

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

Winter 2020



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday



Birding the Pantanal

by Libby Hill

Pull out a map of South America and put your finger on the center of the continent. It will land right on Cuiabá, in Brazil's midwest and home to the Pantanal, an area with at least 650 bird species, an uncounted number of plants, numerous other animals, and a plethora of interacting habitats. In early October, 2019, five ENSBC members — Carol Cleave, Marcia Weflen, Debby Storms, Beth Gibbs and I — together with three birders from Cincinnati, set off for the Pantanal with Josh Engel's Red Hill Birding. It was the dry season, when animals congregate near the water. It was also the end of the breeding season, a good time to observe nesting behavior and young. It was warm enough so that you wanted to be ready for birding at 5:30 am and out of the heat well before noon. Welcome intervals of air-conditioning were punctuated with delicious meals.

The introductory material in *Birds of Brazil: The Pantanal & Cerrado of Central Brazil*, published by the Wildlife Conservation Society in 2010, will help you appreciate the interaction between the Cerrado and the Pantanal. A 10-day trip will take you to a rich diversity of landscapes: the dry forest, gallery forest, and wooded savannah of the Cerrado, as well as the seasonal grasslands, marshes, forested islands and forests of the Pantanal. The Cerrado, occupying one quarter of the area of Brazil, is the world's most biologically rich savannah and the Pantanal's water source. It is full of wildlife. It is also disappearing at an alarming rate, primarily due to agriculture.

Brazil is as large as the Continental United States. We flew first to Sao Paulo. Another two hour flight brought us to Cuiabá. Our first stay was in a charming, birdy lodge in Chapada dos Guimarães National Park. Before traveling, Josh asks participants to list 10 species they want to see. During a cool evening walk in the park we visited a stunning canyon with a waterfall — few tourists, great birds — brought exclamations of "that's on my list!": Curl-crested Jay, Colored Crescentchest, the Blue Dacnis and Red and Green Macaw, to mention just a few.

On day 4, we arrived at the rustic welcoming archway to the Pantanal and the unpaved Transpantaneira Highway, the only access road (with 95 bridges) to the lodges where we stayed. The Pantanal is full of birdlife: parrots, parakeets, macaws, woodpeckers, songbirds, Curassow, Screamers, Aracari, herons, Red-legged Seriema; the list goes on and on. Altogether, we saw 340 species. Everywhere there were lounging caimans and browsing or loafing capybaras,



Hyacinth Macaw by Josh Engel



and we had several exciting sightings of giant river otters fighting or fishing. Our mammal species totaled 22. During our stay at Porto Jofre, the literal end of the road, we took three boat trips on the Rio Cuiabá and its tributaries to see a Pantanal highlight, the jaguar. Most were lounging in the shade along the river bank. Our highlight was a female promenading for quite a while along the river's edge, wide out in the open!

Topping the list of the group's five favorite trip birds was the extraordinarily gorgeous (and noisy) Hyacinth Macaw (see above).

Josh has scheduled another trip to the Pantanal for October 4-14, 2021. It includes an extension to stunning Iguazu Falls on the Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil border. For more detail, visit <https://www.redhillbirding.com/> and click on trip lists.

Christmas Bird Count 2019

By John Leonard



The Bird Club sponsored its 59th annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Saturday, December 28, 2019. The CBC is the premier citizen science project, running now for 120 years. We send our data to a central repository at the National Audubon Society, and one can easily view historical trends at (<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/where-have-all-birds-gone>).

This year, 50 dedicated birders enjoyed mild weather for the second year in a row to note 63 species in our 15-mile diameter count circle. The total number of species seen was quite low compared to our average of 71.2 since 2000 and provokes possible explanations. Maybe the extreme cold earlier in the Fall pushed more lingering migrants further south.

We collectively walked a total of 102 miles, and drove another 270 miles to observe birds in daylight hours. In addition, several participants set out before dawn or after dusk to find owls, both Eastern Screech and Great Horned (11 of each). A single Barred Owl was also obligingly out in the daytime, a treat for Joel Greenberg's group.

At the lovely and fun countdown dinner at Libby Hill's home, roughly half of the counters gathered for a potluck meal, wonderful meal as always. Next, John Leonard presented a new version of the spreadsheet for the excitement-building countdown, starting with, of course European Starling, and ending with semi-rarities. Even with commentary putting observations of each species in historical context, along with trend graphs of all our prior data, the show is rapid paced and gives everyone in the room a chance to participate.

As each of our 10 area leaders called out their numbers in turn, a mini-competition ensued. Especially appealing

is the later stage of the countdown when less common and even surprising finds are revealed. One of the most surprising findings was a Gray Catbird found at the Skokie Lagoons by Jeff Bilsky, Laurel Ross and David Wachtel. Despite the low overall diversity of species, we did discover one new bird for the count. There were not only one but two Eastern Phoebes found. One was spotted by Joe Suchecki's group near the Grove in Glenview, and one by Tim Earle and Dick Young in the river channel just west of the Bahai Temple in Wilmette. Record numbers of Red-bellied Woodpeckers (181 vs 145 prior) and White-breasted Nuthatches were found as on other area CBCs recently. On the other hand, big misses included Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pine Siskin, Common Redpoll, Wood Duck, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Snow Bunting, Red-winged Blackbird, and 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 106 now).

While it is unsurprising that no new species were seen at feeders compared to those seen "out in the field", there were 16 different types of birds at one feeder site or another.



*Yellow-rump at Suzanne
Cecchia's feeder in Evanston*

One surprise was the near absence of European Starlings at feeders (1 at one feeder). A surprise feeder bird was a single Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler. Maybe that's not so surprising given that 22 were found in the field.

In all, we counted 14,373 birds! Maybe we will see even more next year if

Red-breasted Mergansers make a good showing next to the shore. We only had 50 field counters and 11 feeder watchers this year. We're always looking for more help for both. So, save the date for the upcoming December 26, 2020 count!

Note from Joel Greenburg, Feeder Watch compiler: There were only 10 feeder reports submitted, and two failed to record so much as a single species. A total of 16 species were seen, with House Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco leading the flock with 34 individuals each. The most unexpected bird was a Yellow-rumped Warbler in Evanston (referred to above).

The 2020 Great Backyard Bird Count, February 14-17, provides a snap shot of where birds are around the world. Anyone can take part. Find out how at <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/about-great-backyard-bird-count>

A Great Birding-by-Ear Experience!

An electronic news flash from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology a few years ago grabbed my immediate attention. The notice featured a Nature Sound Recording Workshop in the California Sierra Nevada mountains. I was sure of myself in terms of visual bird identification and knew bird behavioral characteristics — red feathers with a crest or a black, gray and white bird walking upside down on a tree trunk are fairly easy. Bird sounds and calls were a different matter. I have been a regular user of the Cornell's Macaulay Library and eBird for several years, and the notion of participating in a workshop sponsored by this group was too good to pass up.

Without delay, I enrolled in the Workshop. It was a blast and tremendous learning experience. Greg Budney, the Audio Curator of Macaulay Library, led the workshop which he has done since 1989. The group size was small for a better learning experience. Mornings started early with field recording and field breakfast. The group returned to the San Francisco State University (SFSU) Field Campus for lunch and afternoon lectures, demonstrations, how-to sessions and friendly reviews of each other's morning work, with the goal of improving with each subsequent recording session.

Since I had no professional recording gear, I had to do some quick eBay shopping for recommended gear. With advance notice, equipment could be borrowed for the week. During the workshop varieties of recording gear were shared and swapped for comparison purposes.

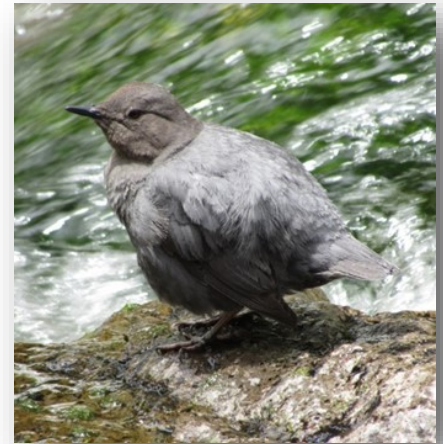
The SFSU Field Campus is a wonderful, rustic facility with all meals provided. Breakfasts are in the field. Lunches are casual with a hot meal in the evenings. Lodging is in platform tents with ample modern bathroom and shower buildings. The costs are modest given the ambiance, level of instruction and workshop experience.

The scenery, birding, quality of instruction, workshop and SFSU Field Campus facility were beyond compare, and I thoroughly enjoyed every minute; can't recommend it highly enough. The workshop improved my birding skills, and I now have added auditory clues to my bird identification. This was a life changer for me.

This year a Sound Recording Workshop will be held June 6th to June 13th. The group gathers in Reno, Nevada, an easy travel destination from Chicago. Interested? Click on <https://sierra.sfsu.edu/content/natural-sound-recording-workshop-0>. The link to SFSU Field Campus is <https://sierra.sfsu.edu/home>.

If you have questions or want more information, contact me at:
markvaughan60201@gmail.com

By Mark Vaughan



*American Dipper, Yuba River, CA
by Mark Vaughan*

News from your ENSBC Board

The Club elects Board members at its April meeting, this year Tuesday, the 28th. Currently the Nominating Committee is putting together a slate of proposed candidates which will be announced in an eblast to members in March.

The Committee is particularly looking for persons to fill the Publicity Chair position and a new post of Education Chair. If you are interested in serving on the Board — and we hope you are — please contact Jim La Rochelle at jimlaro@sbcglobal.net.



*Western Bluebird, Sierra Nevada, CA
by Mark Vaughan*

GET READY FOR SPRING!

Looney Trip: Saturday, April 4. Annual excursion, usually with 100 loons or more! Meet at Diamond Lake, Gale Street Inn Parking Lot, at 8:00 a.m. Ends at approximately 2:00 p.m. with lunch out at local eatery. Limited group size. Reservations required. Leader: David Johnson, djohnsoda@comcast.net.

Air Station Prairie: Wednesday, April 8. Woodcocks, Woodcocks! Meet at 6:45 p.m. on the deck of the interpretive center. Leader: John Leonard, jleonard5440@yahoo.com.

Air Station Prairie and Techny North: Wednesday, April 22. We'll look for early migrants including shorebirds, especially Wilson's Snipe. Meet on the deck of Air Station Prairie interpretive center at 8:00 a.m. Leader: John Leonard, jleonard5440@yahoo.com.

Check www.ensbc.org for the many trips coming up in May to Gilson Park, Montrose, Skokie Lagoons, Northwestern University campus, Perkins Woods and many more.

Warblers will soon be comin' through!



Townsend's Warbler, Montrose, Alison Newberry and Matt Sparapani, Sept. 15, 2019

Don't Miss Our January 28 Program

A year in Perkins Woods with John Bates, Curator of Birds at the Field Museum and Cook County Forest Preserves Bird Monitor for Perkins. See www.ensbc.org for details.



If you've been hearing Great Horned Owls this season, here's why:

High in a leafless cottonwood, a female Great Horned Owl incubates two eggs. As light snow falls on her back, her mate roosts nearby. Since December, this pair has been hooting back and forth regularly at night. Great Horned Owls nest in winter, and the owlets, which hatch after a month of incubation, must remain near their parents a long time compared to many other birds — right through summer and into early fall.

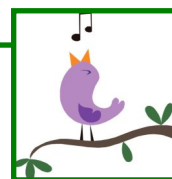
Edited from **Bird Note** which provides stories about birds, the environment and more through images, sound and information. To learn more, go to <https://www.birdnote.org/about>

Check out the new ENSBC Logo!



Updated and redesigned
by Nancy Halliday

Welcome New Members



Dan Bowman	Chicago
April Jensen	Evanston
Joanne Kalnitz	Chicago
Karen Taira	Evanston
Lesley Wolff	Wilmette

Bird Calls is a publication of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club.

Please send ideas, comments, articles and photos to

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