

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

February 2010 www.ensbc.org



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

FROM THE ARCHIVES: THE WAR YEARS: 1940-1945

(In celebration of ENSBC's 90th anniversary, Bird Calls will run a series taking a look back.)
By Eleonora di Liscia

The war-years Evanston Bird Club continued to expand, adding programs, field trips and committees, despite shortages caused by World War II.

The decade sadly began with the death, after a month's illness, of Mrs. Frederic (Bertha Trace) Pattee, founder and virtual mother of the Club. Married in 1899, Mrs. Pattee was probably at least age 70 when she died. After sifting through two decades of archives dominated by Mrs. Pattee, including a 1930s photo of her in her cloche hat, I was literally brought to tears upon coming across a note in her very own hand thanking the bird club for Chrysanthemums sent to her in September, 1939. Also moving was the original note written upon her death by Mr. Fredric Pattee, quotes from which appear on our website.

The Bird Club has been blessed with a history of able women, and Mrs. Pattee's successor, Mrs. J. Benton (Mary Hall) Schaub was no exception. Mrs. Schaub herself volunteered as a bird bander, banding 500 to 800 birds each year in her backyard sanctuary, according to the Evanston News Index, July 23, 1940:

"Banding has done a great deal for the conservation of birds, according to Mrs. Schaub. For instance, a few years ago, by checking reports of banded birds, it was seen that blue birds (sic) were becoming almost

extinct in Illinois because of the demolition of their natural nesting places."

Mrs. Schaub perhaps exceeded Mrs. Pattee's feverish pace of lecturing to schools and community groups. In one Club meeting, she pointedly refused to put a motion reimbursing her expenses up for a vote.

The 1940s Club started the decade by going farther afield than the usual Harms Woods jaunts. The first trip of 1940 was to the Eustice Estate in Barrington. Members were to meet at the end of the Evanston Bus Line on Central and Ridge. Transportation would be arranged for those without cars.

The May walks in Harms Woods, a club fixture since nearly the beginning, gave way to a new destination: the Church Street Forest Preserve.

The Club weighed in on national affairs. The Club protested a bill before Congress that would allow live decoys "which would be disastrous to water fowl."

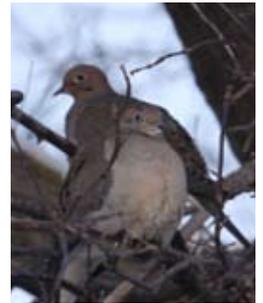
The World War II years made its own impact on the Club. From the 1942-43 Annual Report: "The number of bird walks and the mileage entailed in reaching our destinations were reduced because of the gas and tire situation."

In 1944, "the gas situation became most acute. To go regularly to Church Street was out of the question. Some of our members were too busy in

CHRISTMAS COUNT

By Eleonora di Liscia

A White Christmas may make a beautiful holiday, but a less than ideal Christmas Count. For the second year in a row, Christmas Count totals were suppressed by the weather, according to Joel Greenberg, a Count organizer for the Dec. 25 Chicago Lakefront Count, Dec. 26th Evanston North Shore count and the Jan. 1st Waukegan Count.



Cold Mourning Doves
photo by Tim Wallace

"The Counts were rough. It rained all the 25th. That night it got cooler and snowed all day on the 26th. And on the 1st, heavenly incontinence ended, but it was brutally cold," said Joel.

The Evanston North Shore count ended up with approximately 60 species, barely topping last year's count of 58, when it rained all day. A more typical year might average 70 to 75 species.

"Where it impacted most was for those parties on the lakefront. If you're walking in the woods, you can see close up, but if you're on the lakefront, low visibility prevents you from picking out a Long-tailed Duck or a White-winged Scoter," said Joel. "And the discomfort of being wet and cold keeps people from being out as much as they normally would. They might bird from the car or stop for lunch. You're not going to bird as vigilantly as if the weather were better."

This year's highlights included American Pipits, seen on all three counts. Three north shore teams turned up Eastern Bluebirds.



Cedar Waxwing
by Tim Wallace

"One of the better birds on the North Shore count was a Rusty Blackbird seen in a backyard by Dick Young and his team," said Joel.

While last year featured an abundance of irruptive winter finches such as Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins,

FROM THE ARCHIVES: THE WAR YEARS CONTINUED FROM COVER

war work to attend bird walks at all. The outlook was discouraging. But we found a way to solve the gas problem. We went to the cemeteries and to the gravel pits. Some of us have become so accustomed to "birding" in a cemetery that in our search for the living, we entirely forget we are in the city of the dead," wrote club secretary Grace M. Braden in May, 1945.

In some ways, the War benefited the Club. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife service moved from Washington to Chicago bringing Philip DuMont, an active Club member and speaker. For the November 30, 1945 program night, ex-marine William Beecher showed slides he had taken while stationed in the Solomon Islands during the early days of the war.

Despite War shortages, the Club did attend the annual COS walk to the Waukegan Flats. "We Evanston Bird Clubbers walked meekly in the presence of these more expert field trippers," wrote Mrs. Braden. "To be sure we did not know how to treat Mr. Harry Smith,

whether to ignore him haughtily as a mere member of our own group, or to act reverently toward him as President" of the COS. One COS member found an Upland Plover.

"But we contributed to the glory of the occasion. The most unusual bird of the day was first spotted by the writer of these notes. Bertha Huxford and I were wandering over the sands of the Waukegan Flats when we saw a pair of birds flying about in the distance. One was our common kingbird; the other was similar but of a soft grey color. Memories of a bird seen on the western Kansas plains hurried me on. It couldn't be! Oh, for a good look! It will fly away before I'm sure and I'll never know. We scuttled across the sand. 'There is yellow on that breast!' I appealed to Bertha's quicker eyes. 'See if there is white along the sides of the tail as it flies. Do not fail me!'"

That bird turned out to be a Western Kingbird.



Ring-billed Gulls by Tim Wallace

THE PURPLE MARTIN MARAUDER OF EVANSTON, IL BY TOM MCMAHON

"There's a hawk on the Martin house!"

In the twenty years we have been Purple Martin landlords here on the shore of Lake Michigan, we have never seen that. So we were unprepared on July 22, 2009 to see a law of nature flung in our face, especially since the victims were treasured summer visitors.

Initially, we were awed by the presence and beauty of the hawk. Its size, its white breast and black stripes, its red tail, its piercing eyes, all gave it a fearsome, yet ghostly appearance.

But soon the resident Martins began dive-bombing the hawk, and this triggered us to action. Ann ran to get Sibley. I ran toward the Martin house.

The closer I got, the slower I moved. "That is one big bird. With big talons. And it is looking right at me."

Ann shouted that it was probably a Red-tailed. "OK.... But it's big, and looking right at me!"

The hose was nearby with a jet nozzle, so I edged closer and squirted it, and it flew away.

Unfortunately, it flew next door to our neighbor's Martin house. We thought all the chicks there had fledged. But the hawk stood quietly on the roof of the house, listening. Shortly, it heard what it wanted.

It methodically attacked. It found the compartment and found footing. Then it slashed a claw into the compartment.



Red-tailed Hawk Clutching Purple Martin
by Tom McMahon

There was a lot of flapping around. But the hawk quickly succeeded, plucking out a large chick from the upper right compartment.

The marauder then flapped its way to the top of the house. Where it ate the chick alive.

We had neither the time nor inclination to get close enough to interfere. I was able to take some photos, which show a scene both beautiful and gruesome. And they show, oddly enough, that the hawk had a band on its right leg.

The next day, July 23, the marauder came back and took a chick from our house, flew to a nearby tree and ate the chick alive.

The hawk returned again on July 26, but by then, all the Martins had gone.

For more photos, see <http://picasaweb.google.com/tomdunes/HawkAttacksPurpleMartinHouseEvanstonIllinois#>

CHRISTMAS COUNT CONTINUED FROM COVER

this year winter finches were completely absent. American Crows seemed to be slightly up along with Blue Jays, although Jays can be cyclical depending on acorn crops. Feeder counts showed Black-capped Chickadees maintaining their comeback.

Monk Parakeets appeared on both the North Shore count and at an Evanston feeder. The Waukegan count located an Eastern Towhee and a Bonaparte's Gull. One lakefront highlight was a male Harlequin duck.

Bad weather might have driven some species south as the Waukegan Count tallied both Rough-legged Hawks and a Bald Eagle, said Joel.

GRATING GRACKLES By Eleonora di Liscia

I was filling my backyard feeders in the fall, when a Tennessee Warbler abruptly flew in and chirped to a Pine Warbler: "Some of the Grackles are headed this way. You might want to get out now."

"Thanks for the warning," replied the Pine.

I was perplexed by this exchange. "Just a moment, Mr. Pine Warbler," I said. "Why must you run from the Grackles?"

For a moment, the Warbler did not respond. He looked around the yard as though expecting someone else to answer, then tapped a wing against his chest. "Pardon, but were you talking to me?"

I nodded. He glared. "I am a Black-poll, not a Pine. I would have thought that was obvious," he said.

I reddened. "I'm sorry. You do look similar this time of year."

The Blackpoll looked skeptical. I could swear he muttered, "Like, hardly. Idiot birders."

I chose to ignore the comment. "Why must you run from the Grackles?"

"It's just that no one can stand them," said the Blackpoll. "All they do is brag, brag, brag. A Grackle will say, 'Do I look fat?' But all he wants to hear is: 'No, you're perfect.'"

Just then, some Grackles flew in by my birdbath. "Here we go," said the Warbler.

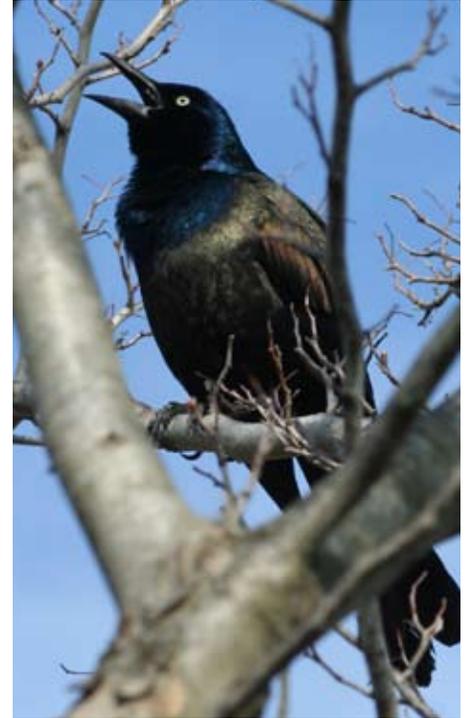
One Grackle appeared to admire himself in the water. "I just molted some feathers. Do I look drab?"

"Oh God, no," said a second. "You always look fantastic. I'm the drab one."

"Au contraire. You're stunning. I wish I could look that good."

"Oh, but you do..." This went on for some time until the conversation turned to migration.

"I hope we have a good fall trip," sighed a Grackle. "To come here, I had to fly over Texas through a storm." continued on pg 4



"Bragging Grackle" by Tim Wallace



Great Blue Heron
roosts at Almond Marsh
by Tim Wallace

ALMOND MARSH HERON ROOKERY BY BRIAN HERRIOTT

Last winter, the Lake County Forest Preserve District, in coordination with the Lake County Audubon Society, installed a single artificial Heron nesting platform at the Almond Marsh Forest Preserve Rookery. After noticing a consistent decline in the breeding population of the Great Blue Herons that nest atop the marsh's dead Cottonwoods, a small group of volunteers showed up on a brutally cold day last year to erect the platform. The platform had to be installed when the marsh was frozen enough to support the volunteers' weight. Their efforts were well rewarded this past summer when five Great Blue Herons successfully fledged.

Fast forward to 2010. The Forest Preserve has agreed to erect another 11 nesting platforms in the marsh after witnessing the proven success of the initial platform. As of this writing, Lake County Audubon is currently seeking volunteers to help install these platforms sometime in late January or early February. The date is not firm since work is dependent on the amount of ice in the marsh. If interested in helping out, please contact audbirds@aol.com or phone (847) 362-5134 to volunteer. The work may

be completed by the time this article is printed, but feel free to contact them regardless.

If you're interested in viewing the Rookery during the spring/summer, Lake County Audubon arranges visits on Saturday mornings from April to June. The marsh is located behind a forest preserve management building, and the only access is from their parking lot. In an urban environment with limited natural areas, this project is making a positive difference in our local Great Blue Heron population and shows what can come from volunteers willing to sacrifice some sweat and time to give back to the birds they have come to admire.

Almond Marsh is located in central Lake County near Grayslake. The entrance to the Planning, Conservation and Development office (including the Natural Resource division) is on the west side of Almond Road, north of Casey Road and south of Route 120 in Grayslake. The parking area is open weekdays only during regular business hours. Please visit www.lcfd.org and search under Preserves & Facilities for more information on Almond Marsh.

PROGRAM NIGHTS

All programs are held at the Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd, Evanston

Tuesday, February 23, 2010, 7:30PM

Birding Jackson Park: Paul Clyne knows the birds of Jackson Park better than anyone, and in a rare north side appearance, he shares his knowledge and experiences birding this remarkable park on Chicago's south side. Designed by Fredrick Olmstead as the setting of the 1893 Columbian Exposition, this park consisting of woods, grasslands, and lagoons is one of the great birding locations in the region. And Paul has studied its avian life with meticulous care, amassing detailed notes of his decades of birding here. His insights and anecdotes will provide the perfect tonic for those who can't wait for the start of spring migration.

Tuesday, March 23, 2010, 7:30PM

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 the equally amazing stories that are associated with the images.

FIELD TRIPS

Saturday, February 20, 2010

9th Annual Gull Frolic at Winthrop Harbor

Saturday, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club at the end of 7th Street near Skipper Buds. Bring loaves of bread to chum for gulls. Lots of gulls, and lots of people. This year, COS is sponsoring a program on "Slaty-backed Gull Identification" by Alvaro Jaramillo, at 11am. The \$10 registration fee includes a breakfast of muffins, doughnuts, fruit, coffee and tea, the traditional lunch of the world famous Sea Gull Stew, Vegetarian Chili, pizza, a drink, salad, and dessert. The fee will help defray facility expenses. Any surplus will go to the IOS Grant Program to benefit Illinois birds and birding. Free coffee, tea and hot chocolate will be available all day. Sponsor: Illinois Ornithological Society. Contact Brian Herriott at wrybill@sbcglobal.net or visit www.illinoisbirds.org for registration and more information.

FIELD TRIPS

(CONTINUED)

March 20, 2010 - Saturday

1st Annual Memorial Ralph Herbst Duck Trip. Bird the lakes and ponds of the Palos region. NEW TRIP! Target species: a variety of spring waterfowl. Meet at 7:30 a.m. From I-55, exit south onto US Rte. 45/LaGrange Rd. Head straight south to the McGinnis Slough parking lot on the west side of LaGrange Rd. Leader: Jeff Sanders.

Saturday, April 3, 2010, 9:00AM

Looney Trip, Lake County

A Dave Johnson specialty. Loads of loons and lots of lakes. Expect other birds as well. Meet at IL Beach State Park. From Sheridan Rd. follow Wadsworth Rd. east into the park and follow signs to the IL Beach Resort and Conference Center. Park in the northernmost parking lot. Leader: David B. Johnson, djohnsoda@comcast.net.

Sunday, April 11, 2010, 7:30AM

Waukegan and Illinois Beach State Park

Meet at McDonald's at Rt. 132 and Sheridan Rd. in Waukegan to see a variety of land and lake migrants. Leaders: Ari Rice and Joel Greenberg, ckerchmar@earthlink.net.

Saturday, April 17, 2010, 8:00AM

North Glenview

A tour through the better birding areas that North Glenview has to offer by local birder, Sulli Gibson. We will most likely bird Techny Basin Conservation Area, Lake Glenview, and The Air Station Prairie for early migrants and lingering waterfowl. Techny Basin is located west of Waukegan Rd., south of Willow Rd., and east of Ravine Way in Glenview. Meet at the gravel parking lot on Ravine Way. The trip will last approximately 3.5 hours but you are welcome to leave at any time. Leader: Sulli Gibson, sulli.gibson@comcast.net.

GRATING GRACKLES CONTINUED FROM PG 3

"Only a storm," said another Grackle. "I flew through a hurricane."

"Try doing that with a hawk on your tail," said a third.

"I was so jazzed that I just flew straight from Texas to Canada during a tornado with a hawk and an eagle on my tail," said a fourth.

Behind me, I swear the Blackpoll sighed. Then, he flew to a perch above the birdbath. "Hey, Grackles! I'm about to go through another 96-hour nonstop over the Atlantic. You ever do one of those?"

A cold silence suddenly descended upon the previously noisy group. Finally, one

of the Grackles glared at the Blackpoll. "You're a Warbler. Nobody cares."

If it were possible, the Blackpoll rolled his eyes, before flying away.

"He's a rather drab fellow," said a Grackle. "Don't you love how these new brassy highlights shine through my primaries?"

"Oh, yes. But I think mine are just a tinge brighter..."

Now, I rolled my eyes and went inside. I was beginning to see the Blackpoll's point.

EDITOR'S NOTES

Superb wildlife artist and ENSBC Board member, Nancy Halliday, was not satisfied with how her Prairie Warbler looked on our masthead, so she generously created a Northern Shrike as a replacement. Special thank you to Nancy for helping to beautify our newsletter.

As Feeder Count compiler, I would like to thank everyone who participated in the Evanston North Shore Feeder Count. Your notes and photos accompanying your checklist are always appreciated. Thank you also to the anonymous person who pointed out the mistake in my dates. Thanks to you, we were able to catch the error before the Bird Calls went to the press and the website.