

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

February 2021



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

Isoo O'Brien sets new record!

ENSBC has mentored some excellent young birders, and one of the best these days is 17-year-old Isoo O'Brien.

Deciding to do a Cook County "Big Year" in 2020, Isoo not only did it but shattered the 2013 record of 281 species by checking off 288! This was definitely a big deal; and Isoo gives credit to other birders who urged him on — "everyone likes to help a kid" — getting in touch when they found birds not yet on his list. To document rare bird finds, Isoo photographed them and had a witness, making the list airtight.



Isoo says good birding is all about watching the weather, putting yourself in the right place at the right time and following up on those tips. He likes going out with other birders best, sharing the experience with friends and having more eyes for spotting. But birding alone, finding those birds on your own, also has its rewards.



Isoo started birding when he was in 4th grade and in 2007 joined Illinois Young Birders, a group that focuses on birders aged 9 to 18; he became one of the more active participants. He joined ENSBC in 2015 where he further developed his birding skills and eventually led birdwalks himself at the Chicago Botanic Gardens and Northwestern campus. He's also led walks for the Chicago Ornithological Society. Isoo says many people helped along the way but particularly mentions Josh Engel as a great mentor.

This past summer, Isoo was a Piping Plover monitor at Montrose each Monday. Because the lakefront was closed, people — usually the most difficult problem — were not an issue. He enjoyed being a part of the project, watching and recording the plovers' movements and behavior.

And Isoo is no stranger to travel. He's birded in the southwest U.S., Washington and Florida—the usual destinations. But when he was in 6th grade, his parents sold their home in Evanston and traveled around the world, literally! They visited 21 countries, and although this was not a birding trip, spotting

birds was definitely on the agenda. They returned to Evanston where Isoo is now a senior in high school. Although birding is his passion, Isoo has also been an avid soccer player, an activity put on hold for obvious reasons in 2020. Currently he's learning remotely and expecting to graduate in June.

And what about future plans? Isoo is looking at smaller liberal arts colleges with environmental science programs, particularly those that offer outdoor field work. Ideally, he looks forward to working in that field, and if birds are a part of the job, "that would be great."

by Marj Lundy



Beaver damage at CSBBS by Suzanne Checchia

Beavers at work at Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary

By Libby Hill

The year 2020 brought, relentlessly, the pandemic and then the presidential election. But first it brought a record-high Lake Michigan lake level and fierce waves. In a wild January storm, Lake Michigan invaded the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary (CSBBS) and knocked down the lakeside fence.

Almost immediately, the beavers, which have lived in the Northwestern lagoon off and on for 25 years, took advantage of the high water. They swam under the bridge, around the Sailing Center, and took down several cottonwoods on the beach at CSBBS. Cottonwoods are a favorite food; they thrive on the cambium layer just inside the tree bark.

City staff rebuilt the fence farther from the lake. Twice. There was no more beaver activity, that is, until fall, when the beavers, who don't hibernate, work extra hard to gather in their food stash for the winter. They came back, gnawed through the new snow fence and took down 30 cottonwoods.

Up to then, volunteers at Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary (of which this writer is one) knew little about beaver life. It was time to learn how they live and how we could learn to live with them. Volunteers fenced off the cottonwood habitat and put four-foot high hardware cloth around 100 individual trees to protect them, leaving most of the area south of the beach house for beaver foraging.

WINTER PROGRAMS

All our winter 2021 programs will be on Zoom on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. Members will receive an invitation two weeks before the event and a reminder closer to the date. Feel free to forward the invitation to friends.

February 23: Jacob Drucker, "Everything You Wanted to Know About eBird." A flagship community science effort, eBird has not only redefined recreational birding but has become a powerful tool for biologists to understand the relationship between birds and their environment. Jacob Drucker, a Ph.D. student, Field Museum/University of Chicago, will explore the plethora of applications for eBird's standard data unit: the checklist. From enhancing models of changing distributions and mapping migratory flyways, to scaling up behavioral studies on cooperative breeding and informing landscape management, there is no shortage of ways for biologists to tap into this unique, 21st century resource. Come learn what happens to your observations after you click 'submit'!

March 23: John Bates, "Birds' Eggs." Every single bird you have ever seen hatched from an egg. Thus, eggs are an essential aspect of pediatrics in birds and can provide important information about the health of birds at this critical stage in their life cycle. John Bates, Curator of Birds at the Field Museum, will highlight the Field's egg collections and how they have been and are being used in research ranging from the effects of pesticides to response to climate change.

April 27: Steven Albert and Lauren Helton, "Helping 'Our' Migrating Birds in Winter." The Institute for Bird Populations (IBP) is partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in a new initiative to connect conservation organizations in the Upper Midwest with groups protecting and studying migratory birds on their wintering grounds in Latin America. The goal is to help under-resourced conservationists in some 100 groups from Mexico to Argentina achieve their goals, while providing tangible benefits to North American partners. ENSBC is considering establishing a partnership.

Christmas Bird Count 2020 by John Leonard

ENSBC sponsored our 60th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 26, 2020. For 121 years the CBC has reigned as the premier community science project, and one can easily view trends at their website (<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone>). The pandemic was of course at the top of everyone's mind this year, with counters keeping their distance from one another and wearing face coverings. Antonio Flores of Chicago Audubon substituted for one coordinator out on quarantine. Because carpooling was not allowed, we had several more field parties than usual. Forty-nine dedicated birders enjoyed mild weather for the third year in a row, finding 70 species in our 15 mile diameter count circle (71.2 is average since 2000). We collectively walked a total of 103 miles and drove another 243 miles to observe birds in daylight hours.

In addition, several participants set out before dawn to find owls, both Eastern Screech (8) and Great Horned (11). After the coordinators pulled their numbers together, John Leonard virtually presented the spreadsheet on Zoom for the excitement-building countdown, starting with, of course, European Starling, and ending with semi-rarities. Putting observations in context using trend graphs is interesting to all participants, and especially appealing is the later stage when less common and even surprising finds are revealed.

A Pileated Woodpecker was observed at Ryerson Woods by the Buckardts. Vlad Nevirkovets spotted the only Ruby-crowned Kinglet. A Pine Warbler, found by Aaron Gyllenhaal at the Chicago Botanic Garden, was a big surprise.

But the most surprising was a Common Yellowthroat at Skokie Lagoons spotted and photographed by Jeff Bilsky and Amanda Tichacek. This species typically is gone from Lake and Cook counties by the first week in November. In the 60 years of this count the only prior record was in 1982. *(Photo below by Jeff Bilsky)*



Record numbers of Hairy Woodpeckers (122 vs 97 prior) were found. Unlike last year, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, and Common Redpoll all irrupted onto our scene in 2020. On the other hand, big

misses included Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Snow Bunting, Purple Finch, Rough-legged Hawk, and though you may not agree, Brown-headed Cowbird! American Crows were hit especially hard by the West Nile virus epidemic that began here in 2001, and their numbers continue to be low (4,576 in 2000 vs 97 now).

Possibly due to the dramatically increased number of feeder counters (26 vs 11 in 2019), we more than doubled our tally of Mourning Doves and Red-breasted Nuthatches, and boosted Carolina Wrens (1 to 4). Thanks to Tim Joyce of WBU Glenview for spreading the word about our feeder effort, and Joel Greenberg for collecting the data. In all, we counted 13,773 birds! Maybe we will see even more next year if ducks make a good showing next to shore. Hopefully we'll be able to hold a normal count next year and recruit a few more participants in the field and at feeders!

Want to be part of a global community science project? Join the Great Backyard Bird Count – February 12 - 15

This 4-day event is sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society and Birds Canada. You can contribute valuable information that will help birds and those who study them.

Count birds anywhere you like for at least 15 minutes and enter your lists on eBird. Easy! Spread the word. This is a great opportunity for families, teachers and students, neighbors and friends. For more details about how to participate, go to <https://www.birdcount.org/>. Last year more than 27 million birds, from 6,942 species, in 194 countries were counted. Help make this year's results even better.

Evanston-born Falcon Sighted in Michigan in December!

*This is Nike, born and fledged from The Evanston Public Library's Peregrine Falcon nesting site in June 2019, alive and well-fed near Ann Arbor, Michigan.
(Photo taken December 29, 2020 by Matt Smith)*



To back up a bit, Nike and brother Zuri were frequently seen around town once they were successfully up and flying. Deborah Cohen, who leads *Evanston Falconwatch*, recounts an incident that warmed her heart. Zuri was found grounded on an Evanston apartment terrace in July 2019. While Deborah was catching him, another falcon was calling continually from very close by. With Zuri safely stashed in her carrier, Deborah looked over the terrace wall trying to spot the falcon and sure enough, it was Nike on a terrace one floor down, looking up and calling for her brother.

"Juveniles stay together in the post-fledging period while still being fed by their parents and are very interactive," Deborah says. "I'm sure it was a bit of an adjustment for her to be on her own after Zuri was taken into rehab, but no doubt she soon got over it. Nike beat the odds stacked against peregrines (and raptors in general) of surviving their first year. For all of us who watched her on the falconcam from hatching to fledging and beyond, to see the gorgeous adult female she has become is immensely satisfying."



And here is a young Nike in a photo taken by Demayne Murphy at the Northwestern canal. After making passes over covering gulls and ducks, she perched on a roof. After peering at dive-bombing swallows, she toppled off her perch. "Adorable!" says Deborah.

To learn more about the Chicago Peregrine Program, check out their [website](#) or follow them on [Facebook](#). And to access Falcon Watch, click main@EvanstonPFWatch.groups.io | [Home](#).



New Members: Welcome to the Flock!

Meghan Bower &

Sheila O'Halloran-Bower

Brandy & Phil Russell

Kerry & Paul Russell

Evanston

Wilmette

Wilmette

Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary has published its first newsletter and hopes to have 3 issues a year. Visit clarkstreet-beachbirdsantuary.org for more info about the Sanctuary which is interesting anytime of year. Feel free to stop by!

Support ENSBC !

Make a **donation**, and if you haven't renewed your **membership**, do it today. Both are tax-deductible. Visit <http://www.ensbc.org> to learn how.

*Bird Calls is a publication of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club,
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