



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



The Pelican Scoop

Inside this issue:

<i>Backwater Birding with Bob</i>	2
<i>With Spring comes Migration by Connie Inskeep</i>	3
<i>Membership Dues—Due</i>	3
<i>Trip to Nachusa</i>	3
<i>Beaver Island Planning Progressess - by Ed Britton</i>	4
<i>Jr. Stewards Chatter</i>	5
<i>Bring Wildlife to Your Desktop</i>	6
<i>Sightings around the Refuge</i>	7
<i>Trio of Nest Bald Eagles</i>	8
<i>Schedule of Events and Membership Form</i>	9
<i>Smartphone Photography Workshop</i>	10

New Members

Karin Herrell
John and Leta Miller

Renewed Members

Elda Goodmiller
Mary Blackmore
Diane Bauseman
Rudy Viereckl
Connie and Wade Inskeep



Western Meadowlark
by Connie Zink

Message from the President

Happy Spring! Three days ago it was 80 plus degrees and I was planting flowers and setting out vegetable plants. Today, as I write this it is 44 degrees, raining and windy. Saturday morning, April 16th was one of those beautiful days, it was also the day of the Sandhill Crane Count. Every year as one of our Stewards activities we participate in the annual crane count. My husband and I have done it for six years now and it is an event we look forward to each year. Talk about having breakfast with the birds! Every year our station is at the Spring Lake Unit, just south of Savanna. We have to be in a specified location by the lake at 5:30 am, before the sun

comes up. Sitting in the dark, waiting for the sun to rise and listening for the first signs of life in the marsh is a phenomenal experience. As nature awakens, the sights and sounds of the marsh come to life. Many different species of ducks, Canada Geese, American Robins, Song Sparrows, and Northern Cardinals all come to life before the sun rises. We heard our first pair of Sandhill Cranes unison calling to each other around 6:05 am. I love the sounds the Sandhill Cranes make, once you have heard them you will never forget it. Within minutes, we caught sight of a lone Sandhill Crane flying over where we were sitting and also a pair of Trumpeter Swans came into view. Such beauty it is to see them gliding



Connie Zink - Savanna,

along in the water at first light. For two hours we sat there watching and listening to the sights and sounds of nature, lost in our own little world, without other people. If you have never experienced an early morning sunrise out alone with nature, I highly recommend it. What a start to a beautiful day! Have a great Spring and enjoy some time with the birds!

Anne's Birding Corner—Western Meadowlark

This medium-sized, stocky bird is in the blackbird family. This robin-size bird has a yellow breast with a v-shaped black band. The wings are rounded and short and the tail is short with white outer tail feathers. The malar stripes (a colored line angled back from its chin) on the Western is more yellow and the Eastern is mostly white. This can be hard to see in the field and where these birds overlap in

breeding. The Western is best separated from the Eastern by voice. The Eastern has a more simple song and the Western is more complex with warbles and gurgles. It nests in grasslands, meadows, and tall grass areas in western and central parts of North America. Food consists mostly of insects but might include seeds and berries. It migrates and winters in the more southern parts of the United States



Anne Straight - Forreston, IL

and into Mexico. It is the state bird of six states: Nebraska, Wyoming, Kansas, North Dakota, Oregon, and Montana.

Backwater Birding with Bob



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia,



Cormorant Island
by David Watts



Great Blue Herons
by David Watts



Bald Eagle
by David Watts

“Oh what a spring!” is a common statement emulating from numerous birders as they summarize their early spring outings to the Mississippi River backwaters this year. Beginning already in mid-February, morning visits to Green Island were spectacular. There were the sights and sounds of clouds of waterfowl—Mallards, Pintails, and White-fronted Geese too dense to count! My best estimate of the birds covering the crop field just north of the Fish Lake Parking Lot was 6,800 White-fronted Geese, 1,200 Snow Geese, 12 Ross’s Geese, and 2,000 migrating Canada Geese. Seeing that many White-fronted Geese brought back memories of a trip to Green Island with my father in the early 1980’s when we saw 3 White-fronted Geese and a small flock of Canada Geese. They were the first White-fronted Geese that I had ever seen. It’s nice to see some things changing for the better. On a recent trip to Green Island, I found at least 1,800 White-fronted Geese with 400 Snow Geese still lingering, taking advantage of the food and shelter in this wetland complex.

During the first week of March, Sandy and I spent almost every sunset at Green Island observing the post sunset roosting flights of thousands of migratory waterfowl. Arriving near sunset, we would usually park at the Channel 4 Access or the Fish Lake Parking Lot, sit on the end gate of our pickup truck, and face northwards. The evening flight show usually began about 10 minutes after sunset and lasted for about 20 minutes. We were rewarded with wave after wave of waterfall descending from the darkened sky and landing in the nearby

marsh to roost for the night. Binoculars and spotting scopes are not very useful for identification at this time of night, but with a little practice, species can be identified by silhouette, size, flight pattern, and sound. I particularly like hearing the loud, sharp quacks and soft chuckling calls of female Mallards, the hoarse quacks of male Mallards, the “pip-pip-pip” calls of Pintails, the “kleep-reeep” call of Wood Ducks, the squeaky, rubber duck like, quack-quack of Wigeons, and the grunting sound of Scaup. If you can, share this evening adventure with other enthusiastic birders. On a special evening we were accompanied by a father and young daughter who had never witnessed this evening phenomenon. She volunteered to be our official counter, but quickly gave up the count at a conservative “4 bazillion ducks!” The show is usually over in about 20 minutes and the marsh goes quiet with the exceptions of a few honks from the geese, cackles from Sandhill Cranes, and hoots from the Great Horned Owls that seem to be objecting to the sudden arrival of thousands of “aliens” invading their nesting homeland. I encourage you to observe this memorable spring spectacle at your favorite marshland from March through mid-April. Besides Green Island, Spring Lake, Sloane Marsh, and Princeton Marsh are all great places to observe this phenomenon.

In addition to ducks and geese, this spring has been great for observing record numbers of Red-breasted, Common, and Hooded Mergansers in Middle Sabula Lake, along with large flocks of American White Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorants that returned almost

three weeks ahead of normal. Also, driving into South Sabula Lake Park was like an old Alfred Hitchcock movie with thousands of gulls assembled on the roadway to feed on the abundant shad that were washing in along the shoreline.

Here is a list of upcoming birding attractions:

April 1-15—Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets will be migrating through our area. Look for Golden-crowns in and around conifers, and Ruby-crowns in brushy thickets at the edges of marshes. Check mudflats for early shorebirds such as Yellowlegs, Snipe, and Pectoral Sandpipers.

April 15-30—Shorebirds, terns, and gulls will be peaking in number. All the species of swallows should be soaring low over wetlands. Early warblers (Yellow rumped, Black and White, Palm, and Tennessee), vireos, and wrens should be arriving. There should be good numbers of grassland and marshland sparrows arriving.

May 1-15—All the species of warblers, vireos, wrens, and thrushes will be arriving. Hummingbirds should be frequenting feeders, and all the flycatchers should be present in wooded areas.

This is definitely a premier time of year to grab your binoculars and take part in the “Year of Birding”. Starting now and continuing for about 1 ½ months, almost 40% off all the species of birds found in North America will be utilizing the Mississippi River flyway for migration or nesting. Head out to your favorite wetland in the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge and enjoy nature’s “Greatest Show on Earth.”

Flash Point— “With Spring Comes Migration”

Every year we look forward to spring and fall migration. Wade and I are “bird people” so at those times of year you will see us out in the field getting pictures of the beautiful birds that arrive or just pass through.



Spring is especially exciting because the birds are all in their most colorful attire to attract mates. Getting a photograph of a colorful bird in its natural setting is very thrilling for us. We actually plan our vacations around where the birds are at any time of the year. Now that’s dedication!

Always remember these responsible birding guidelines when photographing birds during the spring and at nesting time: Use a zoom lens and keep your distance as not to disturb or cause undue stress to



Connie Inskeep - Moline, Il.

the birds. Do not use electronic devices to “call” birds during nesting season. This could make the bird leave the nest unattended where predators or brood parasites could invade the nest. Until next time, grab your camera and get out to your local wildlife refuge and take some pictures!

Membership Dues are Now Due

Thank you all so much for being a part of the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge, whether you are an active member, or a supporting member, you make a difference. We had a discussion at the last meeting on why did we join the Stewards. The same reason was repeated, “we enjoy the comradery with those that have the same interests and care about our resources”. Many of our members are avid birders, photographers and nature lovers. There is something for everyone. 2015 has been a busy year. We completed several upgrades to our wildlife cams; increased the bandwidth at two locations for our WiFi service; assisted in providing many educational opportunities such as photography classes; assisted with the Jr. Stewards Program; provided birding van tours of Lost Mound; refuge golf cart tours; monthly bird walks; bald eagle photo contest and many other outreach activities. Our monthly meetings are open to everyone and we encourage you to attend. We meet at the Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center the 3rd Friday of each month, at 11:00 am for a potluck with a meeting to follow. Please fill out the membership card in the back and mail it in. Or if you want to pay your dues on-line please go to <https://www.razoo.com/us/story/Get-Involved-Today>. If you did not receive a membership pin, please let us know and will get it in the mail to you.



Stewards Members Only—Trip to Nachusa Grasslands—June 15

The 3,500 acre Nachusa Grasslands is owned and managed by the Nature Conservancy consisting of large remnant prairie, woodlands and wetlands, located near Franklin Grove, IL. This is an awesome place to visit and it’s right in our back yard. Bison have returned to Illinois and we will see many of the new calves and a variety of wildflowers. Join us as we travel to Nachusa and learn what they are doing to restore and manage this area.

We will meet at Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center at 7:30 am and car pool to the site. Please bring a sack lunch, binoculars and a camera. Contact the refuge office to register for this trip. Registrations need to be in by June 3rd. We will be back to the Center before 3:00 pm.



Bloodroot

‘Beaver Island Planning Progresses’ by Ed Britton



The Beaver Island Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project is progressing through the planning stage. Project construction is still a few years away due to funding constraints but details of this multi-million dollar project are being identified. The two primary objectives are restoration of deep water habitat within the interior lakes and diversification of the forest community.

The habitat rehabilitation project covers the lower three-fourths of Beaver Island. This area is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and managed as part of Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. The project is part of the Upper Mississippi River Restoration Program, a Corps funded program that focuses on restoration of Upper Mississippi River habitat.

Beaver Island is one of the largest islands on the Upper Mississippi River and is the largest backwater complex in Pool 14. Its 1,800 acres extends four and a half miles long and one mile wide. The island lies in the Mississippi River floodplain with the annual flood pulse controlling the composition of floral and faunal communities.

The construction of the lock and dam system for the nine foot navigation channel in the 1930's resulted in higher water levels that drastically changed habitat conditions on Beaver Island. Annual high water events, flooding, and sedimentation have filled in the once deep backwater lakes and degraded habitat for fish and wildlife.

The loss of deep water habitat in the island's backwater lakes is being addressed. Six to eight feet of material need to be removed from these lakes because they are important habitat for over-wintering fish that require low flows and oxygen rich water. The project must also insure there is future protection of these interior lakes from sedimentation.

The island's forest community is dominated by an even-aged stand of silver maple trees dating back to the 1930's. This species is more flood tolerant than many hardwood species. Forest system management recommendations identify a 100 year rotation. A project feature is to increase tree species diversity, especially the planting of mast producing hardwoods. In addition, a comprehensive forest improvement project is included.

The dominance of a tree species in any forest community is a concern. Lessons learned from Dutch elm disease, pine beetles and emerald ash borer show that forest devastation can occur on a landscape scale in a relatively short period of time.

The protection of adjacent Albany Island is also a project feature. Albany Island was constructed during Corps dredging operations in the 1940's to keep the river channel open for commercial navigation. Erosion is severe along the northern and eastern shorelines due to wave action causing the loss of soil and trees.

Progress reports and milestones on the Beaver Island habitat restoration project are available on at the Corps of Engineers website:

<http://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/Missions/EnvironmentalProtectionandRestoration/UpperMississippiRiverRestoration/HabitatRestoration/RockIslandDistrict/BeaverIsland.aspx>



Jr. Stewards Chatter - 5th Year Begins with a Bang

Hard to believe that 2016 marks the 5th year for the Jr. Stewards program, where has the time gone. Over the years, I have been so blessed to work with 44 excited Jrs. (and their parents). 2016 is looking like it's going to be another awesome year with 20 eager Jrs. and their parents. Getting to Know You was our first session in February. This session gives them an overview of the US Fish and Wildlife Service, National Refuge System, and the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. This mandatory session sets the stage for the rest of the year. Each Jr. then volunteers to be the reporter of the day and/or bring treats for each of the sessions. This program can not exist without the support from Refuge Staff, Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge, Parents and Financial Donors such as: Solutions from Science, JC Carey, Manny's Pizza, Shepherd's Landscaping, Tim Voltz - State Farm, Jeannie Mills and Engels Jewelry.



Pam Steinhaus



2016 Jr Stewards

Back Row: Brennon Anderson (2), Geneva Zach (2), Steven Romo (1), Brennon Cavanagh (5), Ethan Brown (4), Shayla Roberts (5), Ashlynn Kready (1), Emma Swiderski (4)

Middle Row: Dallas Bunn (2), Bryar Haring (1), Remington Anderson (2), Aden Howard (2), Alise Legel (1), Ellie Hanviriyapunt (1)

Front Row: Madison McClelland (2), Alex Peterson (1), Wyatt Wollam (2), Ben Kready (1).

Missing: Jacob McLuckie (5), Ana Cunningham (1)

(Number in parentheses is the number of years each has been a Jr. Steward)



Some Jrs learned how to use their smartphones with various lenses to create some cool looking photos.



Emma Swiderski, 7th grade Savanna, IL

Saturday, March 5th the Jr. Stewards met at the Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center and learned about nature photography. Several photographers from the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge worked with us to learn some special tips on taking better photos. Even though it was cold, we went outside to photograph nature. We photographed plants, geese, landscapes and various birds. The 2016 Scavenger Hunt photo challenge was introduced. We had our first official group photo of the year with our new t-shirts.

Dallas Bunn, 4th Grade Savanna, IL.

April 2, the Jr. Stewards met at Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center to learn about Bird Identification. Bob Walton, Vice President of the Stewards and an avid bird watcher taught the Jrs. about different adaptations of birds.

Dallas writes: Bob talked about bird colors and that a pterodactyl is not a bird. Owls have some things alike with hawks. Woodpeckers don't get concussions because their tongue cushions the brain. Biggest bird is the condor; smallest bird is the ruby throated hummingbird. Saw birds today.



Due to extreme windy conditions we had to do a little birding by window.

Bringing Wildlife to Your Desktop is No Easy Task

Wildlife Camera Manager, Stan Bousson and his assistant Pam Steinhaus have been busy getting various cameras up and online. However, it hasn't been an easy task, especially with the Eagle Nest Cam. Every year since we have had a camera on this nest (2011), we have run into some kind of problem, sometimes its as simple as the eagles moving to another site. This year is no exception. We began the year (fall of 2015) with no power to the camera. We decided to replace the existing electric cable from the home tree (equipment tree) to shoreline after finding some problems. This was no easy task and did not solve the problem. Somewhere across the next wetland is the problem, but where. Thankfully it was quite warm in December to work in the water to find and fix two problem areas. (Thank you Mr. or Mrs. Muskrat). We now had power, but no video. More volunteers were called out to run a new line of CAT5 video cable to replace the one that was cut. We were good to go; wait a minute, now we can't get connected to the main computer. The antenna was then replaced and we were up and operational.



This is the first time in 6 years that everything seemed to be coming together. The camera was working great and the eagles were using the nest. However it wasn't long after the news was out that the nest cam was active on the website, that the bandwidth was being used up causing the feed to get very choppy. Facebook was also picking up more new likes and new followers. A new follower got us connected to Wildearth.tv to do free streaming. We also contacted JCWiFi to increase our bandwidth and they gave us a great deal, however that has also increased our internet service cost 3-fold. This was something we felt was necessary in order to provide the service we need to get the excellent video feed to the public. Our hope is that donations will come in throughout the year to help defer the extra cost. As I write of this article, the eagle cam is still not up and may not get fixed until after the eaglets fledge the nest. I hope this isn't the case but is looking that way. Having cameras in remote areas gives the word challenging a new meaning. Thanks to the Thorens, Waltons, Zinks, and Refuge Staff for helping get the work done behind the scenes.



“Sightings Around the Refuge”



Great Horned Owl by Micheal Fitzgerald



Great Horned Owl young by Micheal Fitzgerald



Great Blue Heron—Debbie Cram



Bald Eagle—Debbie Cram



Great Egret—Dave Watts



American White Pelican by Dave Watts

“Trio of Nesting Bald Eagles”



Schedule of Events

Thursday, May 5th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
 Saturday, May 14th “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00am– 11:00am
 (Meet at Sloane Marsh)
 Saturday, May 14th “Lost Mound Birding Tour” 4:00pm - 7:00pm (Last one till fall)
 Friday, February 19th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00am - 1:30pm
 Thursday, May 19th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
 Friday, May 20th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00am - 1:30pm
 Saturday, May 21st “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
 Thursday, June 2nd “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
 Saturday, June 11th “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00am– 11:00am
 Wednesday, June 15th—Stewards Trip to Nachusa Grasslands 7:30am—3:00pm
 Thursday, June 16th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00 am
 Saturday, June 18th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00 am

Friday, June 17th “Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting” 11:00am - 1:30pm
 Saturday, June 18th “ Smartphone Photography Workshop” 9:00am -12:00p.
 Wednesday, June 22nd “ Smartphone Photography Workshop” 9:00am -12:00p.
 Thursday, July 7th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
 Saturday, July 9th “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00am– 11:00am
 Wednesday, July 13th “ Smartphone Photography Workshop” 9:00am -12:00p.
 Friday, July 15th “Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting” 11:00am - 1:30pm
 Saturday, July 16th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00 am
 Thursday, July 21st “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
 Please check Calendar of Events on the Website for new events.

All events are free and open to the public but registration is required. Please call 815-273-2732 or email stewardsumrr@gmail.com



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

7071 Riverview Rd Thomson, IL 61285 815-273-2732 stewardsumrr@gmail.com



Like us on Facebook

Check out our Website: 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



Make a difference and Join today.

My Phone, My Refuge Smartphone Photography Workshop



If you have an iPhone or android smartphone and would like to learn how to take better pictures, this workshop is for you. We will review basic photography principles, pros and cons of the smartphone, an overview of some useful camera accessories and photo-editing apps to create unique and amazing photographs. Participants will also learn how to integrate photos with social media.

This will be a fun, interactive and informative workshop— open to all ages but geared to the novice user.

Workshop is limited to 10 participants, so register early !

Time: 9:00 am—12:00 pm.

Dates: (choose one)

June 18 and /or 22

July 13 and /or 23

August 27

September 24

Register by phone—Refuge office at 815-273-2732.

Location: Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center - 7071 Riverview Rd, Thomson, IL. 61285

What to bring: a fully charged smartphone or tablet.