

# Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

DECEMBER 2011 [www.ensbc.org](http://www.ensbc.org)



Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

## TALES OF CHRISTMAS COUNTS PAST

By Eleonora di Liscia

'Tis the season to go counting. ENSBC offers several opportunities to participate in the annual winter census (see below). But for anyone who thinks a count is no more exciting than braving the winter cold, here are some adventures from the past:

On a Chicago Urban Count many years ago, I was going behind an abandoned building near downtown to bird some brush piles. Before I could get around the corner, a policeman came up behind me and said I had to leave immediately. He said they were going to raid the basement of that building in a few minutes looking for a "crack house."

I left quickly never knowing what birds were in the brush piles.

Jeff Sanders

On the Waukegan Christmas count a few years ago I was birding along Shihloh Blvd, which is not too far from the closed nuclear plant. Even though I was not on their property, they must have thought I was casing the place. They picked me up driving about 1/2 mile away. They brought me to the police station and put me in a lineup and said someone identified me as the person who ran away from them in the morning. It turns out that person was Geoff Williamson, who was running to catch up with other people in his group, while birding on the south side of the plant. I was at work at the time and couldn't possibly have been there.

They put a tough cop/good cop routine on me with lots of foul language and threats from the bad tough cop, but I wouldn't admit to doing anything because I hadn't done anything! What a fiasco! The cops broke my watch with their handcuffs, but I didn't press charges, as I was just glad to finally be released after several hours of lockup and interrogation.

Rich Biss

New Year's Eve 1985 produced a blizzard that carpeted the region in deep snow. Three of us began our trudge along the river but soon found that the going was too exhausting to continue. Al Stokie and Dick Young went back the way we had come, while I decided to minimize my efforts by taking a shorter route to the road from where I could more easily reach the car. Unfortunately, between me and my destination was a marsh, whose nature was hidden by snow. Wading through water never bothered me, and even in winter I do not hesitate getting my legs wet up to the knees. So when I broke through the ice, I was not concerned. But I quickly learned that the ice was too thick for me to walk through; I had to raise my leg high enough to stomp down on it, if I were to move forward. The water kept getting deeper, however, and I was no longer able to lift my leg far enough to smash the ice. I was then forced to use my fists for that purpose, pummeling my way through the frozen pond. Eventually, the declivity began to shallow out, and I reached the car (although my pants were frozen; to get the sensation, wear cardboard sometime).

Joel Greenberg



American Bald Eagle Photo by Tim Wallace.

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## CHRISTMAS COUNTS CONTINUED FROM COVER

Back in the mid-1990's it was another long, cold day New Years Day participating on the Waukegan count. I was with a group of four birders that split up in pairs to bird either side of the Des Plaines River starting at Rte. 176 with the goal of reaching Rte. 120 on foot (about 6 miles). Reassembling our group, we would then visit a few spots north of there to end the day.

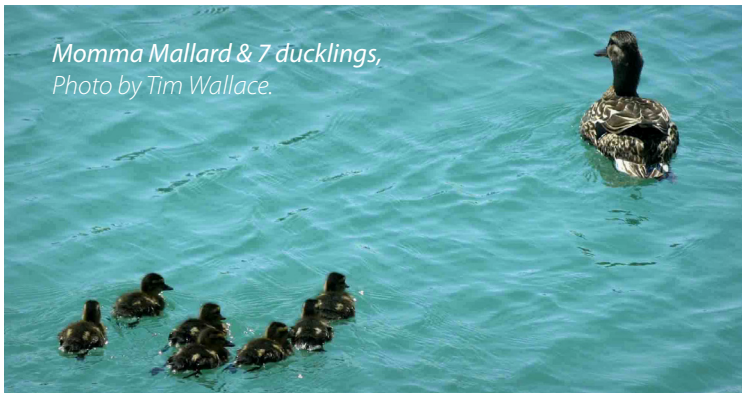
I was temporarily alone when I found myself on the banks of the Des Plaines in a residential area in north Libertyville staring intently at a little bird hopping on the opposite bank. So intently, in fact, that I didn't realize that the bank upon which I was standing overhung the river.

I suddenly found myself falling in slow motion into the river as the bank gave way.

I landed upright in about waist-deep (for me) water, very much unhurt. Since the current wasn't rapid that day, I didn't think it was an emergency until I realized that due to the bank overhang, I couldn't climb out. I ended up calling for help. A nearby home owner heard me, called the fire department for a water rescue, and I was soon out, very much unhurt though a bit wet and chilled.

As is their policy, the Fire Department insisted on taking me to the nearby hospital, from where I was shortly discharged (they gave me generic dry clothes kept there on hand for such situations and a hot cup of coffee). I drove home, changed into my own dry clothes, drove out to Libertyville again and rejoined my birding group (by this time at Rte. 120) about an hour and a half after the occurrence began. I resumed birding and finished the day in the field without further incident.

*Margo Milde*



*Momma Mallard & 7 ducklings,  
Photo by Tim Wallace.*

### MY FIRST CHRISTMAS COUNT

In the early 70's as a new birder, I was excited to go birding in the winter. Too dumb (inexperienced) to have expectations. Walter Krawiec was driving. It started to snow and snow and snow. We drove the best we could, stopped and just barely got out of the car for a few seconds to bird. Icy-cold. In this blizzard and blinded by snow, Walter said at one of our stops, "Listen, hear the mourning doves. We can count a hear." This was the highlight of my first Christmas Count.

*Ray Pershing*

## 2011-12 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS

If you would like to participate in one or more of the Counts, please contact the compiler for instructions.

**DECEMBER 18, 2011 - SUNDAY:** 46th Chicago Urban Count. Compiler: Jeffrey Sanders, 847-657-6431.

**DECEMBER 25, 2011 - SUNDAY:** Chicago Lakefront Count. Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.

**DECEMBER 26, 2011 - MONDAY:** 51st Chicago North-Shore Count. Compiler: Tim Wallace, 847-548-2654. For feeder counters, contact Eleonora di Liscia 847-568-0160 or diliscialaw@comcast.net for a form and to insure that you are within the circle.

**JANUARY 1, 2012 - SUNDAY:** Waukegan Count. Compiler: Joel Greenberg, 630-725-9416.

## IS A WALKING STICK FOR YOU?

*By Kathleen Vogt*

You might automatically say "no," but maybe you should give it some thought.

I started using a walking stick while birding because certain field trips took us to wooded areas where the ground was covered with fallen logs, broken branches, twisted vines, and unseen holes. Although I am steady enough on pebbled or wood-chipped paths, I find it a little tricky managing the unsteady ground cover of the woods. Using a walking stick (a third foot) gave me the added stability I needed to remain upright in such hazardous walking areas.

Then I discovered an added benefit of using the walking stick—a bonus which convinced me to use the extra aid even when I knew the outing would be along a level trail. Using a walking stick gave support to my lower back. Instead of feeling back strain after a two-hour walk, I felt fine after a three-hour walk. Since then I've read that you might also feel relief from knee or ankle strain by using a walking stick.

Nice, manufactured walking sticks can be purchased at some sport stores for from \$20.00 to over \$100.00. These have cushioned grips, leather hand grips, and are light-weight and adjustable. Before spending this kind of money though, you should research on the internet about what to look for in a walking stick or in a "trekking pole" as they are usually called.

You might want to experiment by using your own home-made walking stick. I took an old pool cue, cut it down to size, applied a leather hand grip to it, and attached a rubber tip to the end. The final touch was tying on a hand strap. For now, I find that this works for me.

Some of you might discover that using a walking stick helps you to feel less achy after a long walk. Give it some thought.

**CONSERVATION COLUMN:****GLOBAL WARMING AND BIRD SURVIVAL***By Lloyd Davidson*

The Pied Flycatcher in Holland is a migratory species that arrives there in early spring and soon after nests and raises its chicks. From 1980 to about 2005, an impressive study was conducted on this species, its abundance and its relationship to its primary food source, oak leaf caterpillars, which it depends on for feeding its young. These flycatchers are particularly valuable as a study subject because they will nest in artificial nesting boxes where their feeding and other behaviors can be closely monitored. Although these birds are adept at catching insects on the wing, they depend primarily on oak leaf caterpillars that emerge early in spring, feed on young oak leaves and then, after a few weeks, pupate, and so disappear as an available food source. This is one of the few longitudinal studies of this magnitude and duration that has been done anywhere in the world but represents changes that are occurring globally.

A measure of the caterpillars' abundance over time was done indirectly by spreading cloth around the base of the oak trees and weighing the caterpillar droppings that fell onto it, not a very glamorous undertaking but one that provides fairly accurate data as to their numbers.

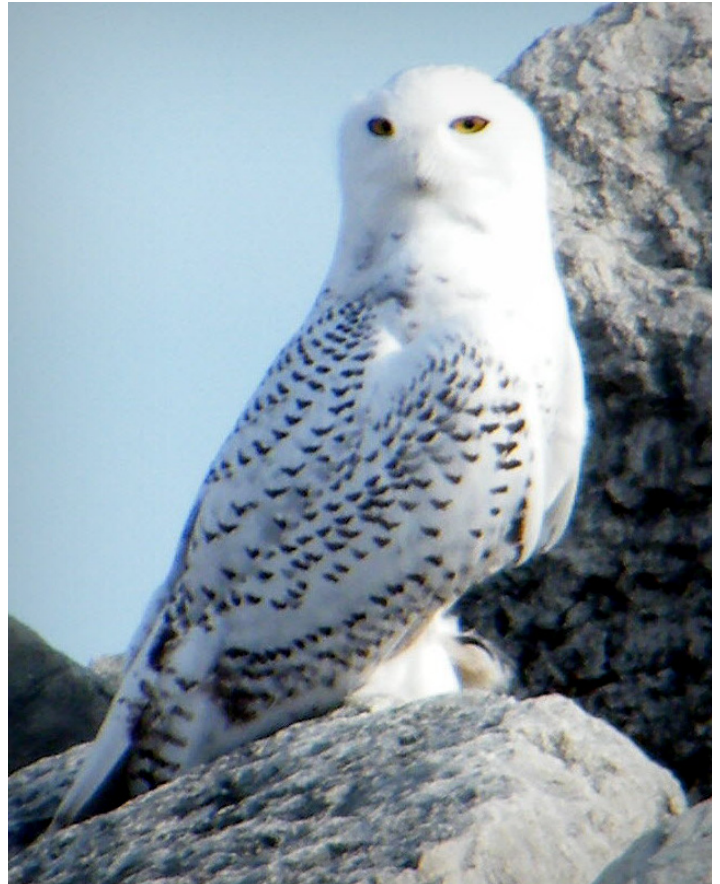
What the researchers found was that over the period of this study caterpillars have been appearing on average 7.5 days earlier each decade, or about 18 days earlier in 2005 than in 1980.

Unfortunately, the Pied Flycatchers, like most birds, depend on day length to trigger their migration and so by 2005 they were arriving in a forest where caterpillars were already present and approaching the stage of pupation. This forced the flycatchers to breed more quickly to take advantage of this food source and by now, six years later, it's likely that most of the caterpillars are gone by the time they arrive. Even more disturbing is the fact that the caterpillars, for complex reasons, were by then appearing even before the oak leaf buds opened, so their success was threatened as well. Data on the date of the Pied Flycatcher's first appearance each year was extracted from the excellent records kept by a local bird club.

Were such changes taking place over a few hundred years, these birds might be able to cope, using the natural genetic variability present in each population coupled with natural selection, but when the speed of such change is this rapid, evolution simply can't keep up.

Global warming, over population and resource depletion are now affecting a majority of species on our small planet and the increasing global reliance on coal and petroleum-based energy resources is leading rapidly to an earth so changed in its environment that it will become, if we were around to see it, nearly unrecognizable by the end of this century. Coincident with these geophysical and habitability changes will be major extinctions of plants and animals, including many bird species, along with the disappearance

of many marine fish, mammals and invertebrates, including corals. Already, many bird species have stopped migrating from north to south because the northern winters have become so mild, especially in Europe.



*Snowy Owl at Thorndale Beach Photo by Eleonora di Liscia.*

The best we can probably do, short of protesting in front of the White House as some have done, including James Hansen (see below), is to donate to groups like the National Wildlife Federation <<http://bit.ly/kstnpl>> that are working to block the implementation of the Keystone XL pipeline that will import oil from the Canadian tar sands. James Hansen, the well known NASA climate scientist and global warming activist <<http://reut.rs/saUsl1>> has correctly concluded that America's collusion in the exploitation of this incredibly inefficient fuel source will be game over for the battle against global warming.

(Note: Some of the examples above have been simplified due to length constraints.)

In part from: *Driven to Extinction: The impact of climate change on Biodiversity.* Richard Pearson, Ph.D. Sterling Publishing Co., NY, (American Museum of Natural History series) 2011.

## PROGRAM NIGHTS

Club programs are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m. at the Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd., Evanston.

**January 24 – “The Field Museum’s Emerging Pathogens Project:**

A Pilot Study of Birds and their Parasites and Pathogens.” Jason Weckstein, a staff scientist at the Field Museum, is part of the museum’s bird division which is conducting a pilot survey of birds (and small mammals) and their parasites and pathogens. The first comprehensive surveys conducted by the team focused on various sites in Malawi. The main goal was to document the biodiversity of parasites and pathogens found on and in birds. Thirty to 70% of life on earth is parasitic yet we know nearly nothing about this critical segment of life. Jason will share images from the first project expedition to northern Malawi and will tell us about what the emerging pathogens project is accomplishing.

**February 28 – “Birding with Buddha in the eastern Himalayas”:**

The Eastern Himalayas of Bhutan and India have only recently opened to tourists but have quickly grown popular with birders because of their unique avifauna, stunning scenery, and fascinating culture. Our own Josh Engel has had the great fortune of visiting the region several times as an international birding guide, where he developed an inordinate fondness for both the region’s birds and its spicy food. Illustrated with a wonderful selection of photos, he will take us through the mammal-filled grasslands of India’s Kaziranga National Park before ascending into the high Himalayas where birds like babblers, hornbills, leafbirds and cutia abound.



ENSBC member Mike Trahan took this photo of an Elegant Trogon on an ENSBC birding trip led by Dave Johnson. *Especies* was so impressed that they asked to use it on the cover of its issue on Trogons.

## FIELD TRIPS

**FEBRUARY 2012 – SATURDAY (EXACT DATE TBA)**

**11th Annual Gull Frolic at Winthrop Harbor** Saturday, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club at the end of 7th Street near Skipper buds. Bring loaves of bread to chum for gulls. Lots of gulls and lots of people. Directions: To reach the Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club, take the I-94 toll road north toward Milwaukee. Exit at Route 173. Turn right (east) and go to Sheridan Road (Rte. 137). Turn left and proceed to 7th Street. Turn right on 7th Street and follow the North Point Marina signs to the yacht club. DO NOT SPEED on 7th Street! It is actively patrolled by the Winthrop Harbor police. PREREGISTRATION IS REQUIRED AND LIMITED TO THE FIRST 150 PEOPLE. Check ENSBC website for further information. Sponsor: Illinois Ornithological Society.

## SPECIAL TRIPS

**FEBRUARY 16-19, 2012 TRIP TO NEW MEXICO**

Following on last year’s success, this tour will target Black, Brown-capped, and Gray-crowned Rosy-finches, Crissal and Curve-billed Thrashers, Ferruginous Hawks, cranes and waterfowl, Juniper Titmouse and many other winter southwest desert specialties. A list of nearly 100 species is possible (last year we tallied 91 species). Estimated tour cost \$550. Easy to moderate hiking. Plan on arriving in Albuquerque by Feb. 15. For further registration and information, email: David B. Johnson, [djohnsoda@comcast.net](mailto:djohnsoda@comcast.net). Leaders: David B. Johnson, Tim Wallace and Raymond Vanbuskirk

**JUNE, 2012 TRIP TO CHURCHILL, MANITOBA:**

Back by popular demand, David B. Johnson will reprise last year’s trip to Churchill, Manitoba. Target birds are Common Eider, Pacific and Red-throated Loons, Ferruginous Hawk, Sabine’s Gull, Arctic Tern, Willow Ptarmigan; breeding-plumaged shorebirds such as Hudsonian Godwit, Red and Red-necked Phalaropes; Sprague’s Pipit; Chestnut-collared, Lapland and Smith’s Longspurs; Baird’s, Nelson’s and Le Conte’s Sparrows to name a few. Last year’s trip recorded 236 species. Projected dates are June 5 to June 18, 2012. Limited to first 13. Contact David B. Johnson at 224-567-9650 or [djohnsoda@comcast.net](mailto:djohnsoda@comcast.net), or visit [www.ensbc.org](http://www.ensbc.org) for details.



Bonaparte’s Gull & Mallard Photo by Tim Wallace