

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

NOVEMBER 2013 www.ensbc.org



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

EVANSTON PEREGRINE FALCON WATCH

by Eleonora di Liscia

Aldo wasn't sure what had gone wrong. His siblings didn't have this much trouble.

When he first flapped his wings off the wall of the Carlson Building, he'd glided across the street, but instead of landing gracefully at the library, he hit the roof and dropped into a windowbox.

After a couple days, he tried again.

This time was worse. Somehow, he had ended up in a basement. Cautiously, Aldo stepped from a crawlspace into a laundry room, his talons scraping the floor. He hopped onto a washing machine. A lady holding a towel appeared. He tried to get away but instead fell backwards into a washing machine. The towel came towards him. He tried to fight it, grabbing with his talons, but then the lady wrapped him in the towel, and he felt himself being moved.

Next thing he knew, he was up on the sundeck, ready to try again.

Aldo is one of the library's Peregrine Falcons. His rescuer, Deborah Cohen, started the group Evanston Peregrine Falconwatch in 2009 to pool news about the falcons and to enlist more pairs of eyes during fledge week. (The yahoo group can be found at <http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/evanstonpfbwatch/info>.) A falcon watcher since 2004, Cohen found people often stopped to share their stories about the birds.

"I thought it would be nice if there was a web forum where people could post. There were a lot of people in Evanston who like watching the falcons and liked keeping up with them during fledge week," Cohen explained.

Fledge week, when the falcons attempt their first flight, takes



Soaring Falcon Photo by Ted Glasoe

place around mid-June. The group watches from dawn to dusk (about 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.) to ensure the young have a successful first flight, so that "they land in a safe place where they are high enough that they are not in danger of being run down and not real obvious to passersby to draw attention to themselves,"



Peregrine Falcon with Chicks Photo by Ted Glasoe

said Cohen.

"If they can take off on their own, that's when there is a successful flight," said member Mary Singh. "When they're unsuccessful, somebody has to put them back in the nest site, and that's what Deb does. Deb saves them. If she's not there, you call Deb, and she puts them back in the window boxes."

Member and photographer Ted Glasoe recalls one time a fledgling landed on a low wall.

"I don't know how many students walked by without even noticing the bird," he said.

The breeding year begins in late January, when residents, Nona and Squawker, engage in various mating behaviors which include courtship flights, and they choose a site. Squawker brings food to Nona.

Nona, who hails from Iowa, has nested in Evanston since the original male Joel took her as a child bride, still bedecked in juvenile plumage, in 2005. But oh, the faithlessness of youth! Joel was injured, and Nona showed up with her new man. Now she partners with Squawker.

"Nona is very, very bossy," Cohen and Glasoe observe. "Nona definitely wears the pants in that family."

The falcons nest in the gravel inside the hollow pillars next to the window boxes at the Evanston Library.

"That has worked out great, because it's under the library roof,

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PEREGRINE FALCON WATCH CONTINUED FROM COVER

and there is protection from wind, rain, and predators, and they can't fall out," said Cohen. "When they're older, they can hang out on the ledge, and usually will drop down and end up in a window box. Usually, they fledge from that area so we watch for the drop down every year. Occasionally, they trick us and go right from the pillar."

In February, the falcons are still courting and begin digging the scrapes that form the nest.

"We know this because they disappear in the pillars, and the library turns the falcon cam on," said Cohen.

At the end of March, Nona begins laying eggs, one every other day for a total of 3 or 4. Incubation lasts an average of 32 days. In late April/early May, the young begin to hatch.

"When it gets close to hatching time, we try to watch really, really closely," said Cohen. "We try and record all the milestones."

The library names the hatchlings, but recently opened up for suggestions from the public. The young are banded at about three weeks of age, when their legs are as wide as they are going to get. Mary Hennen from the Chicago Peregrine Falcon Program does the job.

"Mary comes, goes up on a ladder, then takes all the young out and places them in a box," said Singh. "Mom and Pop are screaming and carrying on."

Then about six weeks after hatching, fledge week begins. The week can be longer or shorter depending on the number of young and how well they fledge. Armed with gloves, a box and a towel, this year, Cohen had to pick up three of the four birds, one of them twice.

By the end of summer, the young have left for parts unknown. But sometimes the group is lucky enough to find out, for example if a bird turns up in another nest site. The falcon named for Cohen, it turns out, nests at the University of Wisconsin in Oshkosh.

Those interested can follow the falcons at the Evanston Library's website (<http://www.epl.org/falconcam/>) on the webcam that the group helped purchase. The original camera "would show you a picture and that would be a still picture, and you'd wait two minutes for another still picture. That was very frustrating, so we contributed to one that shows them live," said Singh.


Evanston Peregrine Falcon Watch started as a group of about 20, but now numbers over 100. While the majority are Evanstonians, members come from as far away as San Francisco, New York and Wisconsin. A few members are birders, but most come from the Evanston Library's website.

Peregrine Falcons
Photos by Ted Glasoe



CLARENCE SPARROW TO THE DEFENSE

by Eleonora di Liscia



Wanted: Disorderly Conduct. Common Grackle
Photo by Richard Paulson

My husband is a criminal defense attorney, and when business is slow, I usually hear about it at least once a day. But even though the phone hadn't been ringing, he wasn't complaining. I was puzzled.

"Actually," he said. "I've taken on a new clientele."

"New clientele?"

"I'm defending birds charged with criminal offenses. Misdemeanors, felonies, you name it."

"You're kidding."

"No. It's been very challenging, but I'm afraid the pay isn't all that good."

"Pay?"

"Have you noticed that pile of dead cicadas outside the back door?" He gestured toward our backyard.

"I've been trying not to," I winced. "How did this happen? What misdemeanors? What felonies?"

"Oh, all kinds. You see one day one of your friends in the backyard, at least he said he was your friend, asked me if I could represent him on a disorderly conduct charge."

"Let me guess. A Blue Jay?"

"Grackle."

"Ah. I see. You understood him?"

"Pretty much. I've hung around with you a bit. I've picked up a few words of Grackle here and there."

"So what happened?"

"I got him off. The complaining witness could not identify him as opposed to the other grackles in his flock. Then, he referred me to a Ring-billed Gull."

"He referred you to a Ringed-bill?" I repeated stupidly.

"Yes. I get my business through word of beak, as it were."

"How ever else?" I groaned. "Anyway, what did the Gull want?"

"He was accused of theft. Seems like he took a fish from a Red-breasted Merganser."

"Did he now?"

"Yes, but I argued that once the Merganser dropped the fish, it was fair game.

He no longer had possession, so the Gull could take it."

"Good job. Anything else?"

"Oh, a Cowbird was accused of child neglect because she left her egg in the wrong nest. Some type of hawk's. And then I had a Great Blue Heron, who was poaching

BIRDING AUSTRALIA'S TOP END: AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR DENISE GOODFELLOW

By Eleonora di Liscia

Denise Goodfellow first crossed paths with ENSBC in August, 2010 when she contacted members as part of her Ph.D. studies on how American birding couples travel. At that time, she had published her bird guide, *Birds of Australia's Top End*, and a memoir, *Quiet Snake Dreaming*, about her life as an advocate for the aborigine who have adopted her into their family. We caught up with Denise again on the publication of her new book, *Birds of Palmerston in Australia's Top End*, a must-have for anyone visiting the region.

Q: What inspired you to produce your new book: *Birds of Palmerston in Australia's Top End*?

Denise: I was inspired by the huge amount of clearing of largely pristine forest happening in and around our town. Also, by the residents' lack of knowledge about their wildlife, particularly the birds.

Q: How does the new book differ from *Birds of Australia's Top End*?

Denise: It's smaller, and lacks the sex, the paleontological info and the Indigenous language among other things. However, it's much more focused on a few birds, and there are illustrations of items of the bird's diet such as insects and flowers.

Q: The illustrations in both your bird guides are exquisite. How do you create the paintings for the books?

Denise: The birds were drawn from watercolours I painted for *Birds of Australia's Top End*. The insects and plants were a combination of artwork carried out on computer and photographic images.

Q: You also work as a bird guide. Have you had any adventures since our last article?

I spent five and a half days guiding author Jonathon Franzen (*The Corrections*) and his brother Tom. We spent time in the sewage ponds and in mangroves. We stood in the mud for four hours waiting for a particular bird—Chestnut Rail—it called but didn't show itself!

But Jon wasn't just interested in birds. I discovered that he'd wanted to go to Arnhem Land since he "was a child." We spent most of the day sitting around on people's porches talking with my aborigine relatives. My Indigenous sister-in-law, Una, took us to a beautiful waterfall, Spirit Dog Dreaming. The trees were encircled with red

ochre, a sign that a senior traditional owner had died. We only saw two birds, a Sandstone Shrike-thrush and a Whistling Kite, but they were acting strangely, sitting quite close together in a tree on the cliff.

Jon went to sit in the sand at the water's edge to contemplate this beautiful place, unaware of the threat beneath in the green water. Una and I screamed a warning, and running to him, began to drag him away. He hadn't seen the warnings in town of the "hungry crocodile" at the waterfall!

Other adventures I've had include buying 20 acres in a rural area. Birds are wonderful but the weeds aren't!

Q: Are you still at work on your dissertation about how American birding couples? Have you reached any interesting conclusions?

Denise: My PhD topic is American couples who travel internationally and

*Denise Goodfellow's
"Birds of Palmerston in Australia's Top End"*

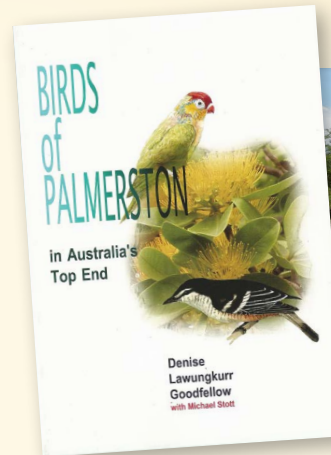
watch birds. I'm presently writing up the qualitative results. And by the way I spent a wonderful morning a couple of weeks ago with a couple that I interviewed, Cindy Lippincott and Bob Berman, along with their friend, ex-president of the ABA, Larry Balch.

I have reached some tentative conclusions, namely that couples often differ in their level of interest in watching birds, but that they usually compromise so that each has a good outcome.

Q: What do you see as some of Australia's challenges in conservation?

Denise: The biggest one is that group of weeds known as 'transformer' species, because they transform the environment from a diverse woodland or grassland to a monoculture. The worst of the worst is a monster from Africa (it grows to over 4 meters in height) called Gamba Grass. It disrupts the water/nutrient cycle, smothers plants with its bulk, and burns so hot that very little can survive. Gamba Grass has the potential to drive thousands of taxa across northern Australia to near extinction.

Not one politician standing at the recent Federal election has mentioned such threats!



Jonathon Franzen, his brother Tom and Denise's indigenous sister-in-law Una at Spirit Dog Dreaming
Photo by Denise Goodfellow

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.

November 26, 2013: "Patagonia: Birds, Mammals, Mountains, Clouds and Adventures" Dr. Lloyd Davidson, world traveler/photographer, will take us on a photographic tour of Patagonia, one of the least populated and most picturesque areas on earth, which is filled with exotic birds, such as the Andean Condor, the very large Magellanic Woodpecker and Darwin's Rhea. Remarkably rugged mountains, calving glaciers, waterfalls, and surprisingly beautiful lichens and plants make this one of the world's most beautiful and interesting regions.

January 28, 2014: Members Night: This ENSBC tradition is a night for members to share their birding memories and photos. Our lineup this year includes Dave Johnson on the club's 2012 Churchill trip, Mary Lou Mellon on Colombia, Vic Berardi on raptors, plus others TBC. The evening will close with a new highlight — Chuck Westcott will give his entertaining bird quizz, with questions to stump even the experts. So bring paper and pencil. Highest score wins a prize!

FIELD TRIPS

NOVEMBER 24, 2013 - SUNDAY

Jeff Sanders' Fall Specialty Trip! North Shore lakefront. 44rd Annual Jeff Sanders' Fall Specialty Trip. North Shore lakefront — Northwestern, Gillson Park, Maple Park, Tower Road Park, Park Ave., Rose Beach in Highland Park, and other areas as time permits. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at Northwestern University beach. Go east on Lincoln St. from Sheridan Rd., turn south past the giant fitness center, then turn east (left) and go almost to the end. Bring scopes and dress for cold lake wind. Leader: Jeff Sanders.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

Yes, the annual winter census of the birds does matter! It provides critical information for scientists to protect species and habitat. Contact the compiler for any count you wish to join.

DECEMBER 15, 2013 – SUNDAY

48th Chicago Urban Count. Compiler: Jeffrey Sanders, 847-657-6431.

DECEMBER 25, 2013 – WEDNESDAY

Chicago Lakefront Christmas Count. Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.

DECEMBER 28, 2013 – SATURDAY

53rd Chicago-North Shore Christmas Count. Compiler: Tim Wallace, 847-548-2654. Feeder Count Compiler: Call Eleonora di Liscia 847-568-0160 or email diliscialaw@comcast.net for a count form and to make sure you are in the count circle. A post-countdown potluck will be held at Libby Hill's house at sundown (about 4:30 p.m). 2715 Woodland Rd in Evanston. Bring your winter specialties to complement the turkey main course. Contact libbyhill@comcast.net for directions.

JANUARY 1, 2014 – WEDNESDAY

Waukegan Christmas Count. Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.



Buffleheads Photo by Tim Wallace



Cape Griffon Vulture, Marakele N.P. South Africa by Richard Paulson

CLARENCE SPARROW CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

from some homeowner's artificial pond. He ate a bunch of expensive fish."

"Sounds like the homeowner was asking for it."

Just then we were interrupted by a tap at the back door. I went to answer.

"I'm looking for Mr. Keenan," a Cedar Waxwing inquired anxiously. "I was hoping he'd take my case. I hear he's very good."

"At least with people defendants," I replied.. I can't speak for birds."

"I have an FUI."

"Please tell me that's not what I think it is."

"Flying under the Influence. But it wasn't my fault. We didn't know the berries had fermented, and I'm afraid I got a little tipsy.

I was flying in circles, and well, there was an accident."

"Did you take any field sobriety tests?"

"What?"

"Never mind. . . Darling, you've got a new client!"