

March 2013

Volume 1 Issue 2



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



The Pelican Scoop

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Welcome New Members

Jane McCarthy
 Gary and Mary Gordon
 David Johnson
 Marion Giesecke



Sandhill Crane

Message From The President

The signs of Spring are all around us. From the flocks of Canada Geese flying overhead, to the first Turkey Vultures of the year, along with the return of the nesting Sandhill Cranes and Great Blue Herons, March "marks" the beginning of Spring. You can welcome Spring by joining us on one of our "Woodcock Walks" or Birding Tours of Lost Mound Unit. In this issue, learn about the birds returning to our area this month, some great nature photography tips, and heartbreaking information on lead

exposure in Bald Eagles. Be sure to check out our schedule of events and tours. Spring is also a time of "renewal", not only in nature, but also in your 2013 Stewards membership. Please mail in your renewal using the form on page 6 or you may pay online thru the website. Individual memberships are \$10.00 and family memberships are \$20.00. Deadline for renewal is May 1st, 2013. Please help support "Stewards of the Upper Missis-



Connie Zink - Savanna, IL

sippi River Refuge" activities through out the year with your donations. Until next month, remember when you step outside your front door, look up, you never know what might be passing by you this Spring!

Anne's Birding Corner

The Sandhill Crane is a tall bird, up to 48" in height. The adult is gray, with a red crown and lores. The feathers droop over the rump giving it a "bustle" look. Their preening with muddy bills, may stain their feathers from the iron solutions contained in the mud, giving them a "stained" look. Breeding season begins in April in the Midwest to mid-May in the North. The Sandhill Crane performs elaborate dancing displays during courtship. The nest is a large heap of plant material, where one or sometimes two eggs are laid. The young leave the nest soon

after hatching, and are feed by both parents. They are able to feed themselves by the second week. The young fly at around 70 days old. Juvenile cranes lack the red crown, and have a gray body mottled with brownish red; full adult plumage is reached after two and a half years. The Sandhill Crane is a migratory bird breeding on the tundras and in marshes. Sandhill Cranes are omnivores, feeding on roots, grain, plant matter and small vertebrates (e.g. mice and snakes). The Annual Midwest Crane Count organized by the International Crane Foundation (ICF) is



Anne Straight - Forreston, IL

Saturday, April 13. The Crane Count involves 3,000 volunteers in over 100 counties in six states. The Crane Count is held from 5:30 a.m. until 7:30 a.m. CDT. Steward's members who might be interested in helping with the Crane Count, may contact Pam at 815-273-2732.



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia,

Backwater Birding With Bob

Having just returned from the tropics of Costa Rica, I'm finding this last blast of winter to be especially cold and brittle. With visions of trogons, crocodiles, and howler monkeys still dancing in my head, I decided to bundle up and head to my favorite wetlands at Pleasant Creek and Green Island to see if any early migrants had arrived. At Green Island Wildlife Area, I was greeted with the sights and sounds of hundreds of Canada geese, ranging in size from our resident giant Canada geese to the much smaller races that are beginning their journeys to Hudson Bay. Raptors were also present in good numbers. There were

over 20 immature bald eagles, several northern harriers, and a beautiful white colored "Kriider's" race of the red-tailed hawk. Just before leaving, I heard the unmistakable killdeer call and located a half dozen of these hardy shorebirds resting on the Fish Lake boat ramp—a welcome sign of spring. I urge everyone to visit their favorite wetland this month to watch spring unfold. A short list of "coming attractions" is as follows:

March 1st-10th: Greater white-fronted geese, snow geese, and tundra swans will peak.

March 10th-20th: Pintails, black ducks, migrating mal-

lards, gadwalls, widgeon, and hooded mergansers will also reach their peak.

March 20th-30th: Early shorebirds will arrive. Diving ducks, including scaup, ring-necked, canvasback, redhead, and bufflehead will crest. Also look for wood duck, northern shoveler, and green-winged teal. Although this winter is slow to lose its icy grip, warmer days are on the way. As I departed San Jose and its balmy 82 degree weather, the last bird I saw was a prothonotary warbler that I gave a typical Costa Rican farewell of "Adios, my good friend." I added, "Hope to see you again in May at Spring Lake"

Do you have a birding question?? Ask Bob! Please email Bob at info@sumriver.org and your question will be answered in future issues.

Jr. Stewards Chatter

A Close Encounter of the National Kind.

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge offers an exciting opportunity to see and experience the American Bald Eagle in its natural environment. With binoculars, cameras and journals in hand, sixteen Jr. Stewards and their families hopped on board the bus and took off to the Lost Mound Unit. Many areas along the banks of the river were still frozen but a few open areas provided for a few excellent viewing opportunities. We were able to spot 40 bald eagles today, however numbers are expected to increase once the backwaters begin to thaw. The best part of today's adventure was watching two pairs of eagles do their "sky dance". They would circle

high in the sky, clasp talons, fall, and release; just in time to begin their climb once again. What an awesome sight that was. We would like to thank

Wiersema's Charter Bus Service from Morrison, IL for donating the bus and driver to take the Jr. Stewards on their adventure.

**How many feathers does an adult Bald Eagles have?
7,200 Feathers**



Flash Point - Nature Photography

When most people think of nature photography, they think of animals and birds. There is much more to nature than the birds and animals around us. There is a beautiful picture out there just waiting to be taken. It can be a small part of what we are seeing or a vast landscape. When I am out photographing birds (which my husband and I do regularly), I always look for interesting things around me. For example: We were taking pictures of the Bald Eagles at Lock and Dam 14 near Le Claire, IA, when I noticed that the sun was glinting off the ice that had formed on the rocks at the edge of the river. I thought this was perfect opportunity to get a great shot. As you can see, I got a couple little “sunbursts” glistening off the ice. It is always a thrill when I get home and see the end result on my computer and it is what I had envisioned the shot to be. Of course, they don’t all come out that way, but with the digital cameras of today, you can take hundreds of shots and hope that you get one shot that shows what you had imagined.



Connie Inskeep - Moline, IL.



I always look for flowers and interesting foliage when I am out walking in the woods. Pretty flowers never disappoint and sometimes foliage can make for wonderful photographs. The bokeh (blurred background) makes this dried thistle stand out and look like much more than just a dried weed.

When you are out walking in nature, look around you and see the photo opportunities that beckon. They are there just waiting to be captured. Until next time, happy snapping!

Stan Bousson "Photos of the Month"



Sandhill Cranes



Sandhill Crane Nest



Lead Exposure in Bald Eagles

By Ed Britton

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge is a major bald eagle concentration area with thousands of wintering eagles and hundreds of nests. Lost Mound is a management unit within the Refuge and has hundreds of wintering eagles. In 2011 a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiative collected 50 bald eagles found dead on the Refuge and along the Upper Mississippi River corridor. Most of the eagles had no external injuries characteristic of trauma or being shot, some had bile stained vents and were emaciated – clinical signs that are characteristic of lead poisoning. In February 2012, livers were removed from the eagles and sent to the U.S. Geological Survey's National Wildlife Health Center for lead analysis. The November 2012 results

showed 66% of the eagles had lead exposure and 42% had elevated levels in the range for lead poisoning. Sources of lead that would be available to eagles in the landscape are limited and include ammunition used in hunting. Thousands of hunters take advantage of the quality habitat along the corridor in winter. The Refuge prohibits lead ammunition for most hunting except deer. Lead fragments are potentially available to bald eagles that scavenge on deer which are wounded but not retrieved and in offal (gut piles) left in the field. During the 2012 deer hunts at Lost Mound, the offal from 13 deer shot with lead ammunition was collected and x-rayed to identify lead fragmentation. The x-ray results showed 38% contained multiple lead fragments. One offal pile had over 100 lead frag-

ments, an amount that could poison several eagles.

During field collection of offal, bald eagles were observed circling above the hunt area. Research on lead exposure in bald eagles wintering on the Refuge and along the Upper Mississippi River corridor is continuing.



“Sightings Around the Refuge”



Coyote by Larry and Bonnie Thoren



“Hey You” by Connie and Wade Inskeep
(Eastern Bluebird)



Northern Shrike by Nathan Goldberg
Age 16



Eastern Bluebird by Michael Fitzgerald

Please see our Schedule of Events for Upcoming Lost Mound Tours

Schedule of Events



Saturday, March 9th Eagle Tour 8:00am-Noon *

Friday, March 15th, Steward's Potluck Meeting
11:00- 1:00pm

Saturday, March 16th Lost Mound Unit Birding
Tour 1:00pm-5:00pm *

Saturday, March 16th "American Woodcock Program" and "Walk" at Lost Mound Unit 5:30pm-8:00pm) Registration not required but recommended

Saturday, April 6th "Curing Cabin Fever IV"
11:00am-2:00pm *

Saturday, April 13th (No Monthly Bird Walk)
Sandhill Crane Count and Jr. Stewards Exelon Fish Hatchery Trip

Friday, April 19th, Steward's Potluck Meeting
11:00am- 1:00pm

Saturday, April 20th Lost Mound Unit Birding
Tour 1:00pm-5:00pm *



Saturday, April 20th "American Woodcock Program" and "Walk" at Lost Mound Unit 5:30pm-8:00pm Registration not required but recommended

Thursday, May 2nd Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge
8:00am - 10:00am *

Saturday, May 11th "Migratory Bird Day" 7:30am-12:00pm (More Details to Come)

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

Friday, May 17th "Stewards" Monthly Meeting
(Whitewater canyon trip being planned)

Saturday, May 18th 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 info@sumriver.org**

For additional events see our website www.sumriver.org



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

7071 Riverview Rd
Thomson, IL 61285

815-273-2732
info@sumriver.org



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Check out our Website:
SUMRIVER.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.sumriver.org



Make a difference and
Join today.