

June 2013

Volume 1 Issue 5



Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



The Pelican Scoop

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Welcome New Members

Edward Weiland
Diane Guntzel

Renewing Members

Jaci Lewis
Linda Boardson
Eileen Hickman
Anne & Doug Schmidt



Baltimore Oriole Photo by Anne Straight

Message From The President

As mentioned in the last newsletter, the summer season of Refuge golf cart and Lost Mound Unit van birding tours are here. A highlight for me, conducting the tours, over the last several month has been meeting three extraordinary young birders. I met 16 year old Nathan Goldberg, back on one of the Lost Mound trips when he was in search of the Mountain Bluebird to add to his Illinois birding list for 2013. At the time, he did not have a driver's license to get to the area, so a friend brought him for the tour. At last count, this remarkable

young man has 220 species for his 2013 Illinois list, 510 species on his US life list, and an amazing 982 species on his WORLD life list! Several weeks ago, I also had the pleasure to meet Olivia Kruse, a 12 year old young girl doing a "Big Year" with her father and grandfather. Her current year list stands at 210 species. Olivia was on a morning golf cart tour with me, a tour of Duck Foot Marsh and a tour of Lost Mound all in the same weekend. Olivia was not only keeping a species list but a total count of all the birds we saw.



Connie Zink - Savanna, IL.

Ethan Brown, a 10 year old Jr. Steward is also doing a "Big Year" competition with one of our newsletter contributors, Anne Straight. Ethan stands at 96 species so far for his list this year. I don't think we have heard the last from these three amazing youth birders!

Anne's Birding Corner

Formerly called the Northern Oriole, the Baltimore Oriole is a brightly colored bird. At 7-8 inches, it is smaller and slimmer than our American Robin. It is flame-orange with a black head and black and white wings. The male's colors resembles the coat-of-arms of Lord Baltimore, from which it received its name. The female is an olive-brown above and burnt orange-yellow below with white wing-bars. It forages for caterpillars, fruit and nectar, even coming to hum-

mingbird feeders. The Northern Oriole was split into the eastern Baltimore Oriole and its western counterpart the Bullock's Oriole. Baltimore Orioles occur in open woodlands and shade tree habitats. It is a summer resident over most of the central and eastern United States and Canada. Its nest is a pouch that hangs from a fork in a tree branch 20-30 feet or higher and made of long plant fibers, string or other similar materials woven into a cup. It breeds in our area in late May.



Anne Straight - Forreston, IL.

There are usually 4-5 eggs. Incubation is around 14 days. The young are attended by both parents. They migrate in winter to the Neotropics, as far as the north part of Mexico and occasionally to the southern United States, but mostly in Central America and Northern South America.

Backwater Birding With Bob



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia,

This year's rainy spring, with major temperature fluctuations, has certainly been a challenging one for birds and birders alike. Soggy feet and rain speckled binoculars were pretty much the norm for those brave enough to venture out during the spring migration. The migration seemed to peak around May 12, when I observed 129 species of birds on a very windy, drizzly day. Surprisingly my total spring tally has 232 species of birds which represents one of my best ever. Unusual sightings include 5 White-faced Ibis at Green Island, a single White Ibis seen while we were on a refuge golf cart tour with Connie Zink, and an American Avocet that continues to make daily ap-

pearances in the newly reconstructed Mississippi River marsh behind the Dubuque John Deere Plant. Now that June has arrived, the migration has pretty much ceased. Birds observed now will either be permanent residents, or southern migrants that choose to remain and nest. During June, birders must be diligent in their efforts to be less intrusive towards birds and their habitat. Unduly disturbing nesting birds by forcing them to flush from cover, and utilizing territory or alarm calls to expose them for your viewing, adds critical stress to the birds during nest building and brood rearing activities. It could also expose them and their nest to predators. June is a great time

to observe birds, especially in the backwaters where broods of waterfowl, Pied-billed Grebes, Killdeer, and many song birds can easily be spotted. Birders should stay on established trails and mowed dikes, avoid damaging potential nesting and brood rearing habitat, and utilize binoculars or spotting scopes to view from a distance. I encourage everyone to participate in the birding activities offered by the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi, especially the golf cart tours of Spring Lake and the van tours of Lost Mound. It's a great way to view birds, share expertise, and socialize with fellow, enthusiastic birders. Have a great summer and good luck in all your outdoor adventures.

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

Bob Walton, AKA Bird Man, joined the Jr. Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge on May 4th for our Bluebird Adventure. He educated us on the bluebird and taught us how to make bluebird boxes. Because their natural oak savanna habitat is diminishing, making these houses is crucial to their survival. When the Bird Man came we had a pile of wood and now we have amazing bluebird houses.

Jr. Stewards Reporter Liam Swiderski, 8th grader, Savanna Illinois.



Liam Swiderski



Young Barred Owls can climb trees by grasping the bark with their bill and talons, flapping their wings, and walking their way up the trunk.

Flash Point - Photographing Birds

I told you the story about how we developed our love for birds and the fact that we want pictures of all of them. When we first started, we would take pictures of anything that moved. As time went by and we got a decent list of species, we moved on to trying to take well composed shots of each bird. This is not easy when you are dealing with a wild animal or bird. They are unpredictable and move around a LOT.

At first, we would just try to get a good enough picture to identify the bird. We wouldn't add it to our list unless we had a picture of it. This really limits us, as it is difficult to get pictures of the nocturnal species. This has not hindered us from sticking to our goals of getting pictures of all the birds that we add to our life list. We also will not count captive birds that we see in zoos or aviaries.

One thing I can say for certain is you will rarely be able to sneak up on a bird. Unless you are dressed in full camo and remain motionless for an extended period of time, they know you are there and will bolt as soon as you raise your camera to take a picture. We have a gesture that we use when walking in the woods where if one sees a bird they want to photograph, they will raise their hand up by their shoulder. If I see Wade do this, I immediately stop walking and talking and wait for him to take the picture. What is really funny is if I do this, chances are, Wade has already snapped four pictures.

Sometimes you have to try to anticipate what the bird will do next and then set up your shot. Here is a Red Winged Blackbird that Wade photographed. It is springtime and the birds are all trying to attract a mate and defend their territory. We saw this bird calling and knew he would call over and over again, so you wait and start snapping and end up with a great shot like this:

With the digital cameras of today, you can snap a hundred pictures and only keep the ones that show the subject the way you want it to be seen. It is a win-win situation.

There are some birds that are less frightened of humans. These are ones you can get fairly close to and take some dynamite pictures. In this area, Ring-billed Gulls are plentiful and co-exist with humans all along the Mississippi River. As we were driving out of the Thompson Causeway area, there is a place along the road that has water on either side. The Gulls were right beside the road dining on the fish in the shallow water and we got to within two feet of this bird. With a long lens, you can imagine the detail you can achieve with the image.

There are also those times when you just plain, get lucky and a bird poses beautifully for you such as this Song Sparrow. These types of situations are few and far between, but if you get out and take pictures as much as we do, your chances of getting great shots increases with each outing. You can't ask for better than this; nice setting, beautiful subject, perfect pose. Excellent!

Until next time, get out and visit your local State Parks and Refuges and see the great birds that are waiting there so you too, can get that wonderful shot.



Connie Inskeep - Moline, II.



Stan Bousson "Photos of the Month"



Great Egrets by Stan Bousson



Palm Warbler by Stan Bousson

Refuge Officer Darryn Witt by Ed Britton

Refuge Officer Darryn Witt Appointed to National Position

Darryn Witt, Wildlife Refuge Officer on Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, has been selected as the National Wildlife Canine Coordinator for the National Wildlife Refuge System, Department of Interior. Witt has been with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Savanna, Illinois for 10 years, the last four as a member of the Refuge's canine team with his canine partner Rudi. His duty station will remain in Savanna where he will continue to work on the Refuge.

Wildlife Officer Witt was the first canine officer in the Midwest Region and has been instrumental in expanding the program throughout the United States. Now, as the National Wildlife Canine Coordinator, Witt will continue to expand the use of canines in protecting wildlife and the people that visit the

National Wildlife Refuge System. Currently, there are eight canine teams throughout the country. Typically deployed in areas with high visitor use or those located in extremely remote areas, Refuge canine Teams are stationed along the U.S./Mexico border, the Alaskan wilderness, urban centers along the eastern seaboard, at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge in southern Illinois, and here on "Upper Miss Refuge".

According to Refuge District Manager Ed Britton, "We are delighted to have such an accomplished and dedicated officer guiding our national canine program. I cannot think of a more-deserving individual to lead and expand our canine program. There are many challenges for Officer Witt to advance the first ever national canine policy throughout the 561 refuges within the National Wildlife Refuge System."

In 2007, Refuge Officer Witt and

Refuge Officer Russ Engelke received the Department of Interior's prestigious Valor Award for putting their lives in danger to rescue a stranded ice fisherman during freezing temperatures in the middle of the night on the frozen Mississippi River. The Valor Award is one of the highest honors given to Interior employees that go to extraordinary efforts to save the lives of others.



“Sightings Around the Refuge”



Henslow's Sparrow by Connie Inskip



Dame's Rocket by Anne Straight



Red-headed Woodpecker by Connie Zink



Magnolia Warbler by Michael Fitzgerald

Schedule of Events



Thursday, June 6th “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am *

Saturday, June 8th “Monthly Bird Walk” 8:00am-11:00am *

Saturday, June 8th “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00pm – 5:00pm *

Saturday, June 15th “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am *

Sunday, June 16th “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00pm – 5:00pm *

Thursday, June 20th “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am *

Friday, June 21st Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00am - 1:30pm

Saturday, June 22nd “Owl Prowl” at Lost Mound Unit 7:30pm - 10:00pm

Saturday July 13th “Monthly Bird Walk” 8:00am-11:00am

Saturday, July 13th “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00pm – 5:00pm *

Thursday, July 18th “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am *

Friday, July 19th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00am - 1:30pm

*Saturday, July 20th “Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge” 8:00am - 10:00am *

Sunday, July 21st “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00pm – 5:00pm *

*** 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

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815-273-2732
info@sumriver.org



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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:

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