

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

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Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

AT RISK IN THE HALLS OF THE FIELD

Story and photos by Eleonora di Liscia

The millions who visit Sue, the Tyrannosaurus rex, at the Field Museum each year are generally unaware that the Field is also a world class research facility. But the cost of special exhibits has plunged the museum into financial crisis. Now facing the budget axe to the tune of \$3 million dollars is the very research and expertise that make the Field a world-renown academic institution.

What's at stake? The Science and Education department may lose 30 to 40 out of 140 staff positions. This can have a huge impact on not only research done at the Field but the Field's ability to assist research at other institutions.

For starters, there are the collections. According to Collections Manager Ben Marks, the Field has 485,000 traditional bird specimens and 20,000+ eggs. The Field also receives approximately 4,000 salvage bird specimens each year, primarily from Chicago Bird Collision

Monitors, 99% of which either collided with windows or were road kill. Thanks to teamwork between curators and collection staff, these specimens are prepared and cataloged into the collection where they may be studied. It is the expertise offered by these scientists that is at risk.

Furthermore, each staff member's knowledge is multiplied exponentially throughout academia. Through the years, one curator may work with many graduate students and post-doctoral fellow and other associates. Losing the ability to care for the collections has larger implications for the amount of science that can be done on them. Future ornithologists may find no one to mentor them at the Field.

Many African and South American students train at the Field, before bringing that knowledge back to their home countries, said Research Assistant Josh Engel. The students learn techniques for lab work and analyzing genetic data. In turn, the Field gains collaborators for research with other countries. Some researchers use the collections under the auspices of the curators for shorter time periods for their own projects, such as studies on color in feathers.

"To us, we think what's at stake is the scientific operations, the support for science at the level of higher administration," said John Bates, Curator, Bird Division. "What we may lose may be something that can't be rebuilt in the long run."

For example, Bates, an ornithologist, has been acting curator of the Field's world class amphibian and reptile collections for the last three years after two herpetologists were lost to budget cuts. As a result of that loss of expertise, he says, there are no Ph.D. level herpetologists in any academic institution left in northern Illinois.

"Our point is that the research people do is what makes these collections come alive," said Bates. "It has a lot to do with our standing as an academic institution. So losing those positions potentially reduces our status as a major academic institution."

Research at the Field differs from that at a university because of the nature of the Field's collections. The Field's scientists focus on biological and cultural diversity. Much of the work involves building the collections, which in turn allows researchers to identify new species.

The collections have enabled the Field to collaborate with four other institutions including the Smithsonian on the Avian Tree of Life

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Andria Niedzielski, Research Assistant on the Philippine Mammal Project and Intern Andrew Pfeiffer re-label jars of Philippine bats after half were returned to the Philippines. When collecting abroad, the Field agrees to return a percentage of specimens collected to the home country.

HALLS OF THE FIELD CONTINUED FROM COVER

project. The Avian Tree of Life mapped the evolutionary relationships between major lineages of birds. The project relied in part on the genetic material available from the Field's collections. Principal investigator Shannon Hackett spoke on this topic to ENSBC in 2009.

Bates' own work on diversity has had major implications for tropical birds.

"People used to believe conservation wasn't a priority in Amazonia because it's a big swathe of rain forest. But I've shown that Amazonia isn't a single monolithic forest, but multiple areas of endemism, all of which need to be protected. Conservation groups now recognize Amazonia has major sub-regions," said Bates.

Bates recently spoke to ENSBC about his work along with Engel in Africa's Albertine Rift. In another diversity project, Marks has been studying birds across major rivers in Africa. Even where birds look alike, they can be very different genetically, Engel said, which has important implications for conservation of those birds.

The collections also provide a foundation for research in convergent evolution—unrelated species that evolve to look alike. For example, the Eastern Meadowlark and the Yellow-throated Longclaw appear virtually identical except for the extra long hindclaw on the Longclaw. While the Meadowlark belongs to the blackbird family, the Longclaw is classified with pipits and wagtails.

One example of the use of the collection involved raptors and DDT, Engel said. When raptor populations such as Osprey and Peregrine Falcon plunged in the 1960s, researchers were able to compare eggshell thicknesses from before and after the use of DDT, thus proving that DDT was weakening the shells and causing nests to fail.

The collections also enable the study of extinct species such as Carolina Parakeet and Passenger Pigeon. ENSBC's own Joel Greenberg said he has found the resources of the Field Museum vital in researching his books including his upcoming book on Passenger Pigeons.



Ben Marks prepares specimens for the collections.

Besides assisting others, Engel performs his own local research. In 2011-2012, he collected Snowy Owl pellets to see what the owls were eating. Turns out it was mostly rats, voles and birds.

Apart from traditional animal specimens, the Field has one of the best frozen tissue collections in the world. The museum also collects blood samples which aide in studying pathogens such as avian malaria.



One drawer in the Field's collection of 20,000+ eggs.

"If you think about a lot of the diseases that are from the biodiversity of the planet, diseases like ebola and avian flu are examples that have crossed over to humans. The collections we have represent baseline data before something crosses over and becomes a problem to humans," said Bates.

Jason Weckstein, Bird Division Staff

Scientist, studies parasites and their hosts. He came to the Field after winning a National Science Foundation Grant which enabled him to begin post doctoral work under Bates. Weckstein's current grant funding insures him a certain level of job security, but losing colleagues such as Bates could have a huge impact on his work at the Field.

"My research is focused on birds and their parasites and understanding patterns of specificity of hosts. We're looking at the evolutionary history of external parasites found on birds. This allows us to understand the geographic distribution of parasites. How many hosts a given parasite is able to infect and why some parasites only infect a single host whereas others infect multiple hosts," said Weckstein.

Ultimately, Weckstein's work will help understand how ecological conditions affect the ability of parasites and pathogens to switch hosts, which in turn helps us understand how these ills can transfer from other animals to humans.

For example, Weckstein has found that a particular parasitic chewing lice species is able to cross the Andes, even though its host, the White-tailed Trogon, does not. "It turns out this particular louse can ride on parasitic flies that are willing to feed on any trogon species. Their habitat is the bird, not the geography, and that allows the parasites to cross geographic barriers to the avian hosts," said Weckstein.

This work is important to not only understanding bird parasites but our own parasites. For example, the Congo Crimean Hemorrhagic Fever infects people in the Congo and the Crimea but not in between. The Field Museum's Pathogens Project studies how the disease could be transmitted by birds and small mammals.

In all, the Board is seeking to cut a total of \$5 million, of which \$3 million would come out of the Science and Education budget. Add to that, the fact that the various science departments at the Field have already been consolidated. The Field had four academic departments: Geology,

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CHARLOTTE ADELMAN RECEIVES WILMETTE HISTORIC PRESERVATION AWARD

Think you can't make a difference? Charlotte Adelman proves you can, one garden at a time. Charlotte, with the help of Wilmette teenager Joe Brunner and the Wilmette Boy Scout Troop 2, planted a two-acre native Illinois prairie garden in Wilmette's Centennial Park. As a result, Charlotte was one of six Wilmette residents honored at the Wilmette Historic Preservation Awards. Charlotte and the Wilmette Park



*Photo of
Charlotte Adelman
by Elsie Holzwarth.*

District received awards for the project in the Restoration category. Charlotte and her husband, Bernard L. Schwartz, both ENSBC life members, co-authored The Midwestern Native Garden — Native Alternatives to Nonnative Flowers and Plants, an Illustrated Guide (Ohio University Press).

HALLS OF THE FIELD CONTINUED FROM PG 2

Botany, Anthropology and Zoology. These have been combined and then merged with Ecology and Conservation into the Science and Education Department.

"This is especially confusing for Zoology because we've always operated as a unit with very defined divisions based on the collections," said Bates. "We are trying to figure out the new hierarchy. It also restricts funds given in honor of donors that were specifically under the control of the Bird Division that might not be under control of the Bird Division in the future."

Want to help? Bates recommends that you stay tuned to the newspapers for future developments. He also suggested writing letters to the newspapers and to John Rowe, Chairman of the Board of Trustees and/or President Richard Lariviere,



1400 S. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL 60605. Names of other board members can be found at <http://fieldmuseum.org/about/staff/boardtrustees>. If you are interested in attending a meeting to brainstorm solutions, contact Eleonora at diliscialaw@comcast.net or 847-568-0160.

*Research Assistant
Josh Engel displays a
drawer of bird skins.
An Ivory-billed Woodpecker
is on the far right.*

ENSBC ELECTION TIME:

Every April, ENSBC elects a slate of officers. Thanks to their dedication, ENSBC offers many fine programs and field trips as well as our much respected Christmas Bird Count. But we are always looking for new ideas. If you are interested in any position, particularly those marked OPEN, please contact Gary Hantsbarger, ghantsbarger@yahoo.com or 847-374-8022, to put in your nomination. The current slate of nominees is:

PRESIDENT:
GARY HANTSBARGER

VICE-PRESIDENT:
OPEN

TREASURER:
JOHN HOCKMAN

SECRETARY:
NANCY HALLIDAY

CORRESPONDING SECRETARY:
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CHRIS TOMCZAK.

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.

February 26, 2013: "Urban Wildlife Study: Coyotes and other Mammals." Chris Anchor, Wildlife Biologist with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, will speak on the return of keystone predators such as the timber wolf, cougar and black bear to Northern Illinois with special emphasis on the Cook County Urban Coyote Project.

March 26, 2013: "Guatemalan Cloud Forest: Community conservation in Action." The Guatemalan cloud forest hosts many endemic birds, such as the Resplendent Quetzal, and the Pink-headed Warbler, as well as being winter grounds for our migrants. Judy Pollock, Director of Bird Conservation at Audubon of the Chicago Region, will discuss the unique work of Community Cloud Forest Conservation in promoting sustainable agriculture, conserving the cloud forest and providing bird education to local Mayan villages.

April 23, 2013: "Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation." Learn about Flint Creek Wildlife's work in saving the lives of injured and orphaned Chicago-area birds. Director Dawn Keller, will talk about past patients including the baby Bald Eagles that fell from a nest in Batavia and Journey, the Ferruginous Hawk that traveled 1,500 miles stuck in the plow of a freight train before being found at a Chicago-area rail yard. Dawn will bring some of Flint Creek's amazing birds of prey. . . . no promises but perhaps even Journey will make an appearance!

FIELD TRIPS

MARCH 17, 2013 - SUNDAY

4th Annual Memorial Ralph Herbst Duck Trip: Bird the lakes and ponds of the Palos region for a variety of spring waterfowl. Meet at 7:30 a.m. From I-55, exit south on to US Rte. 45/LaGrange Rd. Head straight south to the McGinnis Slough parking lot on the west side of LaGrange Rd. Leader: Jeff Sanders.



*Rare Yellow-eared Toucanet from El Cope Parque Nacional, Panama
by Richard Paulson.*

MARCH 23, 2013 – SATURDAY

Air Station Prairie Woodcocks. Come out to see the spectacular aerial displays of the American Woodcock at dusk! The Air Station Prairie in Glenview is a great location for these displays and we may even spot a woodcock on the ground. Meet on the deck of the interpretive center at 6:45 pm. Leader: John Leonard

MARCH 31, 2013 – SUNDAY

Looney Trip, Lake County. A Dave Johnson specialty! Loads of loons and lots of lakes. Expect other birds as well. Meet at 8:30 a.m. at Breezewald Park, off Old Rand Rd. in downtown Lake Zurich. Leader: David B. Johnson

APRIL 13, 2013 – SATURDAY

North Glenview. Tour the better birding areas that North Glenview has to offer. We will most likely bird Techny Basin Conservation Area, Lake Glenview, and The Air Station Prairie for early migrants and lingering waterfowl. Techny Basin is located west of Waukegan Rd., south of Willow Rd., and east of Ravine Way in Glenview. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at the gravel parking lot on Claire Ct. off of Ravine Way. The trip will last approximately 3 hours but you are welcome to leave at any time. Leader: John Leonard

APRIL 21, 2013 – SUNDAY

Jackson Park and Lakefront – Wooded Isle. A perennial favorite among club members, this trip is excellent for early migrants. Meet at 7:30 a.m. Park south of the Museum of Science and Industry after driving on the east side of the building. Leader: Dick Young.

APRIL 27, MAY 4, MAY 11, MAY 18, 2013 - SATURDAY

Spring Saturday Mornings at Northwestern University's Campus. This area is a stopover for migrants of all kinds heading north. The May 4 trip will be included in the Spring Bird Count. Park on the lake side of the upper deck of the south parking lot off of Sheridan Rd. and Clark St., north of Clark St. beach, at 8:30 a.m. Leaders: Libby Hill on April 27, May 11 and 18, Wayne Svoboda on May 4.

MAY 3, MAY 10, MAY 17, 2013 – FRIDAY

Fridays at Skokie Lagoons. These Friday trips pack a great list of warbler species during spring migration. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Forest Preserve parking lot north of Willow Rd. just east of the Edens Expressway. Leader: Joel Greenberg on May 3 and 17, Lynne Carpenter on May 10.

MAY 4, 2013 – SATURDAY

Perkins Woods Garlic Mustard Pull and Birding. Help rid the woods of this aggressive non-native weed. Perform a good deed, be among friends, and enjoy birds and wildflowers. Come for an hour or a morning, 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Perkins Woods is at Colfax and Ewing between Central St. and Golf Rd. in Evanston. Leader: Libby Hill.

MAY 4, 2013 – SATURDAY

Illinois State Spring Bird Count. Contact Joel Greenberg for Lake Co. assignments (630-725-6660). Contact Alan Anderson for Cook Co. assignments (casresearch@comcast.net or 847-390-7437).

MAY 9, 2013 – THURSDAY

Ryerson Woods. Check out the spring migrants and returning breeders at this beautiful Lake County forest preserve. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Brushwood parking lot. Ryerson Woods is on Riverwoods Rd, northwest of Deerfield. Leader: Gary Hantsbarger.