

# Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

DECEMBER 2010 [www.ensbc.org](http://www.ensbc.org)



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

## WHY CHRISTMAS COUNTS MATTER

By Eleonora di Liscia

If you've ever braved winter weather to participate in a Christmas Count, you might have felt your efforts were in vain. Yet every piece of data you contribute has huge policy implications for our feathered friends.

ENSBC members can join their pick of Christmas Counts on December 19th, 25th, 26th or January 1st. See Calendar on Page 4 for details.

After you participate in a count, a compiler collects your data and submits it on line to the National Audubon Society (NAS). Once each compiler has checked that their submission is complete, a regional editor reviews that count. Our regional editor is Paul Sweet.

"One person cannot accurately review every Christmas Count submitted from the Arctic through South America, so I have a team of about 45 to 50 Christmas Bird Count regional editors to review counts for me for accuracy and completeness," said Geoffrey S. LeBaron, Director of Christmas Bird Count Program for the National Audubon Society.

To insure accuracy, regional editors use a series of comment codes to flag species that do not seem to fit their count regions. If a sighting seems poorly documented or unlikely, the editor can mark it as "QU" for questionable or "OU" for origin unknown. If they believe the record is accurate, they can flag "ED" for excellent details, said LeBaron. These codes are essential for researchers.

"If a researcher wants data for Prairie Falcons in Illinois, for example, at the edge of their range, Prairie Falcon is a real hard call. They need good documentation. If it's a QU or OU, a researcher might not want to use that record," said LeBaron.



AMERICAN TREE SPARROW  
Photo by Tim Wallace

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## BARRINGTON WOMAN STARTS LOCAL SUET BUSINESS

By Eleonora di Liscia

A former engineer suffering from Lyme's disease, Armida Rebecca (Becky) Mench found watching the birds at her South Barrington backyard feeder to be a saving grace, both aiding her health and soothing her soul. Eventually the backyard birds led Becky to make her own suet, and her business Pileated Pride was born.



ARMIDA REBECCA MENCH  
packages her homestyle suet.  
Photo by Eleonora di Liscia

Pileated Pride produces natural, home-style suet cakes. Becky also sells suet cages and seed hoops which help catch excess seeds under feeders. The cakes are available by the case on-line with free delivery in the Chicago area, or you can find them at the Arlington Heights or Glenview Wild Birds Unlimited. Additional outlets and information are listed on Becky's website at [www.homestylesuet.com](http://www.homestylesuet.com).

Becky began making suet after reading that home-made suet was less likely to leave oil on a bird's feathers. Unable to find a suet cake to her liking, Becky created her own dough. Working in her basement with tubs of ingredients, Becky microwaves rendered pork fat, then mixes in peanut butter, cornmeal, oats, peanuts, sunflower hearts and flour.

"Especially in the winter when I didn't have time

*continued on pg. 3*



**The Evanston North Shore Bird Club now has a Facebook page.** Members who have a Facebook account can join by clicking "Like" at the top of the page. Once you have joined, you can post notes and share photos on the page. You can also get notices of upcoming field trips and meetings. For more information, you can contact Gary Hantsbarger at [ghantsbarger@yahoo.com](mailto:ghantsbarger@yahoo.com).

## CHRISTMAS COUNTS CONTINUED FROM COVER

But even questionable records can prove valuable.

“What happened a number of years ago is that people on the Gulf Coast and in other areas were sending in reports that they were seeing Garganeys. Some years later, researchers went back and discovered a real pattern of vagrancy. There is a very good reason for leaving records in the data base that you are not sure about, so that’s what the comment codes are for,” said LeBaron.

When all regional editors have completed their review, the Count can then be finalized. Members of the general public or light researchers can access data for each current year count individually, or through historical results summaries which have been weighted for number of participants and hours of effort. More serious researchers, such as ornithologists and government agencies, can request the raw data directly from NAS, said LeBaron.

NAS itself uses count data to analyze long term range shifting and long term trends for a given species. This year, NAS will focus on a subset of this data in light of the Gulf Oil disaster. Gulf Coast compilers will need to turn data in quickly so that this information can be included along with the past several years’ data from Gulf Coast Christmas Bird Counts in an initial analysis of the oil spill’s impact.

NAS also uses count information in Birds and Climate Change, a large



PURPLE SANDPIPER Photo by Tim Wallace



AMERICAN BALD EAGLE Photo by Tim Wallace

scale analysis of bird ranges over time. The study has documented northward shifts in the range of some species of more than 200 miles. Christmas Count data are also combined with the Breeding Bird Survey to derive the WatchList, which flags species on the decline.

For more ways that Christmas Counts matter, read below:

### BECAUSE YOU WENT OUT:

- \* Scientists were alerted to a sharp decline in the raptor population leading to the discovery that DDT caused eggshell and nest failure.
- \* Scientists were able to track the recovery of the Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon after DDT was eliminated.
- \* Scientists were able to document the decline of the Eastern Meadowlark, Field Sparrow, Northern Pintail, Snow Bunting and Common Grackle, to name just a few.
- \* Scientists were able to track the colonization of the Eurasian Collared Dove and the spread of the House Finch through the eastern United States.
- \* Scientists were able to quickly document the impact of West Nile Virus.
- \* Scientists were able to track irruptive species such as Common Redpoll and White-winged Crossbill.
- \* The data you collected prompted Congress to pass the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.
- \* The US Environmental Protection Agency looks at CBC data as one of 24 major indicators of climate change.

Because you went out, tomorrow’s world may be a little brighter place. Brave the cold and make a difference.

# ARTIFICIAL LIGHT AND ITS DELETERIOUS EFFECT ON BIRD BEHAVIOR By Lloyd Davidson

The widespread killing of migrating birds caused by their collisions with lighted buildings is well documented. Indeed, for a remarkable illustration of the effects on bright lights on migrating birds, look at the video on this web site that shows thousands of birds trapped in the spot lights used to commemorate the destruction of the Twin Towers in NYC: <http://tinyurl.com/LightTrappedBirds>.

However, this is only one of the many ways in which artificial light can affect bird behavior and other effects are now being discovered. For example, a recent German study\* has shown that male birds that live near street lights begin singing an hour or more earlier than do those that live in dark areas and females that live near streetlights lay their eggs on average a day and half earlier than their dark area counterparts. Furthermore, those males that live near lights are more successful in attracting “extra-pair mates,” meaning that they more frequently sired offspring with females other than their primary social partners. Such an artificially gained breeding advantage can override normal fitness tests and lead to weaker males gaining a reproductive edge, consequently leading to poorer quality offspring. Increased frequency of mating may not even be good for these males, since it requires additional energy that might be better spent in searching for food for their own chicks.

Such light pollution affects other species as well, of course, including insects, a major food source for birds, which get trapped by the millions in street and other lights and die without reproducing.

Indeed, artificial light can have harmful effects on the natural world around us in general and affects not just birds and insects but fish, amphibians, bats and other mammals, as well as plants.

Luckily, there is an organization in Illinois that is doing battle against the more egregious forms of artificial lighting, the Illinois Coalition for Responsible Outdoor Lighting [www.illinoislighting.org/nature.html](http://www.illinoislighting.org/nature.html).

They strongly urge that all household exterior lighting be on motion sensors rather than being on all of the time and that it be focused downward toward the area intended to be illuminated rather than allowing it to leak upwards, where it is wasted and is more likely to affect birds. This also allows the use of a lower wattage light bulb as all the light is directed to where it is needed with little waste. Closing drapes or shades after dark is also important.

Other suggestions for what can be done to improve artificial lighting in general to make it more environmentally responsible can be found at their web site.

Many of our technologies inadvertently harm nature. It is up to us to see to it that such adverse effects are reduced to an absolute minimum.

\* Bart Kempenaers, Pernilla Borgström, Peter Loës, Emmi Schlicht, and Mihai Valcu. **Artificial Night Lighting Affects Dawn Song, Extra-Pair Siring Success, and Lay Date in Songbirds.** *Current Biology*, 2010; DOI: 10.1016/j.cub.2010.08.028

## BARRINGTON WOMAN CONTINUED FROM COVER

to go to the market, I had to put out greasy cakes, and I felt guilty because the birds didn't like it," Becky said.

Becky notes that these cakes are not for human consumption, a warning she is advised to give after a friend's hungry house-guest opened the refrigerator one night and devoured half a suet cake. He fortunately suffered no ill effects.

At first, Becky made several dozen cakes, giving some to friends. "But then people would say, 'Becky do you have some more?'" she said.

So she started the business, which enables her to work within the limitations of her Lyme's disease. The business officially opened on August 13, 2010 after a difficult testing process.

"I didn't realize how much effort it was to get the license," she said. "You have to have your suet tested for grade analyses of fiber, fat, protein and water. Every time I got it back, the results fluctuated because they only test one gram at a time. You have to have it tested over and over"

Becky also worked to make sure her packaging was environmentally friendly. For example, she uses soy-based inks.

"My main goal is to make sure I always have a high quality product," she said.

Becky named the business Pileated Pride after her mother in Florida called to report a Pileated Woodpecker at one of Becky's suet cakes.



MENCH'S HOME IS A CERTIFIED WILDLIFE HABITAT.

Photo by Eleonora di Liscia



**PROGRAM NIGHTS**

Club programs are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at the Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd., Evanston.

**Jan. 25, 2011 – Joel Greenberg:  
“Of Birds and Murder: The Life of Nathan Leopold.”**

Of all the people born in the United States who studied birds, Nathan Leopold is arguably the most famous. Unfortunately, Nathan’s fame rests on his participation with Richard Loeb in the 1924 murder of young Bobby Franks. All previous accounts have glossed over Leopold’s passion for birds. This talk emphasizes Leopold’s ornithological work, which did influence aspects of the crime and facilitated his arrest. He was eventually paroled and served at a hospital in Puerto Rico, where he published “The Birds of Puerto Rico.”

**Feb. 22, 2011 – Matthew Cvetas: “Birding goes high-tech.”**  
Matthew covers the wealth of resources available to birders on the internet and via technology.

**FIELD TRIPS**

**Early February 2011**

Elgin/Hampshire Area. Tour the fields and dairy farms for Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings. A date will be set closer to February. Check [ensbc.org](http://ensbc.org) or IBET for the date and meeting location. Leaders: Sulli Gibson and Dick Paulson.

**February 19, 2011 – Saturday, 8:00 AM**

**10th Annual IOS Gull Frolic.** Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club. Preregistration required and limited to first 150 people. Contact Brian at [wrybill@sbcglobal.net](mailto:wrybill@sbcglobal.net) to register and for further information.

**CHRISTMAS COUNTS**

**December 19, 2010 – Sunday**

Chicago Urban Christmas Count 45th Chicago Urban Count. Compiler: Jeff Sanders, 847-657-6431.

**December 25, 2010 – Saturday**

Chicago Lakefront Christmas Count Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416

**December 26, 2010 – Sunday**

50th Chicago North Shore Christmas Count. Compiler, Tim Wallace, 847-548-2654 or [tgwdvm@aol.com](mailto:tgwdvm@aol.com). For the Feeder Count, contact compiler Eleonora di Liscia at 847-679-1936 or [diliscialaw@comcast.net](mailto:diliscialaw@comcast.net). All counters are invited to the post-Countdown potluck at Libby Hill’s home, 2715 Woodland Road in Evanston, 847-475-2096 or [libbyhill@comcast.net](mailto:libbyhill@comcast.net). Contact Libby for directions and dishes to bring.

**January 1, 2011 – Saturday**

Waukegan Christmas Count. Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.

# MALLARD MADNESS

By Eleonora di Liscia

I was cleaning inside my house after Christmas, when I heard persistent quacking coming from my backyard. I rushed to the window, and sure enough, there was a flock of mallards standing in a circle outside. First, I would hear them grunting and then they would explode with “Whaack! Whaack! Whaack! Whaack!”

As I listened closer to the grunting, I realized they were telling jokes.

“...and then he said, ‘One good tern deserves another!’”

“Whaack! Whaack! Whaack! Whaack!”

“Get it. Tern, turn. Whaack! Whaack! Whaack!”

“I got one! I got one!” quacked another Mallard. “There was this Pied-billed Grebe and when he dove for a fish, this Merganser got it first. ‘I beg your pardon,’ said the Grebe. ‘But that is my fish.’ The Merganser said, ‘So sorry, I did not realize it was your fish, but I have already eaten it.’ ‘Well, I never...’, said the Grebe. And the Merganser said, ‘Well, it was an accident, and you needn’t be so aggreded.’”

“Whaack! Whaack! Whaack! Whaack! Whaack!”

“Grebe! Aggreded! Whaack! Whaack! Whaack!”

As awful as the joke was, it was still pretty funny coming from a bunch of mallards, so even I had to laugh. That drew the Mallards’ attention.

“Why don’t you tell one,” they said.

“I guess that’s fair enough,” I replied. “I don’t know any good jokes, but I can think of a funny story. It isn’t mine. Our club member, Mary Singh said it, but it was really hysterical. Just broke our whole club right up that night.”

“That sounds good,” said one of the Mallards. “Please proceed.”

“Well, the bird club was having a program night about gulls. And the program speaker was saying how you could tell Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls by their mirror spots, you know those white spots on the tips of their wings. And then he was saying how gulls might mix flocks during the winter, but they separate themselves during breeding season. So someone asked, ‘How do they know which ones are which?’ And Mary said...”

The memory of this started cracking me up, so I had to catch my breath before continuing. ‘And Mary said, ‘That’s why they have mirror spots!’”

At which point, I started rolling on the floor, beside myself. That Mary was so witty. I wished I had come up with that one. Then I realized the Mallards were just staring at me. “Don’t you get it? They look at the mirror spots...”

“Nope,” said one Mallard sternly. “Not funny.”

“Not funny at all,” said another.

“In bad taste, really. Gulls are no joke.”

“No, they’re just plain rude. Let’s go.”

And with that, they all took off. I guess it was funnier when Mary said it.



MALLARD PHOTO  
BY TIM WALLACE