



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



The Pelican Scoop

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Renewed Members

Anne and Doug Schmidt
Elda Goodmiller
Marion Gieskecke
Jacquelynn Albrecht

New Members

Jim and Deb Oleson
Sarah Willet-Walter
Jim Keller
Kristen Elmore



Killdeer

Message from the President

Oh my gosh, Spring has been a long time coming this year but I think we are finally here! Ever since the dark, cold, dreary days of February, I have dreamed of gardening, growing my own food and flowers, and watching for the return of my migratory birds friends. Now don't get me wrong I love winter, but I want my snow in December and January not every other day in April.

As I sit here on May 1st dreaming of May flowers, I have the window open listening to the sounds of my newly arrived feathered friends. The brightly colored Baltimore Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and White Throated Sparrows appeared in my yard this morning along with my first Ruby-throated Hummingbird of the season.

I picked Romaine lettuce last night for a salad for dinner that I had grown from seed, and had lovingly cared for indoors under grow lights for way too long, before being able to transplant into containers outside. Today, we will harvest our first little shoots of asparagus and welcome Spring with open arms.

I will also begin to plan for some of the many plants I will add to my gardens this year to attract the pollinators, the bees and the butterflies. Finding refuge for these humble little insects is of utmost importance in our world today. If you can find a little corner in your yard this year, plant something to attract in the bees and the butterflies.

The world will be a better place for all of us when we make room for all of nature's creatures. I hope you enjoy the Spring weather and have a chance to enjoy the nature that surrounds us all!



Connie Zink - Savanna, IL



Baltimore oriole

Anne's Birding Corner—Killdeer

A medium sized plover, the Killdeer is known for its loud call that sounds like its name "kihdeeah" or "kill-deer". It commonly calls while it is in flight. Killdeer have a dark double breast band, pointed wings with white stripes, a rufous rump, and long tail.

Widespread, killdeer breed in northern Mexico north to Canada. In winter it can be found in much of the southern United States south to

Central America. It feeds in fields, bare and open areas. It nests in gravel areas, in empty lots, grassy fields, and along roads. Food consists of earthworms and insects such as beetles, earthworms and aquatic larvae.

The Killdeer scrapes a nest in the gravel and may add twigs and debris to it. It lays 4-6 eggs. The young is born with downy feathers and leaves the nest once they're dry. The Kill-



Anne Straight - Forreston, IL

deer commonly use a display, either bobbing of their body or a broken-wing performance, to draw predators away from their nest.

*Backwater Birding with Bob***BACKWATER BIRDING WITH BOB—SPRING 2018****“A Sunrise in the Marsh”**

Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia.

At least a dozen times each spring I travel to the Mississippi backwaters for a pre-dawn birding adventure. It's early March, and this day's destination was the Green Island Wildlife Management Area, where I hoped to witness the massive waterfowl migration that occurs each spring up the Mississippi flyway. My watch read 5:45 am as I pulled into the small parking area in the southwest corner of the Green Island Wildlife Area. It was a good hour before official sunrise, and with no moonlight or artificial lights, the cropland and marshland to the north appeared pitch black, but the night sky was lit up with “billions and billions” of stars.

Choosing to remain in the truck and utilize it as my “blind,” I lowered the windows and listened for evidence of life in the marsh. After several minutes of dead silence, there was the first night sound—the nasal *beent* of a male American Woodcock performing his pre-sunrise courtship ritual. His call was soon followed by a twittering spiral assent that ended with a quick descent to the ground where he ended his display with a final *beent* call.

From the distant floodplain forest, I could make out the *who cooks for you* calls of several Barred Owls which were answered by the yelps of a coyote finishing his nighttime hunting activities on the dike. This was followed by about 10 minutes during which I enjoyed the sound of silence. When I reached to start the truck, I was startled by the gruff call of a Great Horned Owl resonating from the top of a large, adjacent cottonwood tree. He was obviously displeased by my quiet presence near his tree. I fought off the urge to carry on a conversation with the owls and headed the truck to one of my favorite locations closer to the marsh.

About a mile on Fish Lake Road, I eased the truck into a small parking area that would give me a panoramic view of the marsh and sunrise. Once again, I lowered the truck's windows and was greeted by a blast of arctic air. This pre-dawn darkness is always the coldest part of the day and it was exasperated by a steady wind coming off the still frozen marsh. Several obvious sounds penetrated the stillness. Most notable was the grumpy sounding, territorial calls from several pairs of Canada Geese staking out prime locations. The deep-throated honks were directed mostly at other geese, and any other living creature (and my truck) that ventured close to their established nest sites. As I listened intensely, sharp *kill-deer, kill-deer* calls emanated from the marsh. With the aid of binoculars, I can faintly make out the images of several newly arrived Killdeer running across the frozen surface. My ears also pick up the song of another early arrival, the Red-winged Blackbird. In another month the marsh will be filled with them, and their call will hardly garner the attention of most birdwatchers. However, after a long, cold winter, hearing the first Red-wing always brings a smile to my face and I nod a quiet welcome.

A glance at my watch tells me its 6:30 am, exactly ½ hour before the actual sunrise and time for the “big show” of migrating waterfowl to begin. As the eastern horizon faintly brightens, a crescendo of honks, quacks, pips and grunts break the early morning silence. Almost on cue, a large mass of waterfowl lifts off the frozen marsh to my east and head west, flying directly over the truck. Leading the parade are nearly a thousand White-fronted Geese. Their yelping, 3-syllable *bo-lee-leek* calls completely shatter the solitude and are near deafening as they pass overhead. Known as “Speckle-bellies,” my first encounter of the year with these very early migrants was back in early February when over 8,000 of them completely covered the picked cornfield adjacent to Green Island. Following the White-fronts, were thousands of migrating Mallards, then loose flocks of Northern Pintails, Gadwalls, Green-winged Teal, and American Wigeon. The large, coppery-red glow of the sun was now visible as it finally cleared the horizon. As the low-angled sun rays penetrated the marsh, an extraordinary light show occurred across the frosted cattails and bulrushes. Rainbows of color were cast across the marsh by the icy prisms. A gentle breeze moved the frost and sent the colors shimmering across the marsh. My fascination with Nature's light show was interrupted by the loud trumpetlike blast from a Trumpeter Swan as it exited the marsh accompanied by several other Trumpeters. A loud resonant rattle echoed across the marsh as a pair of Sandhill Cranes lifted off a large muskrat house and were perfectly silhouetted in the center of a rising sun.

The marsh now became surprising quiet. It was 7:30 am, about ½ hour beyond sunrise and the cattails and bulrushes were steaming as the sun's radiant energy melted the frost. I glassed the marsh one last time. There were a dozen eagles roosting on the tops of dead snags throughout the marsh. I focused on a large swelling on a dead willow a short distance from the truck, and to my amazement, the “lump” starred back with large yellow eyes. It was a well camouflaged Short-eared Owl—my third owl of the morning!

It was time to bring my marsh outing to an end. As I headed for breakfast and a warm cup of coffee, images of waterfowl, Sandhill Cranes, dancing rainbows of light and a sunrise played in my mind. Hopefully, everyone will take the time to spend a sunrise in their favorite marsh this spring. It is a great birdwatching opportunity and a lift to our spirits, and it may even impart a memory of a lifetime.

Coming attractions of the upcoming months:

April—This is “Sparrow Month” with over a dozen species migrating to their summer nesting grounds. Shorebirds such as American Golden Plovers, Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs, Common Snipe, sandpipers and plovers will migrate through. Barn, Rough-winged, Tree and Bank Swallows will arrive by the end of the month. Great Blue Herons, Common Egrets and Bitterns will return to our wetlands. Put your hummingbird feeders out at the end of this month.

May—This month signals the arrival of Dowitchers, Willets, more sandpipers, warblers, vireos, and other neotropical migrants.

June—Look for broods of Common Moorhens, Wood Ducks, Pie-billed Grebes, Canada Geese, and Trumpeter Swans

Flash Point— “Migration Time!”

It's that time again. Migration is in full swing and we are seeing rafts of ducks, geese and swans coming into the refuge. We love this time of year for photography. Day to day you never know what you will see. The Bald Eagles are retreating north and the songbirds will soon grace our area with their songs of spring.



Connie Inskeep - Moline, IL.

We look forward to their colorful plumage and hope to get out onto the refuge to photograph as many of them as possible. Plan a trip to your local refuge and breathe in the fresh air, take a hike through the forest, and just enjoy what nature has to offer. Until next time, take a nature break!

Volunteers Needed!



Want to learn about Monarch monitoring and/or Rusty Patched Bumblebee monitoring?! You are in luck! We need volunteers for both activities starting in June! If you are interested in signing up or learning more information about the process, please contact Pam Steinhaus by phone: 815-273-2732 ext. 116 or by email: pam_steinhaus@fws.gov

2018 Junior Stewards



2018 Junior Stewards!

Front Row (left to right): Sammy Wiersema, Kenny Clemens, RJ Clemens, Ellie Hanviriyaputi, and Remington Anderson.

Middle Row (left to right): Aden Howard, Scout Wollam, Sawyer Wollam, Elise Legal, Brennon Anderson, and Ana Cunningham

Back Row (left to right): Brady Jennings, Luke Jennings, Wyatt Wollam, Lilly May, Ethan Brown, Shayla Roberts, Alex Peterson, Neva Zach and Pam Steinhaus

Not pictures: Ross Wiersema



March was the kick-off session for 2018 Junior Stewards! The group watched introductory videos in order to learn about who the USFWS is and why the word Refuge is so important. They also attended safety training, were introduced to the 2018 photography challenge, and learned about journaling!

Jr. Stewards Chatter Continued

April 7, 2018. Reptiles and Amphibians—Wyatt Wollam, 7th Grade—Fenton, IL

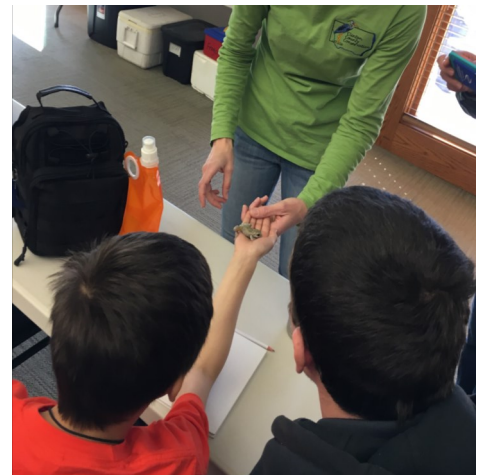
Today, the Jr. Stewards of the Upper Mississippi, went to Rock Creek Eco Center. For this session, we were joined by a very nice woman, Jessica Steines, an Interpretative Naturalist for Clinton County Conservation. She showed us a variety of snakes, turtles, and amphibians native to our area. For example: the Blue Racer (a very quick prairie snake), Black Rat snake, Bullsnake, an Alligator Snapping turtle (which is not a native species), and the American toad. She informed us of their ideal habitats, their preferred prey/food, and discussed issues individual species face, such as habitat loss/degradation, changing eco systems, predation by other species, and harm caused by human activity. This was an awesome, informative, and hands-on session, as we were able to touch and hold a few of the creatures.

My favorite snake was the Speckled King snake, whose diet consists of rats, mice, other snakes, and the unique ability to kill and eat Rattle snakes without any harm! It's also a very beautiful snake. Another favorite, the Tiger Salamander, was very cool, it's able to breathe through its skin by means of cutaneous gas exchange. The Alligator Snapping turtle looked more like a dinosaur than a turtle, with a truly prehistoric look, especially the face, head, and shell ridges. I had a great time at this session and hope we do more things like it in the future.

Special thanks to Jessica Steines for being so well-informed, enthusiastic about her subject matter, and sharing such a wealth of interesting information with us.



Junior Stewards were able to get hands on experience with the 'stars' of the show on April 7th at the Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center!



“Green Scene —Ed Britton”



Eagle trio are parents!

The wait is over for thousands of armchair eagle watchers now that our Internet superstar bald eagle trio are proud parents. We were concerned that eggs may not be produced this year since mom Starr is new to the nest. However, the two dads Valor I and Valor II, were stalwart. Our doubts were smothered by happiness on February 10 when the first egg was laid, followed by a second egg laid on the 13th.

Parental shift work during the incubation period was hilarious as the trio competed for egg time. During the shift change, an adult would land in the nest and nudge the incubator. The nudge often didn't have results, so sitting or walking on the back of the dis-senter was required. The message was finally received and the incubator relented to the shift change.

The eaglets emerged on March 20 and 21 after 39 and 36 days of incubation. The tiny chicks were barely visible due to the deep nest cup which is a great advantage for survival. In 2012, both eaglets tumbled to their death over the rim of a shallow nest cup.

Both eaglets were developing at a consistent rate during the first two weeks. However, there was a major difference in growth during the second two weeks with one eaglet being half the size of the other despite an endless supply of food. On the evening of April 18, the underdeveloped eaglet passed away. The loss of this eaglet is sad but is one of the lessons in nature that the strong survive.

Bald eagles are territorial and competition is increasing for prime nesting sites along the Mississippi River. Last year, the trio's nest was attacked by a marauding pair of bald eagles that resulted in the disappearance of mom Hope. This year on March 19, another Internet superstar, the Arconic bald eagle nest in Davenport, experienced similar tragedy when it was attacked by an eagle that destroyed their single egg. A few days later, a Canada goose unselfishly donated an egg into the nest, but the eagles weren't ready to foster a goose.

Eagles are not picky eaters but they prefer sushi, Mississippi River style. They eat a variety of fish but also dine on ducks, coots, gulls, turtles, skunks, opossums, and just about any other meat that is available.

The bald eagle is one of the greatest wildlife success stories in U.S. history. During the 1950's, their population began to decline due to DDT pesticide poisoning that caused egg shell thinning and egg loss. They were on the federal threatened/endangered species list from 1973-2007 when they finally achieved the goal of 10,000 nesting pairs in the lower 48 states. Currently, the national population of bald eagles is healthy and growing.

Sit back and enjoy the live streaming webcam that provides a personal glimpse into the daily lives of our magnificent bald eagle trio. The website www.stewardsumrr.org is provided thanks to the partnership of the Stewards of Upper Mississippi River Refuges, the

Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, and the Corps of Engineers. The website also offers merchandise featuring the trio that is available for purchase with proceeds going towards operation of the live-streaming webcam.

The mighty Mississippi River has many stories to tell. It is the current of life for many natural wonders. One of our great wildlife success stories unfolds on the wings of eagles.

Ed Britton is a Wildlife Refuge Manager on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and volunteer at Bickelhaupt Arboretum

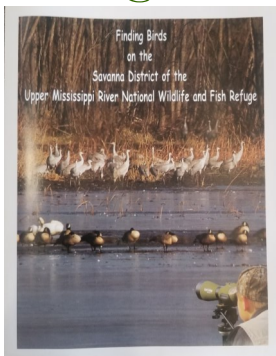


Membership Dues are Now Due

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. Each member may have their dues due at a different time. Take a look at the membership card that you received for your due date. Why are you a member of the Stewards? The reason we hear is, “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 some-thing for everyone. 2017 has been a busy year. We completed several upgrades to our wildlife cams; assisted with the Jr. Stewards Program; provided birding van tours of Lost Mound; refuge golf cart tours; monthly bird walks; and many other outreach activities. We also completed the Birding Guide to the Upper Mississippi River Refuge / Savanna District. 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 with a check written to SUMRR. All gifts are tax-deductible.



Birding Guide



Birding Guide for the Savanna District of Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is completed and ready for you to pickup and explore our portion of the refuge. If you are a current steward member you can get your copy for free, otherwise they are \$10.00. This is a great tool to help you discover new areas that you haven't been before. If you would like an electronic version please let us know by sending an email and we can get it out to you.

Schedule of Events

- Saturday, May 12th “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00am– 11:00am
- Thursday, May 17th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
- Friday, May 18th “Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting” 11:00am - 1:30pm
- Thursday, June 7th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
- Saturday June 9th “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00am– 11:00am
- Friday June 15th “Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting” 11:00am - 1:30pm
- Saturday June 16th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
- Thursday June 21st “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
- Thursday July 5th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
- Saturday July 14th “Monthly Bird Walk” 9:00am– 11:00am
- Thursday July 19th “Golf Cart Tour” 8:00am - 10:00am
- Friday July 20th “Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting” 11:00am - 1:30pm
- Saturday 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

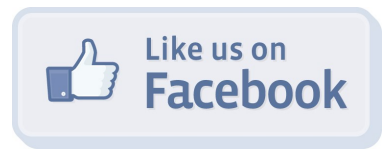


Yellow-rumped Warbler



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

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



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.