiative going before our state government called SB-176. This bill would create a separate 9-person board for the Cook County Forest Preserve, as opposed to the current 17-member board. The current Board now "wears two hats" by also being Cook County Commissioners, which is causing an inherent conflict of interest between what is best for economic development versus what is best for our forest preserves.

The newly elected board would not create a new government entity and shouldn't add any additional costs for the District. The proposal calls for the board to be chosen in non-partisan elections. This new board could more fully comply with its originally stated mission, which is to "protect...and preserve...the flora, fauna, and scenic beauties

within such district." These members would also be unpaid.

In the past, the current board's conflict of interest has resulted in several controversial decisions, including voting to sell 2.4 acres of "non-surplus" land to Rosemont so they could expand the Convention Center. Although the County made \$2.9 million from the deal, the decision went against the Forest Preserve's Land Policy, which forbids the sale of "non-surplus" land. Other decisions include the transfer of funds from the District to the County, and in 2000, the Board granted the Village of Morton Grove a permanent easement over District lands so they could build a highway.

The current Forest Preserve District Board also allocates far too little time to attending their duties. In 2007, the DuPage County

Board of Commissioners met 50 times. The Cook County Forest District Board? 11 times. DuPage County has almost one-third the amount of District land as Cook County, yet they clearly dedicate more time to oversight and management. If a new and separate board were created in Cook County, then the Cook County Commissioners could focus their attention on health and public safety issues, and the Forest Preserve District Board would be able to devote more of their time to managing our forest preserves.

Please visit www.fotfp.org to read more about what you can do to help push this incredibly important bill forward. You can contact your State Senator and urge them to support SB-176. If we can get this to pass, then we can help insure a better future for the birds, which inhabit our forest preserves.

AN APPRECIATION OF THE ORDINARY:

RAY PERSHING

By Eleonora di Liscia

(Bird Calls is beginning a series of profiles on club members. If you would like to nominate someone, please email your suggestion to the editor at diliscialaw@comcast.net. We're looking for unsung heroes as well as good stories.)

Ray Pershing's experience in both watching and carving birds has led him to a greater appreciation for the ordinary. Instead of chasing rarities, Ray has learned to appreciate the birds in his own backyard. Woodcarving has also changed the way Ray looks at birds.

"I've come to appreciate the coloring of the female Wood Duck, the coloring of the Mourning Dove, the feathers of the female Mallard," said Ray. "I use two different parts of my brain, but I've become more aware of feather patterns through the wood carving, than I would as a normal birder. I'm looking at more things than the color. I think a great way to study a bird is to take black and white pictures."

Ray began birding after seeing an Indigo Bunting, but that wasn't the bird that hooked him.

"Barbara and I were driving through the states with a camper, and I became more aware of the different birds in the different areas," Ray recalled. One day, I was in Riding Mountain National Park in Canada, and I heard a beautiful song. All I could see were some cruddy-looking sparrows. Later,

I asked the ranger what the song was, and she told me 'White-throated Sparrow.' And I said, 'You mean there's more than one kind?' And I was hooked."

After several years of making toys and furniture with a table saw, Ray decided to combine his two hobbies. The first bird he carved was the rough shape of a Bufflehead. Since then, he has created Chickadees, Mallards, Screech Owls and shorebirds. Ray usually just displays his birds, but sometimes gives them as gifts or trades them for other artwork.

"Bird watching keeps me in touch with nature, the changing of the seasons. Through woodcarving, I get the joy of creating something," he said.



Ray Pershing with carvings - photo by Tim Wallace.

A member of ENSBC since the mid 70s, Ray served a short time on the Board. He joined the club because he wanted to meet more birders. Some of his favorite trips have been club-sponsored such as one to Point Pelee.

Ray has also taken trips to Israel, Belize, Mexico and London as well as around the United States. One solo trip to Park City, Utah yielded a surprising encounter.

"I was birding in the Park City area looking for a Black-headed Grosbeak, and a jogger kept passing me by, which I ignored. I was on a switchback trail, so I would take my car and block the driveways of all the residences and stay within eyesight of the car. Two men came jogging behind me. There I was standing with my binoculars, camera, long lenses, and they asked me from behind, 'May I help you?' I answered 'I'm looking for the Black-headed Grosbeak.' They broke up laughing. I turned around. It was Robert Redford. He said, 'Do you know you're on private property?' I was so embarrassed. I said, 'I guess I should leave.' And he continued jogging."





C A L E N D A R

FIELD TRIPS

Sunday, January 24, 2010
Eagles, Eagles, Eagles!

Reservations with the leader required by January 18, 2010! View all ages of bald eagles at Lock and Dam 13 on the Mississippi River. Additional areas will be visited to see a variety of duck and other winter birds. Carpooling is encouraged! Leader: Tim Wallace, tgwdvm@aol.com, 847-548-2654.



Bald Eagle - photos by Tim Wallace.

CHRISTMAS COUNTS

Sunday, January 24, 2010

12/20/09 44th Chicago Urban Count, contact *Jeff Sanders, 847-657-6431*

12/25/09 Chicago Lakefront Count, contact *Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416*

12/26/09 49th Chicago-North Shore Count, contact *Tim Wallace, 847-548-2654* for the field; *Eleonora di Liscia 847-679-1936* for feeder watchers.

1/1/10 Waukegan Count. Contact *Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416*

PROGRAM NIGHTS

All programs are held at Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd. For directions to programs on meeting nights, call the Ecology Center, 847-448-8256.

Tuesday, January 26, 2010, 7:30PM

The Evanston North Shore Bird Club Program: History of Bird Photography. Bird Club President Dr. Tim Wallace is a superb bird photographer who has assembled a large collection of books that illustrates how bird photography has evolved over the years. He will show amazing shots taken by the early practitioners and tell the equally amazing stories that are associated with the images.

Tuesday, February 23, 2010, 7:30PM

The Evanston North Shore Bird Club Program: The Natural History of Madagascar The Bird Club's own Josh Engel, now an international bird tour leader, takes us on a virtual trip to one of his favorite places: Madagascar, rightly called one of the world's best natural history destinations. Not only are half of all of its birds found nowhere else in the world (some 120 endemic species), but the same goes for every one of its terrestrial mammals, nearly all of its reptiles and amphibians, and a majority of its 10000 plant species. This lavishly illustrated talk will survey the incredible diversity of habitats on the Red Island, from the desert-like spiny forest to the rainforest, focusing in particular on the island's incredible birdlife, spectacular mammals, and bizarre reptiles and amphibians.

MAZATLAN CONTINUED FROM COVER

provided—with no arm twisting--a banana coconut pie that you could die for! As Gary put it, the accommodations are simple, the nights are very dark and starry, and the village itself seems a bit like a campground after dark. There is a surplus of noise during the night: truck engine-breaking on the nearby highway, donkeys braying and roosters crowing.

Day 2. We drove up early to the Tufted Jay Preserve or Barranca Rancho Liebre and birded at the preserve for about eight hours but we failed to turn up any Tufted Jays. Jayless we descended down the mountains back to our Hotel.

Day 3. We spent the morning birding Panuco Road near Copala. We had spectacular views of Military Macaws, Yellow-winged Caciques, a female Elegant Trogon, Rufous-backed Robins, Sinaloa Wren and a delightful Squirrel Cuckoo. Back in Copala, we visited the local square shops and church dating back to the 1400s. The town was quite birdy with Grayish Saltator, Lucy's Warbler, Rufous-bellied Chachalacas, Mexican Parrolets, Summer Tanager, Yellow Grosbeak being tallied.

Day 4. This was our first festival day. We toured a private ranch north of Mazatlan at Mesa de Cacaxtla. Perhaps the highlight was the Citrolene Trogon.

Day 5. We toured Deer Island in the Pacific across from our Hotel. We dipped on our target bird of Five-striped Sparrow but saw many Groove-billed Anis and hundreds of Brown and Blue-footed Boobies along with Magnificent Frigatebirds. The best bird was a Zone-tailed Hawk we saw on our return to the harbor.

Day 6. Half our group returned to the Tufted Jay Preserve where we were lucky enough this time to spot three Tufted Jays near the cabins.

Day 7 and 8. The festival ended on Tuesday and we were on our own for some local color and culture. Most interesting was the totally refurbished Mazatlan theater. One just had to see the photos of the place in ruins with trees growing up inside the stage—to appreciate what was done to restore this palacial theater in the downtown district. We ended the tour with 229 species!

Of course, we all wish to return to Mexico—a delightful birding country with so much to offer! I am told there is a 2nd Mazatlan Birding Festival in January 2011!

NEWS OF THE FLOCK

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER:

Sandy Swanson - Evanston

EDITOR'S NOTES

BIRD CALLS NEEDS YOUR HELP!

Got a good Christmas Count story?
Send it to Bird Calls at diliscialaw@comcast.net.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

will be back next issue with The War Years.