

Bird Calls



Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

Summer 2009 ensbc.org

FROM THE ARCHIVES: BEGINNINGS: THE 1920s

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

Evanston News-Index, March 6, 1919:

"The first meeting of the new Evanston Bird Club occurs tonight at the Roycemore gymnasium, when the formal organization will be completed. The promoters of the new enterprise invite and urge the attendance of everyone who has any interest in birds—whether sentimental, scientific or economic—and hope that a large proportion of those who attend will become charter members of the club. The annual dues for active membership have been made the nominal sum of fifty cents, so that no one may be excluded because of expense."

And with that began the seeds of the Club we know today.

In its early years, the Club generally featured an annual spring program night and some limited local bird walks. In its first year, the new club's roster numbered about sixty members, including the Garden Club. Meeting minutes noted that Mr. Glen Buck made "the generous contribution of \$100.00." (Current ENSBC members might feel free to emulate Mr. Glen Buck's fine example!)

The club's first "entertainment" was an illustrated talk on wild flowers and birds by Mr. Jesse Smith: "Mr. Smith's pictures, many of them the product of his own camera, are especially charming and excite enthusiasm," promised the Club's announcement. Mr. Smith's photos were shown in stereopticon. The

stereopticon, or stereoscope, used two photos at slightly different angles to give depth to a photo.

The April 26, 1919 program featured American Bird Life in Motion Pictures by Norman McClintock, "Expert Motion Picture Photographer." "Motion pictures of birds are comparatively new, and Mr. McClintock's films represent the highest achievement in this photographic art," read newspaper copy.

Not just concerned with enjoying birds, the Club also made pleas on their behalf. A spring storm prompted the Evanston News-Index April 16, 1921 to publish President, Mrs. F.H. Pattee's appeal to feed the birds: "This is just the critical time when wild birds need assistance...Owing to the unusual mild weather for April they have arrived in greater numbers than usual both resident and migrant birds. Many will die of starvation during such a storm as today's if help is not forthcoming."

For the May 15, 1925 program, Edward Avis, "Bird Mimic," regaled members with a Bird Song Recital. The program included "The Morning Concert" featuring violin and Mr. Avis's mimicry of Bluebird, Veery and Maryland Yellow Throat, to name a few. "The Canary Song" included renditions of "Bob-O-Link" and "Chewink." (Eastern Towhee.)

A May 22, 1925 Bird Club outing met at 4:30 p.m. "at the usual place at the terminus of the Evanston street

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NEWS OF THE FLOCK

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS:

Audrey Tornabene

Arden & Lloyd Davidson

Bruce Loewenthal & Claudia Miller

Trixie Kelleghan

SADLY: *We extend our deepest sympathy to Chuck Westcott on the loss of his wife Lorraine in July. Those of us fortunate enough to travel with Chuck and Lorraine to Belize, Trinidad & Tobago and Costa Rica learned a lot from this kind, considerate and wise woman, who kept us in smiles and treats. "I feel I'm sitting across the van from her, wearing our ankle straps and looking for vermilion flycatchers on the posts ahead." As Debby Storms put it, "It's really hard to believe that that sweet, wonderful woman is no longer around able to dispense her special brand of sunniness and humor." Submitted by Libby Hill.*

CONSERVATION COLUMN

By Suzanne Checchia

GIVE BACK TO BIRDS *Field Trip and Workday Baker's Lake, September 12, 2009*

Come see some great birds, pitch in to conserve their habitat and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow birders. The day will start at 7:30 a.m. with a walk through a beautiful savanna area, looking for fall migrants. The rest of the morning we'll gather seeds, to be sown at another site in the spring.

These twice-yearly combination "bird and work" field trips, sponsored by the Bird Conservation Network, have been a lot of fun. If you've missed them so far, be sure to give this one a try. More details and directions will be posted at www.bcnbirds.org.

All are welcome! RSVP to Joan Bruchman at pjbruchman@yahoo.com or 847-687-3108.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES: BEGINNINGS: THE 1920s (continued from cover)

car line on Central Street and will walk south."The walk ended in a picnic supper. "This is the last week that Warblers will be seen in this part of the country," the news announcement advised.

We cannot tell you what it looked like, but ENSBC members may be proud to know that the Club won a third place ribbon for Organization Float in the 1926 North Evanston Fourth of July Celebration. The Parade chairman thanked the club "for the very special interest your 'Bird' float added to the parade. I know it was

a big job, but I think the personal gratification in a worth while task well done is worth the effort."

In order that girls might be included in "the interest being aroused in the welfare of birds," the Club sponsored an essay contest for girls under age 16 on 'Experiences with Birds.' First prize was \$5.00. This contest was in response to the Izaak Walton League birdhouse building contest for boys. Unfortunately, the archives do not contain a record of the winning entry.

EDITOR'S NOTES

BIRD CALLS NEEDS YOUR HELP!

In honor of ENSBC's 90th anniversary, we would like to hear some of your remembrances. If you have a good story to tell or something interesting that you recall from ENSBC's past, please send it to Bird Calls at diliscialaw@comcast.net.

SPECIAL THANKS!

A great big thank you to Nancy Halliday for donating her beautiful illustration for the new Bird Calls masthead. Special thanks as well to freelance graphic designer Chris Tomczak who gave Bird Calls its new look. www.christomczak.com.

"THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROAD"

By Margo Milde

The threatening rain cleared shortly after 8:00 a.m. allowing nine participants a wonderful hike through the Volo Bog State Natural Area trails north of Brandenburg Road ("the other side of the road"). Several pairs of sharp eyes (thanks, folks!) made up for my lack of the same, and we were treated to a fantastic number and variety of avian nesting residents and late migrants.

Highlights include seeing - at close range, on the other side of the Volo Bog moat - a pair of adult Sandhill Cranes and their colt ("Junior" crane) just after the hike began. This led to a lengthy stop for birders to "Oh!" and "Ah!" at the family group. A second highlight was a Blue-winged Warbler singing in clear view at the top of a small tree in "old field" habitat, brought out by Donnie Dann's judicious use of a taped call.

Almost as popular was the territorial Crayfish, who defended his section of the trail against all intruders (that was us!), and temporarily gave one trip member a bit of a fright! But participant Teri Radke bravely picked him up (gingerly avoiding his claws!) allowing him to be examined by the entire group, many of whom had never seen a crayfish up close and personal.

After the official portion of the trip was over at 11:15 am, several participants continued to a place I had suggested, a separate prairie area, where I hoped to see grassland birds. The grassland birds did not disappoint: we had good views of a Bobolink and an Eastern Kingbird. We also clearly heard a Henslow's Sparrow and Eastern Meadowlarks.

Finally, one die-hard bog trotter elected to walk the Volo boardwalk with me, where we added a Virginia Rail calling almost at our feet (couldn't see it however). In addition, we admired several state-listed sedge species in fruit and the state-endangered Calla palustris (Water Arum) in full and beautiful bloom.



Kildeer performing broken wing display. Photo by Tim Wallace

Highlights of the 67 species for the day included: Virginia Rail, Sora, Sandhill Crane, Alder and Willow Flycatchers, Great-crested Flycatcher, four Swallows, Marsh Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Wood Thrush, 4 Warblers, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, 6 species of Sparrow, Bobolink, and Eastern Meadowlark.

FIELD TRIPS TO NORTHWESTERN CAMPUS

By Libby Hill

Neither cold, rain nor fierce winds could deter participants on five successive Saturdays during spring migration at Northwestern. On different days, the usual suspects were present, along with unusually high numbers of Veerys, Ovenbirds and Caspian terns, which provided great shows as they wheeled overhead and dove for fish. May 16 was probably our biggest day. Clark Street beach held the largest flock of Caspian terns that Sue Robert and I can remember, along with a good smattering of Common or Forster's terns. Dodging the wind, we proceeded to NU's more protected sailing beach. Birding there was so good that no one wanted to leave for the lakefill. We clicked off great looks at 34 species. Subsequent trips to the sailing beach confirmed our suspicions that, with its east-west orientation, this is a mini Montrose jewel. We are hatching plans to request that Northwestern recognize its significance and preserve the surprising diversity of habitats in this small, linear spot.

CONSERVATION COLUMN CONTINUED WIND TURBINES ON LAKE MICHIGAN?

Earlier this year, Greener Evanston, an Evanston-based citizens' group, proposed that a wind farm be erected in Lake Michigan, offshore opposite Northwestern. Learning of this, ENSBC and BCN paired up to provide input into the project. While ENSBC applauds efforts toward developing green energy sources, it wants to ensure that wind energy development in the Great Lakes does not unduly impact the birds, bats and other wildlife populations that use the lake.

Because any installation of wind turbines in Lake Michigan would require a long permitting process, any action taken on this proposal would be years away. It is precisely in this initial exploratory phase that the bird conservation community needs to have a voice.

Libby Hill, Eleonora di Liscia, Matt Cvetas and Judy Pollock collaborated to submit a summary paper to Greener Evanston. Their findings indicate that before any wind farms are designed for Lake Michigan,

much more research is needed. Risk evaluations and pre-construction monitoring are critical. More must be learned about the use of the lake by wintering waterfowl for feeding and resting as well as the needs of land birds, shorebirds and waterfowl during migration.

Their report became the basis of the BCN Green Paper - MINIMIZING THE IMPACT OF WIND TURBINES ON LAKE MICHIGAN'S WILDLIFE. It's worth reading. Look for it at www.bcnbirds.org.

My Friend Ralph By Eleonora di Liscia

This is not the story I intended to write.

Having taken over as Bird Calls editor, we were starting a feature profiling ENSBC members. Ray Pershing was to be our first installment, but I wanted Ralph Herbst to be the next. Ralph knew I planned to do this story, but neither of us knew he would not live long enough for me to interview him. Sadly, Ralph died from a heart attack on June 24, 2009.

There wasn't time for an interview that last day when Alan Anderson and I took Ralph to lunch a couple weeks before his death. It seemed enough of an achievement that we had forced him out of his third floor walkup apartment. Due to painful knees and advancing Parkinson's disease, Ralph was increasingly unable to leave his home.

"But I might fall," Ralph said that day.

"Don't worry," quipped Alan.
"She'll pick you up!"

In some ways though, I can still write the story I had envisioned.

I wanted to tell you that even with his disability, Ralph had moments of grace. He proudly reported hearing a Whip-poor-will in the golf course trees across the street from his living room. He also occasionally saw warblers in those trees. A few years ago, Ralph's article about birding with Parkinson's was published in a book.

Ralph loved to hear about the birds I'd seen, even though he was rarely able to bird himself. He loved the photos his friend Etta sent him of hawks in her yard. I could always call Ralph to share when something special appeared in my own yard, and I dutifully reported all lifers and Illinois birds, since he'd nudged me into keeping an Illinois list.

"You're my connection to this," he once told me, after I brought him photos from a recent trip.

Ralph's baby granddaughter and his two sons gave him other bright moments.

I also wanted to tell you about how Ralph shared his enthusiasm for birding so generously with others. I number among the many who viewed Ralph as a mentor.



Photo by Alan Anderson

"Pay attention to the shape of the bird," he told me that first day I met him at the 1999 Christmas Bird Count.

Ralph once tried to show us a Barn Owl that was roosting in a nearby building. The Owl never did come out. I was sorry I'd missed a lifer, but even more sorry that Ralph could not show us the bird since he had wanted to so badly.

Ralph volunteered hundreds of hours to ENSBC. He served as President from 1992-1996. Jeff Sanders credits Ralph with pulling him back on the ENSBC board and helping the club during

a particularly difficult period. Ralph served as a captain of the ENSBC Christmas Bird Count until Parkinson's prevented him from participating. He led countless field trips to Montrose and to the Palos area for a perennial favorite, Loads of Ducks.

According to Alan Anderson, Ralph helped all 6 years of the Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas (1985-1991) and volunteered to get permission and cover the Stickney Sewage Ponds, when no one else would. He also covered a number of other spots, including the old Reed Mental Health area (where he later saw the Barn Owl). He found the first confirmed nesting of Red-breasted Merganser for the Atlas in the Stickney ponds.

This summer, I will be taking a pelagic boat ride. I know Ralph would say, "Ask them for a list of the birds you are likely to see."

In my heart, Ralph can still be my mentor.

(In honor of Ralph, Jeff Sanders has graciously agreed to lead Loads of Ducks to the Palos area in March Tune in to Bird Calls or www.ensbc.org website for further details.)

FIELD TRIPS

September 5, 2009 – Saturday – 8:00 a.m.

Montrose Point and Chicago-area sod farms. Reservations with the leader required. Start at Montrose to look for shorebirds and then bird on a sea of grass at local sod farms! Target birds: Buff-breasted sandpiper, American Golden-plover, and other “grasspipers.” Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Magic Hedge entrance sign along Montrose Harbor Dr. From Lakeshore Dr. take Montrose Ave. east to Montrose Harbor Dr. Turn right (east) and park along the bend in the road. Leaders: David B. Johnson, djohnsoda@comcast.net, 847-459-3989.

September 13, 2009 – Sunday – 7:30 a.m.

Waukegan and Illinois Beach State Park. Meet at 7:30 a.m. 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.

September 26 and October 3, 2009 – Saturdays – 8:30 a.m.

Northwestern Lakefill and Sailing Beach. This area 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.

October 4, 2009 – Sunday – 8 a.m.

Gillson Park. The Illinois shoreline juts furthest into the lake at this Wilmette park making it an excellent spot to observe migrant passerines in the tall trees and wildflowers and shorebirds on the beach. This trip is cosponsored by ENSBC and Go Green Wilmette. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the top of the Wallace Bowl near the Lakeview Center. Leaders: Brian Herriott and Harry Drucker.

October 17, 2009 – Saturday – 10 a.m.

Illinois Beach State Park, Camp Logan. Reservations with the leader required. A great spot for hawkwatching is Sailing Beach. Meet at 10:00 a.m. at the Sailing Beach entrance shelter off Camp Logan (17th Street in Zion). If hawkwatching is slow the leader will decide to bird elsewhere. Leader: David B. Johnson, djohnsoda@comcast.net, 847-459-3989.

PROGRAMS

(All programs are held at 7:30 p.m. at the Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd., Evanston.)

September 22: “Ninetieth Birthday Party”: Join us as the Evanston North Shore Bird Club celebrates its 90th birthday. We encourage members to bring pictures of their nature outings (no more than 10, please) to share with the club. Or if you are not into cameras, feel free to perform interpretive dances, plays, musical pieces, or other artistic manifestations of your interest in nature. Board members will bring their favorite deserts to add a culinary dimension to this special night. And expect a few surprises. Come early for grazing (and so we can get the images loaded).

October 27: “Life List”: Our Ruth Milgram speaker for this year is Olivia Gentile whose recent book “Life List” is a wonderfully nuanced portrait of the great Phoebe Snetsinger, the first person in the world to see 8,000 birds. Phoebe was certainly single-minded in her avian quest, but only someone with incredible mental strength could have accomplished what she did. Olivia had access to Phoebe’s personal papers and interviewed scores of people in writing this highly acclaimed book about an extraordinary person, whom many of us in this region had the privilege of knowing. There will be copies of “Life List” for sale, which Olivia will be happy to sign.

The Throats & The Crowns

By Eleonora di Liscia

After a birdless summer, I was eager for fall migration. So imagine my delight when I heard a lone White-throated Sparrow in my yard singing: “Oh Sweet Maria, Maria, Maria.”

“Maria?” Puzzled, I went to speak with him. “Mr. White-throated Sparrow. Don’t get me wrong. I am very much enjoying your song. But I am a little puzzled. You are supposed to be singing about Sam Peabody, although frankly who knows who he is anyway. But why are you singing about Maria?”

The sparrow replied, “I am singing about the woman I love. Look over there.”

Perched on my bird bath, I saw a White-crowned Sparrow appearing to drink. But no, the bird was not drinking. Rather, she was admiring her reflection in the water. She began to sing: “I’m so pretty. Oh, so pretty. What a pretty little bird I beeee!”

“Yes,” said Mr. White-throat solemnly. “That

is my true love. But we have one major problem.”

“You’re different species?” I suggested.

“Species?” he cocked his head. “Is that the human word for gangs?”

“No. Gangs is the human word for gangs,” I replied.

“Hmmm. I see,” said the White-throat. “No. She is a Crown and I am a Throat and the Crowns and the Throats, they don’t flock.”

Maria now joined Mr. White-throat. “Oh, Tony,” she said. Tony put his wing around Maria. It would have been rather touching, but just then a flock of White-crowns flew in.

“Get away from my sister, you Throat,” said the leader of the Crowns. The Crowns started to menace Tony, but then a flock of Throats came in and started battling the Crowns.

Before long, the Throats and the Crowns were executing a very cool series of dance moves. I was entertained for hours. I charged admission to my neighbors.

Then things got ugly. The Crowns started pecking Tony. Maria threw herself in the way of their beaks.

“We’re the Crowns,” said the White-crowned flock.

“We’re the Throats,” said the White-throated flock.

“And I’m the Hawk,” said a Coopers Hawk that had flown in unobserved. That scattered everybody. I had never been so relieved to see a Hawk in my life. The sparrows were unharmed. The neighbors were giving a standing ovation. And all the money I had made in ticket sales was going to help pay for this winter’s bird seed.