



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



The Pelican Scoop

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Welcome New Members

- Marion Giescke
- Debbie Cram
- Maggie O'Connell

Message From The President

Awhile back, I was asked how many National Wildlife Refuges could I name? I am sorry to say, I could not think of any, other than the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, the one that I live next to. Everyone can name several National Parks, the sister agency to the Refuge System, but how many of you can name some Refuges, off the top of your head? In March, my husband and I set off on an eight day trip to Kearney, NE. for the Sandhill Crane Migration. That event can be summed up in one word "AWESOME"! Viewing hun-

dreds of thousands of Cranes in one area, is something you have to see to believe. While on our adventure, we also made a conscious effort to see how many National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) in Iowa and Nebraska we could fit into our trip. We started out with Neil Smith NWR just outside Des Moines, then went on to DeSoto NWR north of Council Bluffs and then crossed the Missouri River to Boyer Chute NWR north of Omaha. Before leaving Nebraska, we were also able to take tours of Valentine and Fort Niobrara NWRs.



Connie Zink - Savanna, IL

Each Refuge is unique and offers many different things to see and do. We have plans to visit several Wisconsin Refuges in the upcoming weeks, those will include Horicon, Necedah, and Trempealeau. Okay, I am up to nine now, how many can you name?

Anne's Birding Corner

The Wood Duck is one of the most strikingly handsome of all waterfowl. The male's face pattern, crest and highly colored plumage is unique. The female has a distinctive profile and delicate white pattern around the eye. Unlike most waterfowl, Wood Ducks perch and nest in trees and boxes and are comfortable flying through woods. The Wood Duck is a dabbling duck. Unlike the divers, it feeds at the surface by "dabbling" their bills in the water or by upending to reach

deeper. Their legs are placed forward on the body so that they are able to take off directly instead of running. Their diet consists of plant material including seeds, roots, acorns and small invertebrates such as insect larvae and even fish and frogs. Habitat includes ponds, river and swamps. Females usually lay 8-10 eggs, sometimes more. Young is tended by the female. Around 30 days they will drop unaided out of the box or cavity in response to the female's call. The duck-



Anne Straight - Forresteron, IL

lings may jump from heights up to 300 feet without injury. This is a migratory duck that goes south for the winter. It is rare during winter in most of the breeding range. In mild winters they have been spotted and counted on some of the Christmas Bird Counts.



Wood Duck



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia,

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

The Peregrine Falcon plunges at speeds up to 175 miles per hour to attack it's prey.



Backwater Birding With Bob

Spring migration is well underway. One Saturday in March, I had the pleasure of spending the entire day birding with a group of friends from Dubuque that included a very enthusiastic twelve year old working on her second "big year". We visited Sabula Lake, Thomson Causeway, Lock and Dam 13, Lost Mound and Green Island, and saw a total of eighty species of birds. Highlights of the morning included Thayer's, Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls, among the thousands of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls feeding on dead shad on the ice on South Sabula Lake. Near Thomson, a flooded cornfield held thousands of White-fronted Geese, sixty

Tundra Swans, hundreds of Canvasback and Pintail Ducks, and several Snow and Ross Geese. At Lost Mound we discovered a Merlin, a Golden Eagle, and a Northern Shrike. In spite of our wicked spring weather, the majority of our migrating waterfowl is now here, and is really concentrated in pockets of open water, offering spectacular viewing for birders willing to endure a little cold. I encourage everyone to head out to their favorite wetlands and witness one of nature's greatest shows on earth. Also, next time you venture out birding take a youth along. Their enthusiasm is contagious -- you might just rediscover

Here's Looking At You

Everyone has heard the old adage about the three most important things in real estate being; location, location, location. Never has this been more appropriate than when referring to the little home situated on the top of the Consolidated Grain and Barge (CGB) elevator in downtown Savanna. Inaccessible, windy, claustrophobic, and precarious: All words that describe the small wooden box where a pair of peregrine falcons chose to raise their family. In February of 2010, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff placed a nesting box on top of the elevator in hopes of attracting a pair of falcons. Within 1 month, they found the box and haven't left. The two adult peregrine falcons can be seen perching on the antennae's and

railings of the elevator or soaring over the rooftops of downtown businesses. This location is a perfect place to install a camera and watch the activities of the falcons and chicks (eyas). Partnerships developed between JCWifi, Consolidated Grain and Barge, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Stewards to do just that. In the spring of 2012, the camera went on-line and the private

how beautiful a drake Mallard or a Cardinal really is!

April 1st-10th-- Blue-winged Teal and Wood Ducks will peak, and migrating sparrows including Fox, White-crown and White-throated, Swamp and Lincoln's will arrive. April 10th-20th--Look for Osprey over open water, search mud flats for early shorebirds including Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least, Semipalmated, Pectoral, and Spotted Sandpipers. April 20th-30th-- Plovers, Dowitchers, Phalaropes, and Godwits will be present in shallow marshes along with Grebes, Coot, Rails, and Moorhens. Kinglets, Swallows, and warblers including Yellow-rumped, Palm, and Prothonotary will be occupying our wetlands.

world of the falcons now became public. Currently, Pebbles and Bam Bam have laid their first egg on March 28. A live feed can be viewed by visiting our website at www.sumriver.org and go to webcams. If you enjoy our webcams, please help keep the camera's rolling by donating on-line or send your donation to Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge, 7071 River-view Rd, Thomson, IL 61285.



Flash Point - Know Your Subject

Know your subject to capture its natural behavior

Wade and I are bird lovers and most times when we go out to take pictures, it is of birds. Being prepared and knowing a little about your subject always helps. Recently, we had an opportunity to photograph some birds that we had never seen before (the term for that is “lifer” in the birding world).

We had heard that there were Red Crossbills and White Winged Crossbills at a cemetery in Davenport, IA and we wanted to see them and get some pictures so we could add them to our life list. A while ago, we purchased a Sibley Guide to North American Birds and we also have several apps for our phone so we can do research in the field.

When you look up Crossbills, you will see that they use their beak to pry open the pinecones that are closed to get to the seeds that reside under each layer. Knowing this, arms us with a little knowledge on how the bird will act. To get to the pinecones that hang on the ends of the branches, many times the birds must hang upside down to reach the cones. If you are patient, the bird will perform as expected and you can get the shot.



Once the bird has the pinecone, we expect to see it push its beak into the cone to get the seed that is trapped inside. Again, they perform as we expect and we can get picture after picture of them doing what we know they will do.

Because this species has an unusual trait (crossed bill) we also want to make sure to capture a good image that shows that trait.



Knowing what to expect, can prepare you to make some good images to tell the story of the animal or bird you are photographing.

Until next time, do a little research and get out there and tell a story with your pictures!



Connie Inskeep - Moline, IL.



Stan Bousson "Photos of the Month"



American Wigeon by Stan Bousson



Wood Ducks by Stan Bousson

Eliminating the Street Gangs of the Plant Community

In Spring 2011, the Savanna District began a three year assault to bring down the rampaging street gangs that had invaded the plant community at Lost Mound. These plant gangs were aggressively spreading throughout the sand prairie neighborhoods and had taken control of about 1,500 of the 4,500 up-land acres. The thugs had come from various background origins with names like spotted knapweed, sweet clover and the ringleader crown vetch. Crown vetch is a cool season perennial that is difficult to control. A frontal assault began in March 2011 with a roaring blaze of fire through the prairie gang neighborhoods to eliminate duff which not only exposed the gangs hiding places but opened up the canopy for improved seed germination. As the new sprouting mini-thugs appeared in April-May, a secondary assault was conducted with an application of Milestone herbicide on 250 acres of scattered patches of crown vetch. Herbicide application

has proven to be most successful management tool for crown vetch. An invasive plant mapping project was conducted in summer 2011 by volunteers to identify additional areas of crown vetch invasion. The summer-fall of 2011 had near record drought conditions and delayed a repeat chemical attack on the vetch until after the spring 2012 prescribed burn. In fall 2012, chemical application of Milestone was initiated on an additional 250 acres of scattered patches of crown vetch. A second and final spraying of these acres is scheduled for April-May 2013. The District provided funding to researchers from the University of Illinois to document the effectiveness of the invasive plant management program. Two years of preliminary results show a 99% kill of crown vetch in chemically treated areas. The District is using a variety of other management tools in the battle against prairie plant gangs.

Each winter, the tree-shredding Fecon bull-hog roams the prairie, eating up red cedar and honey locust trees. Heavy snow pack protects the prairie from damage by this rubber matted skid steer mounted industrial tree shredder.



“Sightings Around the Refuge”



Trumpeter Swans by Debbie Cram



Pileated Woodpecker by Debbie Cram



Canvasbacks by Wade Inskeep



Killdeer by Wade Inskeep



Ruddy Duck by Michael Fitzgerald

“Migratory Bird Day” Saturday, May 11th 2013

Schedule for the Day

Life Cycles of Migratory Birds

CONSERVATION ACROSS THE AMERICAS

7:30 a.m. Guided Bird Walk – bring your binoculars and join avid birders on an early morning birding adventure. Participants are to meet at the visitor center and leave promptly at 7:30 with their leaders and will return by 9:30 a.m. Dress for the weather so you don't miss the fun!

7:30 a.m. Golf Cart Tour of the Spring Lake Area

Take an hour tour on Great River Trail that travels through the Refuge. Learn about the history, management techniques and even be able to identify various species of birds and plants. Space is limited to 7 (Rain or Shine).

Please register at 815-273-2732.

10:00 a.m. Life Cycle Photo Documentary of the Sandhill Cranes

- Stan Bousson—Refuge Photographer

11:00 a.m. The Pelican Pod

- Pam Steinhaus—Visitor Services Manager

Where did the American White Pelican come from? Did you know that the white pelican, like the bald eagle only lives in North America? The white pelican does not dive for its food but works as a team, “herding” up their food. Hope you can join us as we learn more about these large waterbirds.

1:30—6:00 Birding at Lost Mound.

Join us for an afternoon of birding in Lost Mound (formerly Savanna Army Depot). Participants are to meet at the Lost Mound Office parking area at 1:30 p.m. and will return around 6:00 p.m. There is no fee, but seating is limited. Please register by sending an email to info@sumriver.org or call 815-273-2732.

2013 Stewards Memberships are Due by May 1st



Thank you to our renewing members for 2013: Anne Straight, Charlene Collins, Connie and Dennis Zink, Nancy Wilkinson, Keith and Mary Blackmore, Diane Bausman, Dustin Holschuh, Connie and Wade Inskip, Bob and Sandy Walton, Anne Swan Johnson, Scott Lombardo, and Brian Bielema

Schedule of Events



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 6:30pm-8:30pm Registration not required but recommended

Sunday, April 21st "Warbler Watch at Pleasant Creek and Green Island Birding Van Tour" * 9:00am-4:00pm (Lunch on own)

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

Saturday, May 11th "Migratory Bird Day" 7:30am-12:00pm

Saturday, May 11th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:30pm -6:00pm *

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 *

Saturday, May 18th "Duck Foot Marsh Birding Van Tour" 11:00am-3:30pm *

*** 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



Like us on Facebook

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.

Reflections from the Field

April 2013

