

# Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

DECEMBER 2014 [www.ensbc.org](http://www.ensbc.org)



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

## BERYL NELSON: BIRDING CHILD ABUSER?

By Eleonora di Liscia

One day, ENSBC member Beryl Nelson overheard her then young daughter, Rachel, talking with a friend.

"My parents abuse me," said the friend. "Particularly my father."

"Well, my mother's a birder!" Rachel replied.

Beryl started noticing birds in 1975 after getting married and having a son. The family had moved into her present home near the lake in Evanston. One day she was watching 4-year old Michael in the backyard.

"I looked out the kitchen window, and I saw two things. I saw my son sitting in the mud, and I saw a stark blue bird. I thought, 'My God!' and then I started to see other colorful things," Beryl said.

"So I stopped watching my son. To heck with Michael! The birds were more interesting. I knew he'd survive," she laughed.

Wanting to get much closer to the birds ("I wanted to see the color of their eyes"), Beryl bought binoculars. Her daughter was born the next year. "She was sitting in the high chair on my left hand and I had my glasses in my right hand. So I would watch and wonder, 'Who's that? What's that?'"

Beryl began running around the neighborhood looking at all the birds, trying to figure out what they were, so she bought a guide book.

"My family began to observe me standing stock still staring at the sky. Whenever we went on a hike, they'd say 'We lost Mom. There must be a bird around. She'll find us.' The family began to realize I'd lost interest in being a wife and mother. I followed feathers."

As Beryl's two children grew, they attended school and "managed to progress without too much of my input. After early March, they just assumed I meant well. They survived my obsession."

One morning, Beryl went to her kitchen and was greeted by "an amazing sight." A Yellow-headed Blackbird was at the feeder.

"I ran to get my children, yelling like mad, 'Mike! Rachel! Get down here! Get down here!' Mike who was half asleep rushed downstairs in his pajamas. Rachel followed him. I was pointing, "Look! Look!



**Beryl Nelson**

Look! Look! He said, 'Very interesting.' Turned around and went back upstairs to bed. Rachel said, 'Why are you yelling?'"

Besides birds, Beryl loved antiques. The antique dealers were often in woody areas and were often birders themselves. Thus, Beryl could satisfy both obsessions.

"One time, I had pulled off the road in a mountainous area. I was on the very edge, but I had great faith in this car. Half of the side of the car was aligned with the cliff, but part of the tire exceeded the ridge I was parked on. The kids were up against the windows on the other side. I was working my way down "You want to make us orphans!" I don't remember the bird but I remember the kids being hysterical!"

Beryl eventually discovered the Evanston North Shore Bird Club after her family saw a stand that said "Bird Club" at the Chicago Botanic Garden.

Beryl and her husband separated. She continued to take the kids on road trips. The worst involved taking her daughter and nephew who fought continually.

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# LAKE CALUMET LAND PURCHASED FOR GREATER PUBLIC ACCESS

By Walter Marcisz

On October 25, 2014, a press conference, held on Lake Calumet's western shore, announced the \$9 million purchase of 282 acres of Lake Calumet and surrounding shoreline by Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) for future public access.

The Illinois International Port District is selling the land and will continue to hold the remaining portions of Lake Calumet. This is a truly a momentous occasion, as Lake Calumet has been closed to the public for decades (with the notable exception of Harborside Golf Course during the warmer months).

It should come as no surprise that such an announcement garnered a lot of interest. Lake Calumet has been classified as an Illinois Important Bird Area, but land use in this area more often than not has been at cross purposes with bird habitat preservation. Recent history shows a patchwork of conflicting interests at work with nature and industrial development often interacting in strange ways.

During the 1950s and 1960s, birders visited the "Cinder Flats" near 103rd & Doty Avenue at the Lake's north end in search of shorebirds. Thousands of migrating shorebirds, including a dizzying variety of species, frequented this location. Wilson's Phalaropes were regular nesters there. This site later became a Chicago municipal dump, and the shorebird habitat was buried in trash.

From 1990-1992, Lake Calumet was proposed as a location for a third Chicago Airport. That proposal was eventually defeated but served to solidify a strong movement to protect local natural areas. This budding environmental movement would eventually lead to opening public access to Lake Calumet, but not until after a long series of setbacks.

During the early 1990s, IIPD created Harborside International

Golf Course at the former Cinder Flats/municipal dump site to generate revenue. IIPD also proposed a (failed) Lake Calumet marina during this period. Razor-wire fences were placed around Harborside by IIPD during the mid-1990s. The remaining portions of Lake Calumet were surrounded by razor-wire fences during the first few years of the 21st century in the name of homeland security.

Why is Lake Calumet of interest to birders? eBird shows that

at least 219 bird species have been recorded there between 1935 and 2014, but this record is clearly incomplete. Historical records include the only Large-billed Tern (a South American species) ever found in Illinois in 1949, and Illinois' first confirmed Reddish Egret (identified by Sue Friscia at Lake Calumet in 1993). The only active Laughing Gull nest ever found in Illinois was located by USDA researchers in 2007. A pair of Bald Eagles built a nest in 2013 and incubated a set of eggs, but the nest was apparently unsuccessful.

These records merely scratch the

surface of a largely untapped resource.

According to Marc Miller, Director of IDNR, the Lake Calumet purchase includes 99 acres on the western shore as well as the body of water adjacent to Harborside Golf Course (to include the northeastern shore of the lake).

When will it be open to the public? According to Miller, that will be a "long process." IDNR first needs to close on the property, which will become part of the Millennium Reserve, after which the community will be engaged to determine how the property may be best used. It will certainly be important for birders to provide input during this period.

The entire process will undoubtedly take a while, but it is still a major step in the right direction.



*Prothonotary Warbler. Photo by Richard Paulson*

## HELP ENSBC THROUGH AMAZON SMILE!

You can help ENSBC and get your shopping done at the same time through Amazon Smile. Amazon Smile will donate a portion of your purchases to ENSBC. All you have to do is visit <http://smile.amazon.com/>. Then, enter "Evanston North Shore Bird Club" in the search box at the bottom right corner, and you're off! Everything else works just like it does on Amazon except you get the satisfaction of knowing you're helping a good cause at no extra cost.

# STAR TREK: THE NEXT MIGRATION

By Eleonora di Liscia

North America. The breeding frontier. This is the Starship Migration. It's mission to cross over deserts and seas. To pass its gene pool to future generations. To boldly go where no warbler has gone before...

And to avoid being spotted by—the Cretins!

**Captain Warbler:** Well, we've all made it safely overnight to land in this city park. The Cretins will be invading the area at sun up. We all need to be prepared. What! They're early. Take cover!

**Woman Cretin:** Honey, look! You can hear the birds singing. It's so beautiful.

**Male Cretin:** I wonder what they're saying.

**Yellow Warbler:** Mine, mine, mine, mine-mine-mine.

**Chestnut-sided Warbler:** Mine! Mine! Mine-mine-mine-mine.

**Red-winged Blackbird:** Sleep with me!

**Woman Cretin:** Look, honey, I think I see a Black-throated...

**Captain Warbler:** B.T!

**Black-throated Green:** Green or Blue, Captain?

**Captain Warbler:** Um, Blue. Activate cloaking device!

**Black-throated Blue:** Cloaking device activated, Captain.

**Woman Cretin:** Oh, no. I thought it was a Black-throated Blue, but I lost it.

**Man Cretin:** Look about 3 p.m. in the oak!

**Captain Warbler:** Northern Parula, they're on to you. Get out quick.

**Northern Parula:** How, captain?

**Captain Warbler:** Why, use your warp drive, man!

**Man Cretin:** Oh no, where did it go?



*Blackburnian Warbler hiding from the Cretins. Photo by Richard Paulson*

**Woman Cretin:** But look! There is a lot of activity in that maple.

**Captain Warbler:** Uh oh, they've spotted us! Launch the torpedos!

**Man Cretin:** Gosh, are we by some kind of nest? Why is this Red-winged Blackbird dive bombing us?

**Woman Cretin:** Maybe he thinks we're a hawk. Ouch!

**Captain Warbler:** Good work, men!

**Red-winged Blackbird:** That was fun! Can we do it again?

**Woman Cretin:** Ow! Let's move away from here!

**Man Cretin:** Ooo. Look! About 10 p.m. in that big oak. A Blackburnian!

**Woman Cretin:** Where?

**Captain Warbler:** BB! The Cretins got you! Take evasive action! Get into the tree top!

**Man Cretin:** Oh. It's way up there now! Now, it's behind a leaf.

**Woman Cretin:** My neck is already getting sore.

**Man Cretin:** No kidding. Let's see if we can find the Wood Ducks on the pond.

**Captain Warbler:** Blue and Golden-wingeds, the Cretins are looking towards the pond. You can pass behind them now.

**Blue-winged Warbler:** Thanks, Captain. We're now out of range.

**Woman Cretin:** Did you hear a rustle behind us?

**Man Cretin:** I'm not sure. Oh, look down on the path... Is that a Connecticut or a Mourning...

**Mourning Warbler:** What about me, Captain! They're zeroing in on me!

**Captain Warbler:** There's a clump of grass under that bush. Try to get there!

**Man Cretin:** Oh, it moved away. I don't see it now.

**Woman Cretin:** Darn.

**Man Cretin:** Ok, I don't see the ducks. Let's move down the path.

**Captain Warbler:** Wood Ducks, good job staying on the far end of the pond. The Cretins didn't see you behind those reeds. Fellow migrants! The Cretins have vacated the area. You can resume feeding in the open.

**BT & BG:** Thanks, captain.

**Woman Cretin:** Doesn't it sound like the bird song just got louder behind us?

**Man Cretin:** Maybe a little. I'm sure we're just imagining it.

# C A L E N D A R

## 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](http://www.ensbc.org).

**January 27, 2015: Bird Topography** – Knowing the names of all the different parts of a bird gives us a language for communicating precisely what a bird looks like. Bird topography is so critical to identification that nearly every field guide has a section covering the topic. That section, however, is usually neglected. Geoff Williamson will provide an introduction and review on the topic and will deepen our appreciation of how incredible birds are. Geoff was a 2013 recipient of the American Birding Association's Ludlow Griscom Award.

## 2014-2015 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

**December 14, 2014 – Sunday: 49th Chicago Urban Count.**

Compiler: Jeffrey Sanders, 847-657-6431.

**December 25, 2014 – Thursday: Chicago Lakefront Christmas Count**

Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.

**December 27, 2014 – Saturday: Chicago-North Shore Christmas Count**

54th Chicago-North Shore Count and ENSBC Post-Count Potluck dinner at Libby Hill's house, 2715 Woodland Rd, Evanston. Arrive any time after 4 p.m. 847-475-2096 or libbyhill@comcast.net. Compiler: Tim Wallace, 847-548-2654. Contact Feeder Count Compiler: Eleonora di Liscia, 847-568-0160 or diliscialaw@comcast.net for a feeder count form.

**January 1, 2015 – Thursday: Waukegan Christmas Count**

Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.

## BERYL NELSON CONTINUED FROM COVER

"I couldn't walk into a store. I couldn't focus on anything. We were crossing a bridge over a marshy area, and they were fighting like mad. I thought the only way to solve my problems was to lock them in the car and say, 'Resolve your differences!' I leaned over the bridge and saw my first Virginia Rail. The car was shaking, the bridge was shaking. And I was birding. It was bliss."

For Mother's Day, Beryl's family would go birding as a concession to "the pouting mother."

"I was heaping layers and layers of guilt on them: 'If you really loved me, you'd come with me. It's my day. I don't want to sit in a restaurant.' Rachel would plop down complaining she had homework to do: 'Why would my mother do this to me! Why can't we go to some nice restaurant! Everybody's going to restaurants. It's air conditioned. There are no bugs!' My son would walk with me and say, 'OK. Mom, we saw a bird. Let's go back.'"

Later, Rachel moved to Madison to attend college. Rachel had broken up with a boyfriend, and Beryl and her daughter were visiting a nearby state park.

"I stood between my daughter's inner turmoil and my need to bird. She said, 'How could you do this to me! I am hurting!' All of a sudden, a big bird swooped down. She said, 'What was that!' I said, 'That is a Golden Eagle, dear.' She was so surprised that the Eagle swooped down, and we both concurred that this was a sign from God that she better drop the guy."

While Beryl gave up on converting her children to birding, the next generation shows promise. At age 4, her oldest granddaughter recognized several birds and their songs. All four of Beryl's granddaughters love filling the feeders and cleaning up the seed. They'll watch birds without protest and are even enthusiastic, she says.



*Beryl Nelson*



*Above: Bay-breasted Warbler  
Below: Northern Parula  
Photos by Richard Paulson*

