

March 2015

Volume 3 Issue 2



## Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



# The Pelican Scoop

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### New Members

George and Sandy Davis  
 Karin Herrell  
 Majorie Stevens



Common Redpoll by Anne Straight

## Message From The President

Happy March to all, Spring is getting closer. I just heard on the weather, the possibility of a couple of fifty degree days next week. The Bald Eagles are starting to migrate north, so this Saturday will be the last Bald Eagle Viewing Tour. With the exception of the last week, it has been a little hard pressed to find numbers of Bald Eagles in one place, with most of the Mississippi River still frozen. However, concentrations of about fifty Bald Eagles at a time have been congregating in Sabula, Ia around a small patch of unfrozen water each evening. This has provided some great views and insights into their feeding habits. With the beginning of

Spring also comes some changes. Starting April 11th we will begin a second Saturday of the month History and Wildlife Tour of the "Old Savanna Army Depot". What was once the "Depot" is the largest remnant sand prairie in the state of Illinois. Join us as we travel through time to experience some of the history and legends of "The Sand Prairie". SAD was established in 1917 and closed in 2000 by the U.S. Government. Many of the original buildings still stand as ghostly sentinels of the prairie, guarding over the rich history of the area. In 2003, the first 9,857 acres were transferred to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Lost Mound Unit was established. During the



Connie Zink - Savanna, Il.

tour you will also learn the current habitat management of the refuge and will be provided an opportunity to view many species of wildlife. The van will leave from the Lost Mound Unit Office promptly at 1:00 pm and will return at 5:00 pm on the second Saturday of each month. Please call Ingersoll Center 815-273-2732 to sign up for one of the new history tours. Until next month, get out and enjoy Spring!

## Anne's Birding Corner

A small, streaked winter finch in our area, the male Common Redpoll has a rosy breast and sides, red on its forehead, giving it a cap or "poll" and black surrounding the yellow bill.

The female and juveniles are gray/brown and lack the red cap. All birds have two white wing bars. The Common Redpoll breeds

subarctic Northern America in boreal forests and tundra shrubs.

It will winter in the northern and central part of the United States. This seed-eater will visit feeders, weedy and brushy areas, and catkin bearing trees.

A similar but less common Redpoll, the Hoary, can be hard to tell from the Common Redpoll. The male Hoary is paler with a frosty appearance,



Anne Straight - Forreston, Il.

a smaller bill, pale pink breast and unstreaked coverts.

## Backwater Birding with Bob



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia,

Common Mergansers are sometimes called sawbills, fish ducks, or goosanders. The word “merganser” comes from the Latin and roughly translates to “plunging goose”—a good name for this very large and often submerged duck.



Common Merganser by Wade and Connie Inskeep

Having recently returned from a vacation in Costa Rica, I'm finding these late blasts of winter to be especially bone chilling. With visions of trogons, macaws and hummingbirds still lingering in our minds, it was a real shock to our systems to venture outside the Des Moines Airport into frigid -10 degrees F weather and 14" of new snow! We decided to instigate a “preemptive strike” on cabin fever, grabbed the snowshoes and head to the tracts at Whitewater Canyon in search of birds and a few positive signs of spring. Shortly after sunrise, Sandy and I drove out our lane and were greeted by two mature Bald Eagles soaking up the morning sunlight high atop an oak tree at the edge of our property. It was not exactly a sign of spring but it was a great way to start the day! While driving the short ten miles to Whitewater we encountered numerous flocks of Horned Larks, several good sized flocks of Tree Sparrows, and a few Lapland Longspurs, all foraging along the wind-swept shoulders of the road. At the Whitewater Canyon parking lot, we were greeted by two Rough-legged Hawks hovering over the prairie, and our friend, Jim Oleson, who was also interested in shaking off a little “winter dust.” In spite of the bright sunny morning, the 8 degree F temps and 10-15 mph wind gusts would make the upland Whitewater prairie very uncomfortable and unlikely to harbor many birds. Instead we opted for a hike into a narrow side canyon called Valley of the Caves, that we knew would be protected from the wind. As we descended from the prairie to the small stream that runs

the length of the valley floor, the climate improved dramatically. Near the entrance of the canyon, feeding on newly planted prairie forbes, was the largest flock of Dark-eyed Juncos that I have seen this year. We estimated the flock had over 400 juncos, along with around 200 Tree Sparrows. As we ventured down the canyon, the prairie gave way to cedar dominated bluffs, pot marked with crevices and caves. We soon found ourselves unzipping coats, removing gloves and enjoying the warmth of the bright sun reaching the valley floor while the wind continued to howl over the prairie a couple hundred feet above us. As we continued to hike, we were able to spot a half dozen Northern Cardinals, 5 Yellow-shafted Flickers, 12 Eastern Bluebirds, and 15 American Robins. After being alerted by the raucous call of several Blue Jays we spotted a Barred Owl tucked tightly to the trunk of a large cedar tree, and in a small grove of walnut trees, we were pleasantly surprised to view over a dozen woodpeckers—Downy, Hairy, and Red-bellied Woodpeckers all feeding on the small nut fragments inside the shells of chewed up walnuts, discarded by squirrels. While returning to our vehicles, a loud “fee-bee” song of a Black-capped Chickadee echoed through the canyon. The “fee-bee” call is a territory call that they sing as they begin establishing their nesting territories instead of their normal “chick-a-dee-dee-dee” song. It was great to hear at least one harbinger of spring! As we approached the parking lot, the cold winds picked up in velocity and the snow once again began to fall. Jim's parting

comment was, “A day like today makes it easy to see why Whitewater Canyon was so important to the early Native Americans.” Even today, there are fragments of natural habitat found in our parks, preserves, and refuges that continue to be very important reserves for insuring the survival of our remaining natural resources and wildlife-- in addition to making life a lot easier for a few hardy outdoor enthusiasts just trying to fend off a minor bout of cabin fever. It has been a long, long winter and I can't wait to hear my first rattling/ trumpeting call of a Sandhill Crane or even the gurgling “konk-la-ree” of a Red-winged Blackbird. The following is a list of overdue coming attractions:

March 1-15: Check out Spring Lake and Green Island for early arriving Greater White-fronted Geese, Snow Geese, and migrating Bald Eagles.

March 15-5: Northern Pintails, American Black Ducks, Gadwalls, American Wigeon, and migrating Mallards will be arriving in large numbers. Check out Lock and Dam 13, Spring Lake, Princeton Wildlife Area and Green Island.

March 25-31: Early shorebirds including Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs will be arriving. Large numbers of gulls and Bald Eagles will be feeding in backwater areas where there were winter fish kills. Diving ducks including Lesser Scaup, Ring-necked Ducks, Canvasbacks, Redheads, and Buffleheads will pass through our open water area in large numbers. Check out South Sabula Lake for large numbers of gulls that usually include many rarer varieties.

## *Jr. Stewards Chatter*

2015 Jr. Stewards season is gearing up to be another fantastic year with 16 youth (with parents) taking part. We would like to thank the various businesses that are supporting the Jr. Stewards program: Solutions from Science, JC Carey, Manny's Pizza, Shepherd's Landscaping, Tim Voltz - State Farm, Powerlab, Milo and Beavers and Engels Jewelry. Each Jr. Steward volunteers to be the "Reporter of the Day", and write about what we did in that session.



Shawn Wegmann

Reporter of the day Shawn Wegmann, 3rd Grade, Clinton IA

Saturday, February 7th at Junior Stewards, we watched nature intro. videos. We also talked about snowshoeing. Then we went snowshoeing for a long time. I think we also had a good snack. I liked the first Junior Stewards session.



## Flash Point - "Using Props in Your Photography"

I have always loved landscape photography. The refuges have lovely scenery with the wooded acres and waterways. There is a glorious photograph around every corner.

Recently, I saw a photo online of a city skyline shot through a crystal ball. When the image was inverted, it was quite a spectacular shot. I thought to myself, "I can do that". I went online and found an 80mm crystal ball for \$16 and ordered it. Luckily, it was only coming from Indiana and arrived quickly.



Connie Inskeep - Moline, IL.



It has been very cold here lately (in the teens and below with wind chill), so doing any outdoor photography is something you do very quickly. Holding a glass ball with your bare fingers when the wind chill is sub-zero is not fun, but the resulting photos are awesome!

Wade and I went to Lock and Dam 14 to see the eagles and get some shots (he with a zoom lens and I with a wide angle to accommodate the crystal ball). There weren't many eagles there as I think they may be on their way north for the year. I managed some shots of the sunrise over the river with the lock in the background.



Keep in mind if you are shooting through a glass sphere like this, that any image will be inverted. You can flip the photo in post processing or leave it as it is if you prefer. Here is a shot of Lock and Dam 15 in downtown Davenport right side up or upside down. It is up to you how you will like your picture.

Use your imagination and capture your local refuge in different ways. No matter what, it will still be beautiful! Until next time, keep shooting and use your imagination!

Connie Inskeep

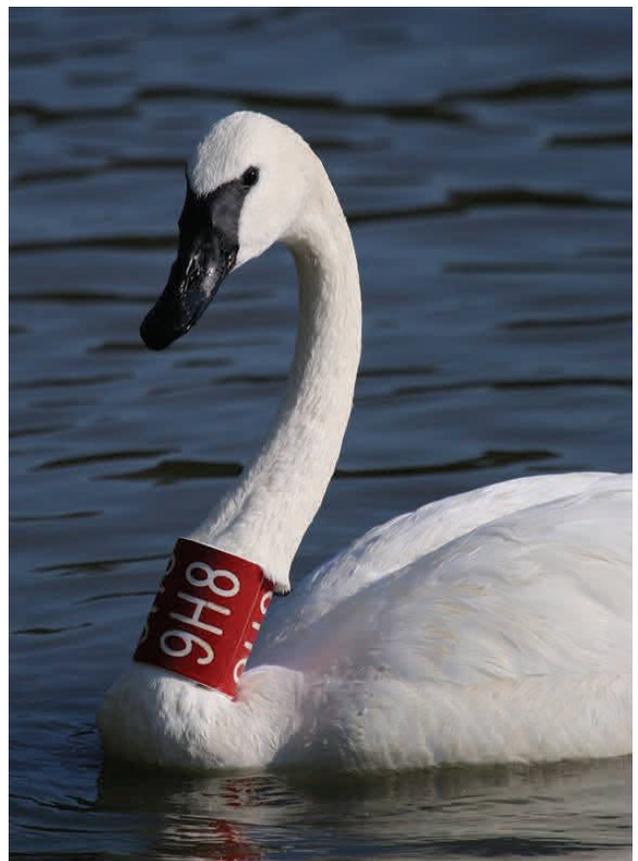


## *“Trumpeting Success” by Ed Britton*



Thousands of migrating diving ducks are fishing the waning edge of Mississippi River ice and dining on local sushi during their trek to the northern nesting grounds. Their cousins, the vegetarian and insectivorous puddle ducks, won't be far behind this first wave of diver's. A more spectacular but seldom seen waterfowl species that winters locally and was on the brink of extinction is the majestic trumpeter swan. Trumpeters are typically the only swan species that we see locally in late winter. Groups usually only consist of a single pair or a small family. They originated from a state-wide restoration program and don't migrate long distances because they were raised locally. There are two smaller swan species that frequent our area, the tundra and mute. Tundras resemble trumpeters in body size and appearance but arrive by the thousands in spring and fall, usually stay in large groups, and have a distinct muffled musical whistle. Mute swans are an Old World species that were introduced to North America. They are often seen in larger city parks, are considered semi-tame, and have a distinctive bright orange bill. One or two pairs have frequented our river area but have not been successful in establishing a local population.

Trumpeter swans historically nested throughout Iowa. Many factors including the loss of wetlands and unregulated hunting resulted in their population decline. A 1930's survey indicated that only 69 trumpeters existed in the entire U.S, all of them at Red Rocks Lake National Wildlife Refuge in southwest Montana. In 1993, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources developed a plan to restore trumpeters to the state. Two goals were identified: establish 15 wild nesting pairs by 2003 and bring about a public awareness on the value of wetlands. Iowa DNR began re-introducing trumpeters in 1997 in Blackhawk County followed by Dubuque County in 1998. The first modern day hatch of wild trumpeters occurred in 1998 in Dubuque County, some 115 years after the last documented wild nest in Iowa in 1883. Since 1997, over 1,100 trumpeters have been released in Iowa. Locally, swans have been released at the Green Island Wildlife Management Area in Green Island and the Jackson County Conservation Board's Hurstville Interpretive Center in Maquoketa. These restoration efforts have been an important contribution to not only our local population but the state-wide restoration program. Iowa's wintering population varies greatly from year to year with last winter's number being 458. Since 1998, there have been 437 known trumpeter swan nests in Iowa. In 2014, there were 45 wild nesting attempts reported and included nests in Clinton, Jackson and Scott Counties. Several pairs of Iowa released swans are nesting in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois. There have been 294 known trumpeter mortalities. These included 62 died in power line collisions, 55 poached by violators, 59 died due to lead poisoning, 11 with apparent malnutrition, and 38 to diseases. The public is encouraged to report trumpeter swan sightings as these reports relate to the success of the restoration program. Some swans are marked with neck collars, wing markers or leg bands. Reports should include the type and color of marker and the alphanumeric code on the marker. You can report trumpeter swans sightings to Dave Hoffman with Iowa DNR at 641-357-3517 or email: [David.Hoffman@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:David.Hoffman@dnr.iowa.gov). The Iowa Department of Natural Resources and many Iowans are very excited about the future of trumpeter swans in the state and hope their numbers remain strong.



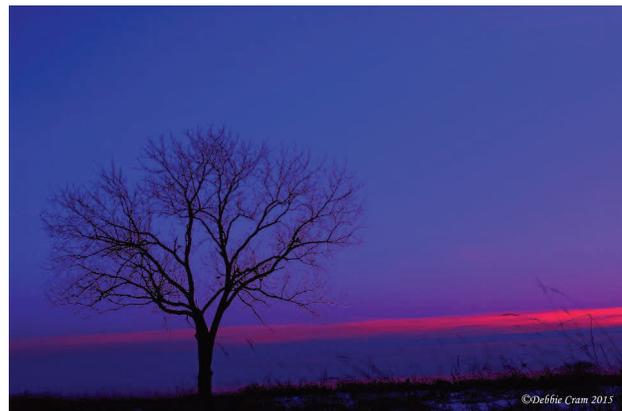
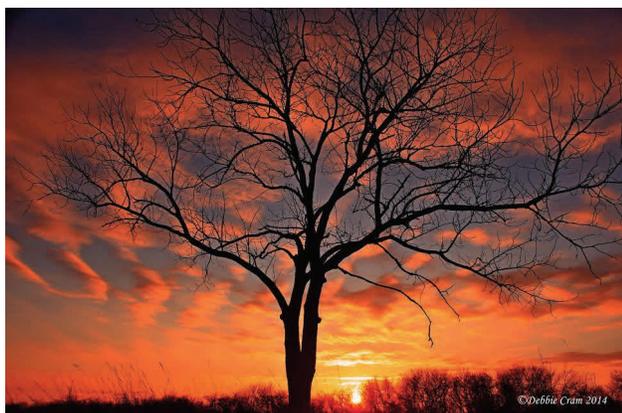
## *“This Ol Walnut Tree” by Debbie Cram*

“This Ol Walnut Tree” welcomed me home from my journey to Dubai. It was an experience I will never forget.

I missed “This Ol Walnut Tree” while I was away. She welcomed me with a fabulous sunset that warmed the night sky.

Beauty is still found around her on the refuge even though the temps are bitter cold, you just have to know where to look or use your imagination.

I am currently on day 271 of “This Ol Walnut Tree” so please continue the journey with me to day 365. You can see all of the photos on Facebook at "This Ol Walnut Tree".



*“Sightings Around the Refuge”*



Bald Eagles by Michael Fitzgerald



Snowy Owl by Dave Watts



Bald Eagle by Connie Zink



Juvenile Bald Eagle by Michael Fitzgerald



Bald Eagle by Wade and Connie Inskeep

*“More Sightings Around the Refuge”*



Trumpeter Swans by Wade and Connie Inskeep



© Stan Bousson

Female Common Merganser by Stan Bousson



Belted Kingfisher by Wade and Connie Inskeep

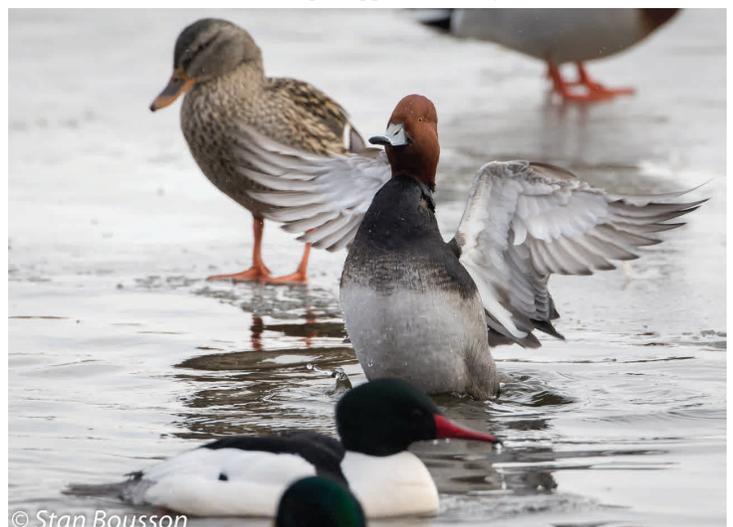


© Stan Bousson

Dark Phase Rough-legged Hawk by Stan Bousson



Mallards by Wade and Connie Inskeep



© Stan Bousson

Redhead, Common Merganser, Mallard by Stan Bousson

*“Even More Sightings Around the Refuge”*



Deer at Lost Mound Unit by Connie Zink



Long-eared Owl by Michael Fitzgerald



Great Horned Owl by Michael Fitzgerald



Redhead By Stan Bousson



Snowy Owl by Dave Watts



Bald Eagle by Connie Zink



American White Pelicans by Connie and Wade Inskeep

### Schedule of Events

Sunday, March 15th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:45)

Friday, March 20th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00 am - 1:30 pm

Saturday, April 11th "Monthly Bird Walk" 9:00 am – 11:00 am (Meet at Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center)

Saturday, April 11th "Lost Mound History and Wildlife Tour" 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office 12:45)

Friday, April 17th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00 am - 1:30 pm

Sunday, April 19th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:45)

Thursday, May 7th, "Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge" 8:00am - 10:00am

Saturday, May 9th "Monthly Bird Walk" 9:00 am– 11:00 am ( Meet at Sloane Marsh)

Saturday, May 9th "Lost Mound History and Wildlife Tour" 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office 12:45)

Friday, May 15th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00 am - 1:30 pm

Saturday, May 16th, "Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge" 8:00am - 10:00am

Sunday, May 17th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:45)

Thursday, May 21st, "Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge" 8:00am - 10:00am

Thursday, June 4th, "Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge" 8:00am - 10:00am

**All events are free and open to the public but registration is required. Please call 815-273-2732 or email [stewardsumrr@gmail.com](mailto:stewardsumrr@gmail.com)**



### Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

7071 Riverview Rd  
Thomson, IL 61285

815-273-2732  
[stewardsumrr@gmail.com](mailto:stewardsumrr@gmail.com)

Check out our Website:  
[www.stewardsumrr.org](http://www.stewardsumrr.org)



### Membership Form

All members receive a 10% discount at the Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center Book Store.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Membership Categories

- Blazing Star ( Student) ..... \$5
- Yellow-headed Blackbird ( Individual) ..... \$10
- Ornate Box Turtle (Family) ..... \$20
- Sandhill Crane (Supporter) ..... \$100
- Osprey ( Corporate) ..... \$250
- Bald Eagle (Lifetime) ..... \$1,000

Mail completed form to SUMRR:

7071 Riverview Rd

Thomson, IL 61285

[www.stewardsumrr.org](http://www.stewardsumrr.org)



Make a difference and join today.



Capturing Moments in Nature

Photo by Stan Bousson



Photo by Stan Bousson



Photo by Stan Bousson



Photo by Stan Bousson



Photo by Stan Bousson

We want your input. Photo by Stan Bousson  
**STAN BOUSSON** has graciously agreed to lead a few photography classes to include classroom and field time.

What is your level of interest?  
How can Stan help you?  
Which camera set up do you use?  
What day of the week and time works for you?

We would like to tailor classes to best suit needs and interests.  
Please email us with your thoughts.  
[stewardsumrr@gmail.com](mailto:stewardsumrr@gmail.com)  
**ONLY THOSE CONTACTING US WILL RECEIVE UPDATES ON CLASSES!**