

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

February 2019



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

Happy 100th Birthday ENSBC!

1919 was the year and March was the month! 100 years of great ENSBC birding is truly something to celebrate.



Over the years, ENSBC has mentored young birders, some who have become eminent scientists, authors and naturalists. Our programs throughout 2019 will reflect that mentoring, as we bring former members to speak about their current projects. The February meeting (at the Levy Center, 300 Dodge Ave.) focuses on “The Changing Bird Life of the Chicago Region” with Joel Greenberg. Then on March 26 at 7:00 p.m., it’s a birthday party you won’t want to miss; there’ll be refreshments and a program with Richard Horowitz of the Academy of Natural Sciences at Drexel University in Philadelphia and his “Confessions of a Counter: From Birder to Scientist.” In April we’ll have Bob Russell, a retired biologist and Great Lakes shorebird specialist for the US Fish and Wildlife Service presenting “Bird Migration in the Great Lakes: A Twelve-month Spectacle.” Check out www.ensbc.org for details.

Other activities planned throughout the year include a presentation with live birds; a book display on birds and birding at the Evanston Library; programs at middle and elementary schools in the area; and participation in community events to raise awareness of the Club.

Join us to celebrate 100 great years!

And for more than half those 100 years, Jeff Sanders has been birding with ENSBC, during which time he has led an untold number of field trips and served as President in 1975-76. Here are some anecdotes Jeff passed along:

My first field trip to Indiana, in April 1964, was to the Jasper Pulaski Refuge and Willow Slough Wildlife Area. Two other teenage boys and I got separated from the group and were lost for several hours. Somehow my mother found out and called the Indiana state police who were just as unsuccessful at finding us as we were at finding them. I made a note to either never bird with those guys again or do a better job of navigating next time.

In May the same year, on a trip to Skokie Lagoons, warblers were dripping from the trees in a huge fallout. An elderly lady tugged at the sleeve of Kim Eckert, who was leading the trip, saying “Isn’t that the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen, those 4 Blackburnian Warblers together at one time?” Kim, with his typical smirk forming, replied, “Yeah, if you like that kind of stuff.”

Cont'd on p. 2



Sanders—cont'd from p.1

In September in the late 1970s or early 1980s, I was leading fifteen or twenty birders at Montrose looking for shorebirds when at 8:15 a.m. I stopped, deciding to have a little fun with the group. I announced that a Whimbrel would appear in front of us at 8:30. After fifteen minutes, the Whimbrel made a soothsayer out of me, appearing on the beach. The shocked birders watched as he stood there and let us take a good look. People asked how I could have possibly done that, and I responded, "A true soothsayer never reveals his secrets." Every once in a while, I encounter people who were on that trip who ask me what time the Whimbrel is going to land. I pause reflectively and tell them, "You only get that once in a lifetime."

The largest field trip I ever led was in November 1982 with over 100 birders. I recall looking for an Ancient Murrelet, which had been spotted a few days before, attracting throngs of observers from all over Illinois. We found the bird, a lifer for many people there that day.

**Recollections from Mary Singh,
President 1998-2001**

I was already middle aged on my first field trip. Led by Barbara Nobles, a stalwart of ENSBC, our group followed the narrow path through Ladd Arboretum, chasing a lone female redstart which kept well ahead. Could have been a house sparrow, for all I saw. But that afternoon at home, having looked in Peterson, for the first time I sat out back and looked for movement in our trees. And there she was: a beautiful redstart, all grey and bright yellow, looking like a falling leaf as she tumbled from branch to branch.

Spring has been more wonderful ever since!



*Tricolored Heron
Florida, 2019
By Mark Vaughan*



Field Trips Comin' up!

NEW! Evanston and Wilmette WINTER Birding Highlights, co-sponsored by Illinois Young Birders, Saturday, Feb. 9.

Meet at 8:30 a.m., parking lot, northeast corner, NW University campus. Leaders: Josh Engel and Steve Bayer.

Air Station Prairie, Saturday, April 13. Come out to see the spectacular aerial displays of the American Woodcock at dusk! Meet on the deck of the interpretive center at 6:45 p.m. Leader: Jeff Sanders.

Perkins Woods, Thursdays, May 2 — 30. Look for warblers and other migrants. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the corner of Ewing Ave. and Grant St. Park along Ewing Ave. Leader: John Bates or Josh Engel.

Skokie Lagoons, Fridays, May 3 — 9. These trips pack a great list of warbler species during spring migration. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at Erickson Woods Forest Preserve parking lot, north of Willow Rd. just east of the Edens. Leader: Lynne Carpenter or Wayne Svoboda.

Northwestern University Campus, Saturdays, May 4 — 18. This area is a stopover for migrants of all kinds. Meet at 8:30 a.m. Park on the lake side, upper deck, south parking lot off Sheridan Rd. and Clark St., north of Clark St. Beach. Leaders: Libby Hill and TBA.

Gillson Park, Sundays, May 5 — 26. Sponsored by our partner, Go Green Wilmette. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the beach by the dog park. Non-residents may park there through May. For more information, contact kglenneimer@gmail.com.

Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary, Tuesdays, May 7 and 14. Join us for a morning at Montrose. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at handicapped parking. Leader: Wayne Svoboda.

The Grove, Wednesday, May 8. Expect warblers and other passerines. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at The Grove: east side of Milwaukee Ave., just south of Lake Ave., in the second parking lot that leads to the interpretive center. Leader: Nancy Halliday.

Jackson Park and Lakefront – Wooded Island, Sunday, May 12. We will be looking for migrating passerines. Meet at 7:00 a.m. Park south of the Museum of Science and Industry after driving on the east side of the building. Leader: Dick Young.

Kankakee Sands, Morocco, Indiana, Sunday, May 19. Near Morocco, Indiana, this 8,000-acre prairie and wetland restoration was originally part of the 500,000-acre Grand Marsh of the Kankakee River. This is a Nature Conservancy site with over 200 bird species recorded since restoration began in 2001. A two-hour drive from Evanston, carpooling is recommended. RSVP to Leader: Mark Vaughan, markvaughan60201@gmail.com.

In Memoriam

Barbara Nobles



Barbara Nobles was born in Spokane, Washington and later lived not only in Evanston but also California, Massachusetts, Arizona and most recently Washington, on the edge of the Olympic Peninsula. In each location, she joined a couple of bird clubs. She was active in ENSBC, serving in many leadership roles, from 1952 – when the Club met in the basement of the Evanston library — until 1990 when she moved to San Diego; she retained her membership and interest in ENSBC throughout her life. Barbara was involved in the Club’s early effort to get young boys interested in birding. When he was just a kid, Joel Greenberg was one of those boys. His mom brought him over for trips and left him in the capable hands of the ENSBC ladies. A world traveler, Barbara took many birding trips including to Trinidad & Tobago, Panama, Cuba, Patagonia, Australia, Scandinavia, Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, and Costa Rica. In 2001, she, Lynne Carpenter and their husbands went to Morocco together, and she joined Dave Johnson on trips to Churchill, Manitoba and Colorado, for the famous grouse circuit. Barbara never stopped birding. She passed away on December 7, 2018.

Barbara Brown

Tribute by Joel Greenberg



I learned with great sadness that Barbara Brown (1929-2019) had passed on January 7. I have known Barbara since the spring of 1967 when I began going on field trips and attending meetings of ENSBC in which she was quite active, including serving as President from 1971-72 and again from 1973-74. Barbara led many of the Club’s Friday morning bird walks during May at the Skokie Lagoons. She also, for many years, hosted an annual August picnic at her lovely home in Highland Park as well as several Christmas Bird Count compilations and dinners. Barbara began working at the Field Museum starting in the 1970s. She worked closely with mammal curator Philip Hershkovitz and accompanied him on several research trips to Brazil. He and several other curators recognized her contributions by naming a number of species after her. Barbara and her husband Roger also made a great difference in their generous philanthropy to such institutions of science and conservation as the Field Museum, Chicago Botanic Garden, and the Science Museum of Minnesota.

These two strong women are role models for all of us!

It’s that time of year again! The ENSBC Board is looking for new members.

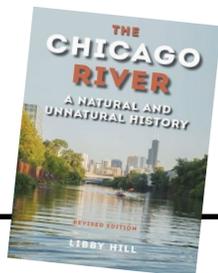
There are two important slots to fill: Vice President and Publicity Chair.

Interested? We hope so. Contact Gerry Ginsburg at gnginsburg@sbcglobal.net.

You’re Invited...

**...to a party launching Libby Hill’s newly revised book
“The Chicago River: A Natural and Unnatural History”**

**Evanston Ecology Center
2024 McCormick Blvd.
Sunday, February 10, 2 to 4 p.m.**



“Hill’s work has long been the definitive resource for anyone interested in the history of the Chicago River. This revised edition brings the story up to date. The once unloved Chicago River is lucky to have a voice in Libby Hill.”

Geoffrey Baer, WTTW (PBS), Chicago

The Ravenmaster, My Life with the Ravens at the Tower of London, by Christopher Skaife

Reviewed by Kathy Stohrer



I'm sure most of you know of the Ravens at the Tower of London, and many also know of the intelligence of Corvids. Here is an up close and personal portrait of the Tower Ravens as told by the man who cares for them, Yeoman Warden Christopher Skaife. As he clearly states at the beginning, this is not a scientific book, although there is plenty of ornithological information about Corvids in general and Ravens in particular, which he has well-researched. He also includes an excellent suggested reading list for those wanting more.

The book is not just about the Ravens, but includes also the history of the Tower (past and present), and, naturally, his own history: how he came to be Ravenmaster, beginning

with his service in Her Majesty's Army. All Yeoman Warders are required to have served honorably in the armed forces for at least twenty-two years, and not all nowadays are men. But only a few learn to care for the Ravens. Or, to be more accurate, only a few are accepted by the Ravens.

Christopher Skaife was trained on the job by his predecessor concerning their care, feeding, and housing, as well as how they are (allegedly) kept from escaping the Tower. This last is important, for as the legend goes, without the Ravens the Tower will crumble into dust and great harm befall the kingdom.

But things are not completely serious, for there are plenty of Raven adventures. Oh yes, they are intelligent, and mischievous too! They like to dumpster-dive, play dead on Tower Green (to the consternation of visitors), plot and succeed at escapes, and steal your Pringles! There are officially required to be a minimum of six Ravens at the Tower, but just to be on the safe side, there is a spare, and the "spare" is the boss of Ravenmaster Chris. Her name is Merlina; she sees him as her mate, and is the star of the show on his Facebook page.

As they say on the other side of The Pond, "a cracking good read." It is available for checkout at the Evanston Library (and others) and on the ebook loan site <https://meet.libbyapp.com/> as well as for purchase in hardcover or Kindle ebook.

Another successful Christmas Bird Count!



ENSBC sponsored its 58th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 29, 2018. Forty-seven dedicated birders enjoyed mild weather to note 66 species in our 15 mile diameter count circle. We collectively walked a total of 92 miles, and drove another 206 slowly enough to observe birds in daylight hours! In addition, several participants set out before dawn or after dusk to find owls, both Eastern Screech (10) and Great Horned (18).

Chicago area birders often remark that harsh weather prior to count day brings good birds, and there seems to be some truth to that. With our mild conditions, ducks were tough to find, as many of the usual suspects were far offshore in Lake Michigan. At the fun countdown dinner at Libby Hill's home, we were given an overview of the count history by Joel Greenberg, longtime organizer. Next, Geoff Williamson served as emcee for the excitement-building countdown, starting with European Starling and ending with semi-rarities. Geoff was the first Chicago-area compiler to produce a powerpoint for countdown dinners, and it is always a big hit!

As each of our 10 area leaders called out numbers, a mini-competition ensued. Especially appealing were some surprises revealed at the later stage of the countdown. While we did not discover any birds new to the count, there were many interesting sightings. Amanda Zeigler spotted a Merlin at the Canal Shores Golf Course in Wilmette. Isoo O'Brien first spotted the White-winged Scoters at Gillson Park, and this same group of birders, led by Josh Engel, had a male Canvasback, a flock of 30 Pine Siskins and a Black-crowned Night-Heron at Northwestern University. Both Joe Sucheki and Ari Rice found Eastern Meadowlarks (3 total). Also there were two Pileated Woodpeckers, two Monk Parakeets, and a high count of Great Blue Herons (20). Numbers of American Crows, hit especially hard by the West Nile virus epidemic that began here in 2001, continued to be low.

We were initially concerned about the lack of House Finches and House Sparrows. However, our 16 feeder watchers revealed that these birds remain plentiful. Eighteen different types of birds were seen at one feeder site or another. One surprise was the complete absence of European Starlings.

All in all, we counted 12,343 birds! Roughly 160 people have participated in this count over the past decade, but we only had 47 this year. We are always looking for more help. So, please save the date for the next count — December 28, 2019!