



COMPASS

Navigating the world of birds and nature

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MARCH 2003

Christmas Bird Counts and the West Nile Virus Impact and Implications

by Gail Goldberger

A report for Audubon-Chicago Region comparing the 2002 Christmas Bird Counts with 11-year averages for eight count areas showed dramatic declines in the populations of three local bird species: American crows were down by 81%; blue jays by 66%; and black-capped chickadees by 35%. The counts were held in Cook, Will, Lake, Du Page, and Kane Counties in Illinois, and Lake County in Indiana. The report was prepared by William Moskoff, Professor Emeritus of Economics and Biology at Lake Forest College, and reviewed by Jeffrey Brawn of the University of Illinois and Douglas Stotz of the Field Museum.

Crow and blue jay numbers were down in every count area, with Barrington and Evanston-North Shore showing the steepest decline, down 90% or more from the 10-year average. Chickadee numbers were lowest in the areas that had the highest concentrations of human West Nile virus cases: the north and south suburbs. The four counts that included parts of those areas with the highest concentrations of human cases had an average 47% drop in chickadee populations, while the other counts had a drop of 37%.

Numbers were not down for all species. The study examined other year-round resident landbirds: mourning doves, American goldfinches, downy woodpeckers, Northern cardinals, and white-breasted nuthatches. All of these

species showed increases in the 2002 count over 11-year averages.

Moskoff's analysis ruled out normal annual fluctuations in the numbers, due to such things as food supply, weather, and number of observers, as a cause of the declines in crows, blue jays and chickadees.

Moskoff was careful to point out that there is no scientific proof that these declines were due to West Nile virus. But three factors - the striking declines in some species, the lack of declines in other species with similar diets and habits, and the concentrations of the declines in the areas where humans were hardest hit - strongly suggest that the virus is the cause. This study was not designed to test whether the decreases were due to disease (other than WNV), pesticide spraying or other factors.

This study confirms the findings of two fall surveys by Audubon and the Bird Conservation Network that local populations of crows and chickadees have been greatly reduced, if not eliminated.

Judy Pollock, Audubon-Chicago Region Projects Manager pointed out that the effects on summer residents, those birds migrating at the end of summer when the disease hit, are still not known. Volunteer bird monitors will be making careful observations this summer to determine whether the numbers of other species have been reduced.

This is a good time to think about

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Give a Little Bit Back to the Birds And Have Fun Doing It!

by Karen Glennemeier

The Bird Conservation Network invites you to join us in 2003 for the Grassland Bird Blitz, the BCN Nesting Bird Census, or West Nile Virus Bird Monitoring.

Grassland Bird Blitz

Chicago Wilderness is embarking on a detailed, regional conservation plan to improve and increase habitat for grassland birds. To succeed, we need to count the birds in as many grasslands as possible. Many grasslands already have monitors; our blitz teams will cover the rest. We'll document the abundance and distribution of rare and important species and the location of sites with good habitat potential. In the future, we'll track changes and learn how our restoration efforts are affecting grassland birds.

The Grassland Bird Blitz will take place from June 13 to June 22, 2003, with local gatherings on the 22nd to compare findings and share exciting sightings. County teams and individual monitors will count birds in all of the grasslands in the region. We'll connect you with your local coordinator, who will give you all the details for your area.

Note: If you already cover a grassland for the BCN Census, your June 2003 data will be included in the Great Grassland Bird Count. This 'blitz' is for sites that are not already covered. If you would enjoy being a part of the energy

and celebration that surrounds that week, please consider monitoring during the Blitz period.

Leaders should be able to identify grassland birds by sight and sound, but less experienced birders are welcome on Blitz teams. If you would like to participate, please contact Karen Glennemeier at 847-965-1150 or kglennemeier@audubon.org

BCN Nesting Bird Census

This Census, now in its fourth year, is providing detailed, long-term data on the breeding birds of Chicago Wilderness. Local land managers use this data in myriad ways.

Monitors have motivated some of the biggest habitat improvement projects in the region:

- Removing nine miles of hedgerows at Bartel Grassland
- Saving heron rookeries
- Stopping a harmful marina, and helping to set priorities of the Lake Calumet wetlands
- Transforming Orland Grassland into a haven for grassland and shrubland birds
- Restoring wetland and grassland habitat at Springbrook Prairie

The Census is simple and fun: monitors visit their sites any two mornings in June and return to the same sites every year. Monitoring methods are either a timed checklist (like a

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YOUR MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS WILL RUN OUT IF YOU DON'T JOIN CHICAGO AUDUBON TODAY!

To sustain the Chicago Audubon Society, you must join the local chapter. Our chapter is a leader in the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. Established in 1971, CAS operates as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with over 4,000 members in the Chicago area.

CAS is a chapter of the National Audubon Society with 600,000 members nationwide.

MEMBER ACTIVITIES AND BENEFITS:

- Member meetings (6 per year)
- Bird Walks led by trained guides
- Bird Habitat Survey
- Christmas Bird Count
- Center for New Birders (2003)
- Field trips year round
- Biennial Birding America Conference
- Birdathon
- Student Scholarship Awards
- The COMPASS (10 per year)

TO JOIN: Complete the application form below and mail it with your check (payable to "Chicago Audubon Society") to:

Chicago Audubon Society
5801-C North Pulaski Road
Chicago, IL 60646-6057

Or by Phone: (773) 539-6793 with a VISA or MASTERCARD

CHICAGO AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Please enroll me as a member of the Chicago Audubon Society. Enclosed is my check for \$20.

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Implications

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encouraging local officials to plan an ecologically sound response to the virus. "Next summer will be a time of stress for recovering bird populations, and Audubon urges municipalities to take the time now to carefully plan their response to future virus outbreaks," said Audubon's Director Stephen Packard.

Spraying for adult mosquitoes is one of the least effective methods of disease prevention, and the most disruptive to wildlife and ecosystems. Audubon urges that other, safer, measures be used first. The most effective and least ecologi-

cally detrimental measures include reducing standing water sources such as uncleaned gutters, and applying bacterial larvicide to stagnant water with "wigglers" - mosquito larvae that have not yet hatched into their adult stage. Spraying with the chemicals typically used by municipalities kills many fish and insect species, disrupting the balance of nature by reducing natural predators of mosquitoes such as dragonflies, and eliminating the food sources of insect-eating birds.

For more information about this report, call Judy Pollock at (847) 965-1150.

(Note: Joel Greenberg, Duane Heaton, Ralph Herbst, Libby Hill, David Johnson, Dennis Kania, Jim Kelly, Carolyn Marsh, Jeff Sanders, Joe Suchecki, and Geoff Williamson kindly made their Christmas Count data available for this report, and Eleanora DiLiscia and Marj Lundy helped with the research.)

Give Back to the Birds

continued from page 1

Christmas Count), a transect (walk the same path each time), or a point count (five minutes at each point).

Monitors should be able to recognize the breeding birds of the region by sight and sound. Apprenticeships are available for less experienced birders. To participate, contact Lee Ramsey at LeeRamsey@aol.com or 847-501-4683.

West Nile Virus Bird Monitoring

Our area was one of the hardest hit by West Nile Virus, and our monitoring network is one of the strongest and most thorough in the nation. Last fall, we made national news in describing the impact of the virus on area crows and discovered a similar pattern of disappearances in chickadee populations. Many questions about the impact of the virus on birds remain unanswered, so our work to document these impacts will continue in 2003.

Backyard birders are welcome to join this project, as well as more experienced birders. If you are already a BCN Census monitor, your data will also be used for this study. To participate, contact Judy Pollock at jpollock@audubon.org or 847-965-1150.

EAGLE OPTICS DAY FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY

Saturday, April 12, 9-4
North Park Village Nature Center

Do you need new binoculars or want to get your first pair? Do you want to upgrade your viewing options by adding a scope? Or would you just like to see what's new in the world of nature watching and optics?

If you answered yes, Eagle Optics Day is for you.

Come to North Park Village Nature Center on Saturday, April 12 and see the latest, greatest and newest developments in optical equipment. Eagle Optics has been helping birders and nature lovers make sound decisions since 1986. They carry binoculars, spotting scopes and telescopes from all major manufacturers including Bushnell, Bausch & Lomb, Canon, Fujinon, Kahles, Kowa, Leica, Minox, Nikon, Pentax, Swarovski, Swift, and Zeiss.

Their knowledgeable, professional and courteous staff will help you pick the models most suited to your needs, or the needs of your family. And 5% of your purchase will go to support Chicago Audubon.

Choosing Binoculars for Birding

Choosing binoculars is one of the most important decisions you'll make as a birder, for they are your window into the world of birding. Making an informed decision now can prevent years of unhappy performance. There are many factors to consider when buying binoculars, such as cost, size, weight, power of magnification, and waterproofing.

The price range of binoculars is from twenty-five dollars to several thousand dollars. Most of that price difference comes from the quality of the optics (glass)-its light gathering ability and precision at transmitting the light.

Binoculars are labeled with two numbers. For example, they may read 8x40 or 10x50. The first number refers to the magnifying power (the object viewed looks 8 or 10 times closer than it actually is). The second number refers to the



front objective lens size in millimeters. A ratio of 1 to 5 between the two numbers (the magnification and the lens diameter) allows in the optimal amount of light for a given magnification. The 8x40 binocular is probably the most popular variety, but 7x35 or 10x50 also work for birders.

When choosing binoculars, make sure they are comfortable for you. You will spend much time with your arms up, holding the binocular to your face. The weight of your binocular is an important consideration. If the binocular is too heavy, not only will your shoulders and neck get sore, but your hands may tremble and destabilize the image you see. Also, check the minimum focusing distance of the binocular. Some models won't focus on an object 10 to 15 feet away, which may be desirable as some birds allow close approach.

Full-size binoculars offer the greatest light-gathering ability and over-all optical performance. Larger lenses and prism blocks provide brighter, sharper image quality. Typical full-size configurations include the 7x35, 7x50, 8x40, and 10x40 models.

Today, full-size binoculars are available in ultralight models, which combine a lighter carrying weight without sacrificing magnification power and image quality.

Compact binoculars are much more portable than full-size models and may even fit into a purse or coat pocket. Smaller lenses limit the light gathering ability of the binocular, but may be ideal for day events. Examples of compact configurations include 7x21, 8x25, and 10x25 models.

How much magnification do you need?

Higher magnifications of 10x (iten power) or more will help when observing at longer distances in more open terrain. When viewing raptors, waterfowl, and large wildlife, the extra magnification will give you more detail.

Lower magnifications of 7x or 8x work equally well in all terrain and in a wide variety of situations. The fields of view are wider and images tend to be brighter. Wider fields of view make it easier to follow fast moving birds in thick woodland environments, scan for animals from a distance, and to follow action in sporting events or at the theatre.

Do your binoculars need to be waterproof?

Binoculars are made for use in the field. Most standard binoculars will stand up to light rain and humidity, but if you plan on extended use in bad weather, or if the binocular could be submerged, then waterproofing is suggested. Waterproof binoculars are becoming more popular and cost-effective as more people push into extreme outdoor situations. They are good for boaters, backpackers, and birders that brave the elements. Waterproof optics are literally submersible, and any water damage would be handled under the manufacturer's warranty. Water-resistant optics will handle occasional splashes, but are not submersible.

Will you wear eyeglasses or sunglasses?

Many models of binoculars allow you to view in comfort while wearing eyeglasses. These binoculars have a feature, known as long eye relief, which allows you to see the full field of view. In order to take advantage of this feature, you roll back, twist in, or pop down the rubber eyecup that is part of the eyepiece. Binoculars are rated for eye relief. Consider models with at least 15mm of eye relief.

COMPASS

Chicago Audubon Society
North Park Village
5801-C N. Pulaski Road
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Audubon info hotline: (847) 299-3505
Report sightings to: (847) 265-2117
Rare bird alert: (847) 265-2118
Activity line: (773) 539-6793, press 1
Web page:

www.homepage.interaccess.com/~stephenc/index.html
Audubon office: Manager, Karen Andersen, (773) 539-6793, fax (773) 539-6830, chicago_audubon@juno.com. Office hours: Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

OFFICERS

President: Christine Lee, (708) 485-8197, stephenc@interaccess.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Hotline: Doris Johanson, (847) 827-5930.
Awards: Alan Anderson (see Research below)

Birdathon: Joe Lill, (773) 631-3154, trptjoe@aol.com

Bird Seed Savings Days: Al Rothenbach, (847) 816-6514, a_rothenbach@yahoo.com

Conservation: Carol Nelson, (773) 583-8616, blue2wings@aol.com

Field Trips: Stephen Lee, (708) 485-8197, stephenc@interaccess.com; and Doris Johanson, (847) 827-5930

Illinois Audubon Council: Al Rothenbach, see above.

Illinois Environmental Council: Gene Small, (773) 434-8328

Land Stewardship: Jerry Garden, (773) 545-4632, jerrygarden@sprynet.com

Nominating: Alan Anderson, (847) 390-7437, casresearch@attbi.com

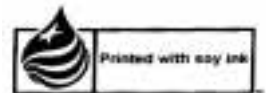
Programs: Debra Fuller, (312) 744-5472, ddustin@ci.chi.il.us

Editorial/Advertising: Gail Goldberger, (773) 743-2457,

gailgoldberger@earthlink.net
Noël Maguigad, (847) 563-3000 xt5259
compass@no-el.com

Publicity: Bill Schwaber, (847) 475-4986, formulae@mcs.net

Research: Alan Anderson, (847) 390-7437, casresearch@attbi.com; Judy Pollock, (847) 864-6393, bobolnk@ix.netcom.com



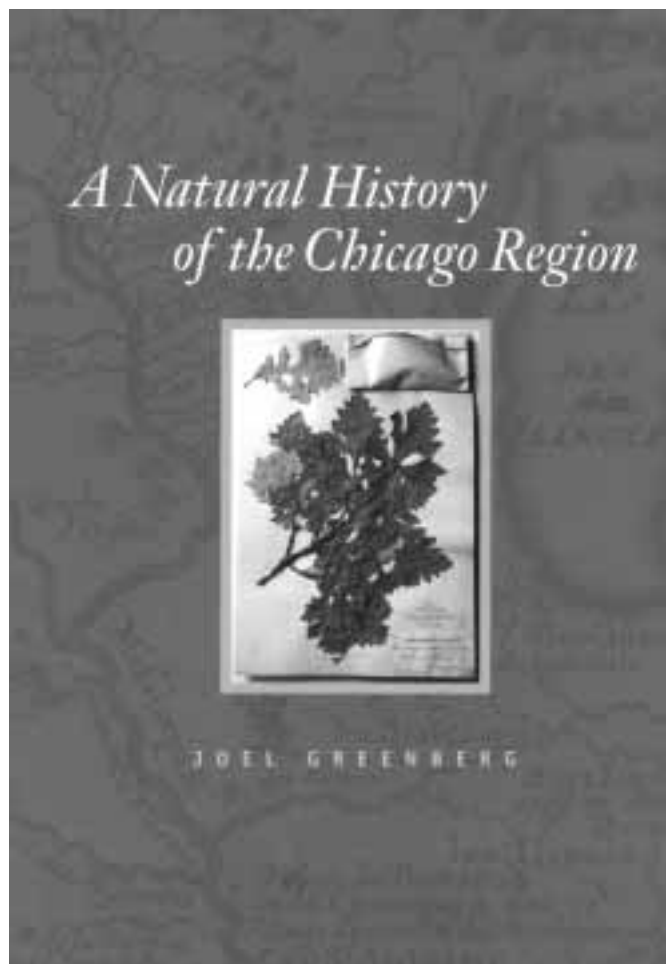
BOOK REVIEWS

A Natural History of the Chicago Region

Joel Greenberg

“ ... that diversity brought to the land an almost unimaginable fertility and an abundance of life that in some manifestations was unrivaled by any other terrestrial environment on earth. To understand and appreciate this remarkable bounty, one must look at how it came to be.”

From *A Natural History of the Chicago Region* by Joel Greenberg



REVIEW 1

by Bill Burger, Department of Botany, Field Museum of Natural History

Listen up everybody, there's a great new book, just published, that provides an overview of our local natural history like no other. The book, *A Natural History of the Chicago Region*, was written by Joel Greenberg, and published by the University of Chicago Press. It costs forty bucks, but that's very reasonable for a fulsome volume of about 600 pages.

What makes the book so valuable, in my opinion, are the many quotations from the first explorers, early settlers, and recent local authorities. These varied sources help the author describe the transformation of local environments over the last two hundred years.

Greenberg begins the book with landforms and vegetation types. Later chapters deal with wetlands, the lake, and several categories of animal life. Each chapter begins with the earliest accounts and takes us into the present.

In discussing birds and mammals, Greenberg provides especially rich historical narratives. Here you get an impression of the grand landscapes and wealth of wildlife lost to modernity. Many conservation efforts are recorded in this book, both those that succeeded and those that failed. Thanks to his background as a lawyer, all this information is brought together in clear and well-organized chapters, backed up by forty pages of references. Best of all, the author writes engagingly, and with a deep affection for our natural heritage. My guess is that few metropolitan areas of the world will have a book to match this one.

Reprinted with permission from *Field Notes of the Field Museum*.

REVIEW 2

by Christine Williamson, Conservation Chair, Chicago Ornithological Society

Have you ever been in a forest preserve in the Chicagoland area and suddenly realized that you can't see or hear anything that's man-made? Does the prospect of getting lost deep in the Indiana Dunes thrill rather than scare you? Do you ever imagine the landscape of northern Illinois as Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet saw it in 1763?

If you lean toward the natural in the urban/suburban landscape, Joel Greenberg's new book, *A Natural History of the Chicago Region*, is perfect for you. In it, he describes how the beaches formed where you look for shorebirds and how glaciers formed the esker ridge in a Lake County Forest Preserve where you might be looking at a blue-gray gnatcatcher nest.

The book was a 17-year labor of love for Mr. Greenberg, a long-time bird watcher and dedicated conservationist. His research into our landscape is exhaustive, yet Mr. Greenberg's gift is the ability to translate that wealth of knowledge into a natural history that is actually readable. Mr. Greenberg's distillation of more than 200 years of human habitation and the prior 30,000 years of natural ecosystem development will change how you view Chicagoland.

Analysis of survey maps made between 1821 and 1841, coupled with ecologists' modern estimates of soil distribution, plant communities and wildlife distribution, lead Mr. Greenberg to conclude "that diversity brought to the land an almost unimaginable fertility and an abundance of life that in some manifestations was un-

rivaled by any other terrestrial environment on earth. To understand and appreciate this remarkable bounty, one must look at how it came to be." From a discussion of glacial impact on northern Illinois, southern Wisconsin and northeastern Indiana, Mr. Greenberg moves to a discussion of both the original and current state of prairie, shrub land, forest, wetland, Lake Michigan, river and stream, beach, dune and bluff ecosystems.

I know Joel from many a National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count dinner, where his wit wakens and cheers even the most frozen bird surveyor, and it is in his section on birds that his natural prose style is at its most compassionate.

A Natural History of the Chicago Region is a rather emotional and personal book, filled with both modern and historical anecdotes about plants, animals and people. Some are the author's, but many are collected from first-hand accounts of settlers.

In an 1884 account from Lacon, Illinois, for example, Mr. Greenberg found the following on how one could shoot a sandhill crane:

"Where corn adjoined a wheat or oat stubble, they would alight ... and then approach the corn in the most wary skirmisher style ... Shy birds? I should say they were. Here they were always very careful in looking out for the safety of companions ... with this one exception: the cranes ... are very greedy and nearly always hungry, hence sometimes when a bunch would visit a field ... and the grub was good and plentiful, they all fall to eating at once, leaving no sentries. At such times one with good care could get quite close to them ... Many a one have I laid low with my little old single shotgun."

I wondered immediately why anyone would want to shoot a sandhill crane: To eat it?

Mr. Greenberg had the answer. A man in the 1830s described a woman he knew who had a sweet tooth and just had to make some mince pies for Thanksgiving. The man said:

"Meat was pretty scarce at the time and fruits and sugar were costly articles. But her mind was set on pie, and pie she must have. The chopped breasts of sandhill cranes and mashed crabapples, sweetened with a spoonful of molasses and well-spiced, made that mince meat. A wedge of that pie was enough to break the courage of the stoutest settler and never failed in a single instance."

Birders often tell me how overwhelmed they get by the gloom and doom scenario described so often in the environmental press. Mr. Greenberg doesn't pull any punches when it comes to describing the reasons behind reduced biodiversity in the Chicagoland area and the future dangers to the wild, natural aspects of our cities, suburbs and natural areas. But this natural history leaves room for hope, and describes the many ways that birders and conservationists just like you have made a difference in preserving our natural heritage.

Knowing what the past landscape was like informs what the future will be, and I think Mr. Greenberg's new book will be a great help in shaping our mindset as well as our landscape.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Stewardship Workdays

At the Skokie Lagoons: March 8 and April 12 at 10:00 a.m.

Chicago Audubon conducts regular monthly workdays at the Skokie Lagoons on the second Saturday of every month. Activities include buck-thorn cutting, animal and plant monitoring, cleanup and debris removal, and other management activities. Meet at the Tower Road parking lot, east of the lagoon bridge. If you arrive late, look for a CAS sign near the parking lot directing you to the work site.

For further information call Jerry Garden at (773)545-4632, or e-mail him at jerrygarden@sprynet.com

Member Programs

NOTICE OF CHANGE

At the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, Chicago 7-7:30 p.m. Refreshments 7:30 p.m. Program

These programs (open to the public, not just members) will now be held six times a year, April, May & June and September, October & November, at the same time and place, second Friday of the month. Watch future issues for program topics.

Field Trips

Saturday— March 8. EAGLE VIEWING at Lost Mound Wildlife Area, Savanna IL

During the winter, more bald eagles can be seen along the Mississippi River in Illinois than anywhere south of Alaska. Hundreds of eagles spend the winter feeding around the locks and dams and other open water areas, and roosting in the bluff areas.

Lost Mound Fish and Wildlife Area (formerly the Savanna Army Depot), now co-owned and managed by the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, is one spot where you can spot anywhere from 20-200+ eagles during the winter. In addition to eagles, we expect to see resident birds, including possibly wild turkeys and horned larks, as well as ducks and other species. After spending most of the day at the Depot, we will also check for eagles along the Fulton Dam, a bit farther south.

Dress for the weather (layered clothes are best for the warmer bus or colder outdoor temperatures) and bring a lunch, beverage, snacks, binoculars, field guide and spotting scope if you have one. The bus trip to Savanna is just over three hours; your Audubon leader is Alan Anderson.

March 8, 6 a.m.-6 p.m. Register by phone: (312) 665-7400; \$55 FM and CAS members /\$70 non-members. Bus leaves from Field Museum west gate, 6:00 a.m.

Bird Walks

Wednesday, March 26 - 8:00 a.m. Wooded Island Bird Walk - on the birthday of Paul Douglas- meet at the Darrow Bridge just south of the Museum of Science and Industry. For more info call Doug Anderson (773) 493-7058

Saturday, March 29-8:00 a.m.- Wooded Island Bird Walk - Doug Anderson (773) 493-7058.

Every Wednesday in April - 7:00 a.m. Every Saturday in April - 8:00 a.m. Bring binoculars and field guide. Dress for the weather.

Every Saturday in April - 8:00 a.m. North Park Village Nature Center

Meet in front of the Nature Center at 5801 N. Pulaski Road. Walks are sponsored and led by Audubon guides. Bring binoculars and field guides. For more information, call the Nature Center at (773) 744-5472.

WOODCOCK COURTING FLIGHTS. SUNSET — Wednesday, March 26 and Saturday, March 29 & Sunday, April 6 and Saturday, April 12.

You don't have to go far to see the high-flying courtship of this unusual looking bird. Join us at sunset (6:30 - 7:30 depending on the date) at Wolf Road Prairie (31st St. and Wolf Rd. in Westchester). We have had very good luck in the past eight years seeing woodcock flights on the Prairie. This year these trips will be co-sponsored by Save the Prairie Society. For exact times call Stephen or Christine Lee at (708) 485-8197 a day or two before the trips. E-mail: stephenc@interaccess.com.

Saturday, April 26—8 to 10:00 a.m. Early spring migrants at Lyman Woods in DuPage County.

Lyman Woods is located at the intersection of 31st Street and Highland Avenue in Downer's Grove. The new entrance to Lyman Woods is located on 31st Street just east of the intersection with Highland Ave. (See April COMPASS for update on meeting place.)

Bring binoculars and dress for the weather. For further information call Stephen or Christine Lee at (708) 485-8197. Our e-mail is stephenc@interaccess.com.

Other Events

Birdathon Mailing Day Saturday, April 5, 9 am - 2 pm

Join us in the Chicago Audubon offices. Volunteers requested. Call (773) 539-6793 to reserve a space. Refreshments all day.

Eagle Optics Demo Day North Park Village Nature Center Saturday, April 12, 9 am - 4 pm

CAS will host a demonstration day with Eagle Optics. You will be able to try out the newest binoculars and scopes. Experts will be on hand to answer questions. Five percent of the proceeds go to CAS.

Annual Awards Dinner Saturday, April 26, 6:30-9:00 pm At the Homestead Restaurant in Melrose Park. See April COMPASS for details.

Birdathon! 2003

dates have been set! Teams may compete for the coveted Beecher Cup on any day between Wednesday, May 14 and Tuesday, May 20. Contact Joe Lill at (773) 631-3154 or trtpjoe@aol.com for more information.

Chicago Flower and Garden Show — 2003



Chicago Audubon will again be sponsoring a booth at the Chicago Flower and Garden Show at Navy Pier running from Saturday, March 8th through Sunday, March 16th. The purpose of the booth is to spread the word about Chicago Audubon, the environment, and the Center for New Birders opening in the spring at North Park Village. At the booth, we will be handing out information, offering specials on Chicago Audubon memberships, and selling a few items.

We need volunteers to help out at the booth, especially on the weekend and in the evenings. If you can help out, you will receive free admission to the show, but parking will not be covered.

Show hours are from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. every day except Sundays, when the show closes at 6:00 p.m. The following time slots have been set up to make the scheduling easier: 10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.; 1:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.; and 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. If you would like to help, please call the office at 773/539-6793 with your first choice of day and time slot, and a second choice if possible.



Illustration by Steven D'Amato

STUDENTS WANTED FOR AUDUBON SUMMER CAMP

by Joe Lukascyk

"To absorb a thing is better than to learn it, and we absorb what we enjoy. We learn things at school; we absorb them in the fields and woods and on the farm. When we look upon Nature with fondness and appreciation she meets us halfway and takes a deeper hold upon us than when studiously conned. Hence I say the way of knowledge of Nature is the way of love and enjoyment, and is more surely found in the open air than in the school-room or the laboratory."

The naturalist John Burroughs wrote these words. The Chicago Audubon Society (CAS) has helped teach some of our area students about their natural world, and what they can do to help preserve it. Through its Summer Scholarship Program, Chicago Audubon has provided scholarships for two area students to attend the Northwoods Audubon Camp

in Sandstone, Minnesota. During the weeklong camp, students learn about bird banding, Native American crafts, camping skills, plants, animals and habitats. They visit a Wildlife Science Center, the Duluth Zoo, and the Great Lakes Aquarium.

These scholarships, including tuition and airfare, are open to students aged 10-12 years old. The 2003 Camp will be held from July 13 - 18. If you are a science, biology or environmental science teacher, and would like your class to compete for one of our scholarships, please write to me at the Chicago Audubon office, or call (773) 539-6793 and leave a message.

If you would like to help Chicago Audubon continue to send area students to these summer learning camps, your contribution would be greatly appreciated. Please send them to our office, earmarked for Summer Camp scholarships.