

July 2013

Volume 1 Issue 6



## Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



# The Pelican Scoop

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## Message From The President

Summer is in full swing now, and the Stewards tours of Lost Mound Unit have been filling up nicely. Lost Mound Unit (Old Savanna Army Depot) is one of my favorite places to visit. I have family ties to "The Sand Prairie" as it was originally called, as my great great grandparents settled there when they came to Illinois from Georgia, in the 1860's. Lost Mound Unit is the largest remnant sand prairie in the state of Illinois. It covers 9,857 acres and has 13 miles of river shoreline. Forty-seven state threat-

ened or endangered species of birds, plants and animals have been recorded there. Loggerhead Shrike, Blue Grosbeak, Northern Mockingbird, Lark Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Whip-poor-will, Upland Sandpiper, and Bob-o-link have all been found nesting there in the summer and are seen regularly on our tours. In the winter, we have the Long-eared Owl and Northern Shrike visiting. An added bonus for several months last winter, was an off course Mountain Bluebird that spent



Connie Zink - Savanna, IL. time there. Please join us on one of our tours on the second Saturday and third Sunday of each month. The history of the old depot is fascinating, wildlife is extraordinary and the views of the prairie in bloom are spectacular!

### Welcome New Member

Mary Klasen



Belted Kingfisher Photo by Anne Straight

## Anne's Birding Corner

A big-headed, big-billed and blue-gray bird, the Belted Kingfisher hovers and plunges or dives from a perch into the water for its food. The male has a broad gray breast-band. The female has an additional rusty band across its breast. This is one of only a few bird species where the female is more brightly colored than the males. It lives mostly on a diet of fish but may include crayfish, mollusks, amphibians and others aquatic food. The loud, dry rattle is easily recognized. It is a year round resident in the United States. They breed

throughout most of the United States and to the north including Canada and Alaska. It spends winter in areas where water does not freeze. Some may migrate south to the southern United States, Mexico, and the northern parts of South America for the winter. Habitat includes streams, lakes, bays and coasts. Tunnels are burrowed out along the banks, typically near water for nesting. These tunnels can be from 3-15 feet in length. 5-7 eggs are laid and incubated by both parents for around 24 days. They have been known to have 2 broods.



Anne Straight - Forreston, IL.

Nestlings are fed for 27-29 days. There are only two other species of kingfishers that occur in the U.S. The Ringed Kingfisher in the southern part of Texas and the Green Kingfisher is found in the south Texas area and sometimes in Arizona. The Belted Kingfisher is depicted on the 1986 Series Canadian \$5 note.

## Backwater Birding With Bob



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia,

**Do you have a birding question?? Ask Bob! Please email Bob at [info@sumriver.org](mailto:info@sumriver.org) and your question will be answered in future issues.**

**When the adult Mayfly hatches it has only one thing on its mind, reproduction. After 24 – 72 hours it dies.**

In spite of our monsoon like weather, the June Mississippi backwaters continue to be productive for birdwatchers. Those that are willing to tolerate high river levels, temperatures and humidity reminiscent of tropical rainforests, annoying mosquitoes and gnats determined to extract a meal from our earlobes, are rewarded with excellent birding opportunities. Fortunately for birders, areas with high insect populations seem to be attracting record levels of insect-eating birds, with the best viewing during the early morning and late afternoon. A recent trip to the Green Island Wildlife Area resulted in a lot of mosquito swatting, but also afforded excellent viewing of a large number of Prothonotary Warblers, Yellow Warblers, American Redstarts and Tree, Cliff, Barn, and Rough-winged Swallows. Other prominent “bug-eaters” were Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Wood Pewees, Great Crested Flycatchers, and Eastern Phoebes. They were taking advantage of the abundant protein source and could be easily observed as they

gleaned insects from the flooded timber adjacent to the lower parking lot. Last weekend I participated in a program sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the newly constructed John Deere Marsh, north of Dubuque. We were surprised to see Caspian Terns and Forster’s Terns still present in good numbers. Great egrets were abundant and a single Snowy Egret was identified. In early July, birders should concentrate their efforts around fruiting mulberry trees that are found along shorelines, dikes, railroad right-of-ways, and bicycle paths. In addition to berry-eating birds like Gray Catbirds and American Robins, over 75 other species of birds will take advantage of this abundant food supply, such as orioles, woodpeckers, grosbeaks, cardinals, bluebirds, kingbirds, and waxwings. During mid-July, broods of waterfowl will be more visible as they begin their initial flights and flock together during the early morning and evening. Look for young Canada Geese, Wood Ducks, and

Mallards. Most Neotropical migrants will be losing their bright spring colors and will be molting into drabber plumage as they prepare for their southward migration. The swallows and blackbirds will also be grouping together, adding color and sound to our marshlands. By the end of July, the shorebird migration will be well underway. Upland Sandpipers, Greater Yellowlegs, Hudsonian Godwits, and Marbled Godwits will once again be frequenting our backwater areas as they begin their southward journeys to Central and South America. I encourage everyone to grab their binoculars and bug spray, and visit their favorite wetland areas this month. You will be surprised at the diversity and abundance of birds present at this time of year. Be sure to also “stop and smell the roses.” Some of most colorful wetland plants—swamp milkweed, water lilies, and cardinal flowers will all be blooming.



Logan Zimmerman



On June 1st, the Jr. Stewards were supposed to go and canoe, but the water was too high. Instead we did a game. Its called geocache. The idea is to find stuff that is hidden. To do this we used a GPS unit and good sight. There are different sizes of treasures from nano to standard. It’s like a game of hide and seek. This is the link to find more about geocaching: <http://www.geocaching.com>. It’s a lot of fun especially for young treasure hunters!

By: Logan Zimmerman, 6th grade Clinton, IA



## Flash Point - Eagles and the Midwest

Every winter we are blessed to have hundreds of Bald Eagles congregate around the lock and dams on the Mississippi River. The only drawback is the temperatures you must endure to view them. Lock and Dam 14 near LeClaire, IA is one of the premiere locations for viewing Bald Eagles in our area. You can get very close to the action on the boardwalk that is set up right along the river's edge. Most weekends it is standing room only, but if you can brave the cold and the crowd, you are in for a spectacular show.



After a while, you will get to know how the eagles behave and you can anticipate when it is a good time to take a shot. Generally, when one eagle leaves the tree to fish, others will follow; some to fish, and some to chase those that have just caught a fish. These majestic birds are not above thievery. They are happy to take a good catch from another eagle. You can also witness the interaction of adults and juveniles where the adults will teach the juveniles how to fish by dropping a fresh catch and having the juvenile take it from the top of the water or even catch it in mid-air. It is amazing to witness, first-hand.

Sometimes you get real lucky and get that shot that makes you say wow! When that happens, standing out in the cold and holding your camera with numb fingers seems worth it.



Connie Inskeep - Moline, IL.

From this vantage point, the eagles will fish right in front of you. You don't need a huge telephoto lens like you see most of the people in the picture using. A 300mm kit lens will work just fine. The eagles are close enough that you can get spectacular shots if you are patient. This shot was taken with a 250mm lens at f5.6.



If you set your camera on continuous shooting, you can get shots that you didn't even see with your naked eye. The action happens so fast, that you wouldn't see it even if you were staring right at it. This eagle just missed a fish and if the camera wasn't shooting continuously, it would have been a missed opportunity.



Until next time, take the time to enjoy what you are shooting. You may even learn a little something about the species while you are recording some lasting memories.

## *Tennessee Turtle Dogs Return to Lost Mound by Ed Britton*

The Tennessee Turtle dogs once again returned to the Lost Mound sand prairie to sniff out the elusive ornate box turtle. The Turtle dogs are a professional turtle tracking service and have been specially trained to find box turtles. They have worked on scientific research projects throughout the US and on highway development and forest clear cutting projects where they run in front of the dozers to find and remove turtles out of harm's way.

The Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge brought back the Turtle dogs for a third year to help with a long term research study on ornate box turtles in northwest Illinois. The ornate box turtle was listed as a threatened species in Illinois in October 2009 due to its declining population status. Population decline was primarily attributed to the loss of sand prairies, an important habitat type used by these land turtles - they do not live in water as most turtle species do.

The turtle search area was focused at the Refuge's Lost Mound Unit, formerly Savanna Army Depot. Historically, the Depot supported a large population of ornates but decades of military activity resulted in the loss of preferred habitat and reduction of the population to only a few individuals. The military mission ended in 2000 and the Refuge inherited about 10,000 acres at the Depot which is now called Lost Mound.

In 2008, the Refuge began a research project to re-establish a viable population of ornates at Lost Mound. Currently, there are 36 known ornates in the population with a radio transmitter attached to each individual for long term monitoring. The Turtle dogs searched several sand prairie areas and located 6 new individuals. The turtles are re-located to a 19 acre sand prairie maximum security enclosure consisting of aluminum sheeting buried in the ground and a five foot high weld wire fence to

protect against coyote predation.

Ornate box turtles are mostly solitary in nature, well camouflaged, and hard to find visually by researchers. The Turtle dogs provide an efficient method for locating turtles by relying on scent trails of turtles, the drawback being that turtles must be active for the dogs to find them. The dogs pick up the turtle in a specially trained soft-mouth grip.

The Turtle dogs are Boykin spaniels, a breed that has historically been used in the southeast as hunting dogs due to their keen sense of smell. The Boykin spaniel is the official state dog of South Carolina. The Turtle dogs have also been trained as bird dogs. Their cross training led to some minor distractions by upland birds but owner/trainer John Rucker would reinforce their goal of finding turtles by constantly reminding the dogs "Turtles, find turtles." The team of researchers accompanying the dogs was warned not to say the B-I-R-D word because the dogs may respond and search for birds instead of turtles.

John is a nomadic traveler that spends most days with his 5 dogs in search of turtles or birds. His next destination was Michigan to search for ornates at another research site. John is a retired high school English teacher that resides in the mountains of East Tennessee. John's love of the outdoors and his dogs was foremost. His knowledge and devotion to turtle conservation was inspiring. The Turtle dog's contribution in finding ornate box turtles will add significantly to the conservation and management of this imperiled species in Northwest Illinois.



*“Sightings Around the Refuge”*



American White Pelican by Michael Fitzgerald



Orchard Oriole on Spiderwort by Connie Zink



Monarch Butterfly by Debbie Cram



Great Egret Family by Michael Fitzgerald

# Stan Bousson "Photos of the Month"



Great Blue Heron by Stan Bousson



Cattle Egret by Stan Bousson



Indigo Bunting Nest by Stan Bousson



Indigo Bunting Nest by Stan Bousson



Indigo Bunting Nest by Stan Bousson



Great Egret by Stan Bousson

## Schedule of Events



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 \*

Thursday, August 1st "Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge" 8:00am - 10:00am \*

Saturday, August 10th "Monthly Bird Walk" 8:00am-11:00am

Saturday, August 10th "Lost Mound Birding Van-Tour" 1:00pm – 5:00pm \*

Thursday, August 15th "Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge" 8:00am - 10:00am \*

Friday, August 16th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00am - 1:30pm

Saturday, August 17th "Golf Cart Tour of the Refuge" 8:00am - 10:00am \*

Saturday, August 17th 2nd Annual "Amazing Refuge Race" (Time to be Determined)

Sunday, August 18th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00pm – 5:00pm \*

Friday, Saturday August 23rd, 24th "Stewards Members Trip to Wisconsin" \* (See newsletter for details)

**\* All events are free and open to the public but registration is required. Please call 815-273-2732 or email [info@sumriver.org](mailto:info@sumriver.org)**

**For additional events see our website [www.sumriver.org](http://www.sumriver.org)**



### Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

7071 Riverview Rd  
Thomson, IL 61285

815-273-2732  
[info@sumriver.org](mailto: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](http://www.sumriver.org)



Make a difference and  
Join today.

## Stewards Members Only - Explore Wisconsin's National Wildlife Refuges August 23 – 24, 2013.

### Itinerary

There will be two groups heading to WI. The 1<sup>st</sup> group will be going up for the day and returning, while the other group will be staying overnight and then traveling to Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge on Saturday. The day trip folks will travel by Government Vehicle while the other folks will carpool. If you're interested in learning more or to sign up for this trip please contact Visitor Service Manager Pam Steinhaus at 815-273-2732 ext 116. Registration for trip due by July 20th.

### August 23<sup>rd</sup>

7:00 am-promptly Leave the Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center

9:00 am – break Pit stop at Platteville, WI

11:00 – noon Lunch at Culver's in Reedsburg, WI

Arrive at Necedah NWR around 1:00 pm

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm – tour

Group 1 will return home arriving back to the center by 9:00 pm

Group 2 check into motel

Nestled in central Wisconsin is a landscape that was epitomized by early homesteaders as the Great Wisconsin Swamp. Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) that is located near Necedah Wisconsin and consists of a mosaic habitat of sedge meadow, savanna, prairie, and pine-oak forest. It is home to the ringed boghaunter dragonflies, whooping cranes, trumpeter swans, wolves, Karner blue butterflies, badgers, and red-headed woodpeckers.

### August 24<sup>th</sup>

Leave motel by 7:45 am – travel to Trempealeau NWR

Tour at 9:30 am

The 6,226-acre Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge lies within the Mississippi flyway, along the Mississippi River in western Wisconsin. It is an isolated backwater, cut off from the Mississippi and Trempealeau rivers by dikes. It is a resting and feeding area for waterfowl and other birds.

**What to Bring** – snacks, beverage, camera, binoculars and a sense of adventure.

