

# Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

February 2018



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

## OoPiks\* Are Here!

### This Winter's SNOWY OWL IRRUPTION

This winter of 2017-18, Chicagoland birders have been treated to another irruption of Snowy Owls from the wide white north tundra with some 103 observations of individuals from Mid-Nov to early January throughout Illinois, some reaching as far south as Clinton and Gallatin counties. In Chicagoland, Snowy Owls have been regular visitors in the harbors of Lake Michigan at North Point Marina, Waukegan Beach, Montrose, 31<sup>st</sup> Street and Steelworkers Park while others have been seen at O'Hare and Midway airports, atop buildings and streetlamps in Chicago and farther afield in the wide open farmlands of surrounding counties. At one inland location, ten! Snowy Owls were seen in one day, December 21<sup>st</sup>, just before a major "Polar Vortex." Enigmatic and charismatic in nature, these large white owls--measuring 2 ½ feet long and weighing some 3-6 lbs.-- will continue to visit until at least the end of March.

An apparent cause of this winter's irruption is that many Snowy Owls this winter are of hatching year, i.e., young birds that have come south in search of food and wintering habitat. While the downturn of lemming

populations may have some effect on the owl's migrations southward, it is now thought that a lemming boom causes more Snowy Owls to be produced on their breeding grounds and the younger owls tend to move south to avoid competition with the older ones. Whatever the cause of their irruptions, these wintering owls are every birdwatcher's delight on an otherwise dull, seemingly birdless winter in the Chicago area.



Thus, there are almost daily reports of Snowy Owl observations listed on eBird and IBET in our state.

As with all irruptions of raptors, many owls fall victim to starvation, car collisions, poisoning, electrocution and other calamities as these young birds adjust to a new wintering area. But many owls will survive and move about, establishing winter-

ing territories, some as much as eight miles wide, others smaller; and some will just nomadically keep moving.

The number one prey south of the tundra for Snowy Owls is Meadow Voles. Apparently, the Canadian Meadow Vole population is "down." This might also be a contributing factor to the irruption. Whatever the cause, Snowy Owls are certainly here for us to enjoy this winter.

*Photo above by Isoo O'brien*

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## Where do they roost—and how do I find one !?

Snowy Owls like broad expanses of open habitat from which to hunt, whether it be coastline overlooking Lake Michigan and its harbors or open “aglands” or farm fields throughout our region. They often perch on the ground or on slight rises in fields or fence posts and atop telephone poles; along Lake Michigan, they’ll perch on break walls, rocks and even pack ice out in the Lake. They don’t like wooded areas or forest and are often where birders don’t like to go—out where there are only Horned Larks, longspurs and Snow Buntings and a bleak barren landscape; this is where I’ve often found them, atop a farm silo or out in the middle of corn or soy stubble. It’s best to look for them on cloudy days, early in the morning or evening when they are more actively flying to hunt.



### Welcome, New Members !

*John Bates, Evanston  
Jeffrey Bilsky, Evanston, IL  
Lin Johnston, Chicago  
Richard Locke, Evanston, IL  
Pat Shepard, Evanston  
Allison Sloan, Evanston, IL*

## Don't Miss these Upcoming ENSBC Programs

**Tuesday, February 27, 2018: Nancy Halliday, “New Zealand”.** Nancy will narrate and illustrate her experiences from her birding trip to New Zealand in 2016.

**Tuesday, March 27, 2018: Geoff Williamson, “Converting Observation to Identification”.** Identification involves more than just matching a bird to a depiction in a field guide or to a set of Internet photos. A more effective approach considers not only what the bird looks like, but also factors such as behavior, habitat, and vocalization. The warbler family provides an excellent opportunity to apply these tactics, helping you to improve your warbler – and other species – identification skills, just in time for migration.

## Check Out Project SNOWStorm...

... to learn more about Snowy Owl migrational movements. Did you know that Snowy Owls are now being tracked by satellite with GPS transmitters? Just to our north, “Badger” and “Arlington” are two Snowy Owls being tracked in Wisconsin. For more information on this wonderful SNOW project, paste this link into your computer browser window or follow this link and go! <https://www.projectsnowstorm.org> Perhaps one day a transmitter can be placed on a wintering Illinois Snowy Owl.

Enjoy them while they are here!

*\*OoPiks is the Inuit Eskimo’s word for Snowy Owls and they are often symbolized by toy owls with large heads and eyes. A source of guidance and wisdom, some Inuits believe the Snowy Owl safely shepherds the spirits of the dead to the afterworld.*

--- by David B Johnson

Past President of the ENSBC aka SNOWTick

## Spring Field Trips Comin’ Up

**Sunday, March 25, Air Station Prairie, Glenview:** Come see the spectacular American Woodcock aerial displays at dusk! Meet on the deck of the Tyner Center, 2400 Compass Drive at 6:45 p.m. Leader: Jeff Sanders.

**Saturday, April 14, Air Station Prairie:** Look for early migrating passerines and more. Meet at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot across the street from the Tyner Center. Leader: Mark Vaughan.



**Thursday, May 3, Perkins Woods:** Look for warblers and other migrants (and also a great display of spring wildflowers). Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the corner of Ewing Avenue and Grant Streets. Leader: John Bates or Josh Engel.

**Fridays in May, Skokie Lagoons:** Great for Warbler species! Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Erickson Woods Forest Preserve parking lot. North of Willow Rd., just east of the Edens Expressway. Leader: Lynne Carpenter.

**Saturday, May 5, Northwestern University Campus:** A stopover for migrants of all kinds heading north. Park in south lot off Sheridan and Clark, upper deck, lake side at 8:30 a.m. Leaders: Libby Hill and TBA.

*Photo above: Wilson’s Warbler by Mark Vaughan*

## See Special Field Trip to Indiana in May — Page 4

## A Win for ENSBC in Cook County's "Bird the Preserves" Big Month Competition

As reported in our last issue, ENSBC joined the Big Month (October 2017) competition, adopting Perkins Woods and registering as the Perkins Prairie School Warblers. John Bates of the Field Museum signed on as the team captain.

Here's how Gerry Ginsburg summed up our team's results: "Competing for species, we were underdogs and went up against some powerhouses, but wait till next year! It is interesting that we were able, for all intents and purposes, to equal the team from the huge and diverse Chicago Botanic Garden. And as it is, ***we won for most checklists submitted!***"

And according to Judy Pollock who reported results for all teams: "There's a pretty good correlation between the number of visits and the number of species -- except for ***our winner in (the category of Greatest Number of Checklists), the Perkins Prairie School Warblers.*** Gerry Ginsburg, John Bates and many others from the ENSBC probably saw every bird that visited this tiny spot! Bravo!"

Awards to winners within ENSBC were presented at the November club meeting. They were:

**Most Species in One Visit:** Josh Engel 24, John Bates runner-up 23; among the amateurs, Pamela Feldman 21

**Most Visits:** Sarah Flax 16, runner-up Tamima Itami 14 (most solo visits)

**Latest Visit:** Jim La Rochelle 4:00 pm, runner-up Tamima Itami at 3:35

**Earliest Visit:** John Bates 5:20 am, runner-up Mark Vaughan at 6:45

**Least Likely Bird:** Jim La Rochelle for Rusty Blackbird

Finally, from Nina Baki of the Cook County Forest Preserves to all who took part: "Thank you so much for participating in the Forest Preserves' Bird the Preserves Big Month Competition. More importantly, thank you for leading public walks in the Forest Preserves. The success of this program is because of your passion and commitment to the birding community."

***Way to go Perkins Prairie School Warblers!***

**Save the Date ! Birding America Symposium, Saturday, March 10**  
**North Park University, 3225 W. Foster, Chicago**  
**Visit [chicagoaudubon.org](http://chicagoaudubon.org) for details**

### *Club Notes:*

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Check us out on Facebook [Facebook](#) Send posts, photos to [Mark Vaughan](#).

Want to get more involved in ENSBC? We're looking for someone to handle

Ways and Means (contributions) and another, Public Relations.

Contact [gnginsburg@sbcglobal.net](mailto:gnginsburg@sbcglobal.net)



### **Join this Year's Great Backyard Bird Count**

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time global snapshot of bird populations. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). Anyone can take part.

Each checklist submitted helps researchers at the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and the [National Audubon Society](#) learn more about how birds are doing and

how to protect them. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 21st annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 16, through Monday, February 19, 2018. Visit the official website at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) for more information.

(Info from National Audubon Website)

## Here's a Trip You Won't Want to Miss !

**Sunday, May 20, Willow Slough and Kankakee Sands**

Near Morocco, Indiana, this 8-acre restored prairie and wetland was originally part of the 500,000-acre Grand Marsh of the Kankakee River. The site is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy which describes it as a "birder's paradise," with over 200 species recorded since restoration began in 2001. Last year we spotted 62 different species on the trip. The destination is a 2-hour drive from Evanston; carpooling is recommended and may be arranged through trip leader Mark Vaughan. RSVP to [markvaughan60201@gmail.com](mailto:markvaughan60201@gmail.com).



Clay-colored Sparrow by Mark Vaughan

## ***A Great South African Adventure!***

***October 30 — November 16, 2017***

***Pied Kingfisher — Photo and article by Libby Hill***



What could be better than going to South Africa with friends on an adventure led by bird club member Josh Engel and his new company, Red Hill Birding? Take a ferry ride to Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 18 years, with dolphins trailing your boat and seabirds darting through the air. Take a cable-car to the top of beautiful, rocky Table Mountain with extraordinary views of Capetown and the ocean. Drive partway up the Cape of Good Hope for awe-inspiring views from the headland. Watch African Penguins close-up at Boulders. Visit the very birdy floral displays at UNESCO World Heritage site Kirschenbosh Botanical Garden; even if it rains

for a few minutes, that can't dampen your spirits and the birds are still out. Stay overnight where the sunbirds and sugarbirds visit feeders within feet of you.

What could even come close to those experiences? How about flying to Durban to explore South Africa's east coast?

Dip into the ferocious wind-whipped waves of the Indian Ocean. Enjoy a picnic lunch at the Umfolozi River estuary, watching White Pelicans and Yellow-billed Storks. Drive the hairpin turns of the Sani Pass road as you birdwatch and ogle the rocky cliffs on your way to the highest pub in Africa in Lesotho (pronounced Lee-su-tu), with two extraordinary local guides who know local culture as well as birds. Stay at a lodge where the animals, including crocodiles, are as free to roam as you are. End the trip with a five-day safari at Kruger National Park, where mammals and birds abound, with the remarkable Edward Themba of Gap Tours joining Josh as the second guide. Before reluctantly heading for home, visit Rietvlei Nature Reserve inside Pretoria (the seat of the South African Executive Branch) to see yet more wildlife.

We added many species of mammals, other critters and birds, including endemics, to our life lists, even though a number of us had previously been with Josh to Southern Africa. Red Hill Birding's next South African tour is October, 2018. It's bound to be unforgettable.

**This will whet your appetite for a trip to  
Minnesota's Sax Zim Bog in winter....**

***Black-backed Woodpecker, Sax Zim in  
January, 2018, by Tamima Itani***

