The Greater White-fronted Goose is named for the white patch on the front of the face near the bill. They have a gray-brown body, dark bars or mottling on the belly and orange legs and feet. They are around 28” tall. There are three sub-species, Arctic, Taiga and Greenland that vary in sizes and color patterns. One of the world’s widest ranging geese, in North America they breed in the far north on tundra, usually near fresh water. In the US, it is common only west of the Mississippi River. Large flocks will visit croplands and wetlands. Most often seen during migration in our area, it winters in the south and west of the Mississippi.
Backwater Birding with Bob

The early arrival of winter’s cold and snow have quickly turned our Mississippi backwaters into frigid “hard waters.” Bass boats have been replaced by ice fishing huts, all remnants of fall foliage have been stripped away, and the starkness and quiet solitude of a winter landscape predominate. Marshes that were teeming with life several short weeks ago are now blanketed with ice and harbor only a few hard core survivors.

High on the list for spectacular winter viewing are the magnificent Bald Eagles that gather by the hundreds below the lock and dams and wherever pockets of open water can be found. Search these pockets for several of our hardy winter ducks such as the Common Merganser, Common Goldeneye, and Bufflehead. These ducks are actually more commonly seen in December than any other month of the year. On a recent trip to Big Slough we sighted hundreds of Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes, and Bufflehead. These ducks are actually more commonly seen in December than any other month of the year. On a recent trip to Big Slough we sighted hundreds of Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes, and Bufflehead. These ducks are actually more commonly seen in December than any other month of the year. On a recent trip to Big Slough we sighted hundreds of Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes, and Bufflehead. These ducks are actually more commonly seen in December than any other month of the year. On a recent trip to Big Slough we sighted hundreds of Common Mergansers, Common Goldeneyes, and Bufflehead. These ducks are actually more commonly seen in December than any other month of the year.

Gull watching can be a challenging winter activity with over ten species that can be observed at the lock and dams and other pockets of open water. South Sabula Lake and the City Harbor in Sabula are two of my favorite viewing areas for gulls. While there last weekend with avian birders Olivia Kruse and her dad, Craig Kruse, we sorted through dozens of Herring Gulls and Ring-billed Gulls before we spotted a Black-legged Kittiwake standing on the ice only twenty yards away!

Following the closure of the Iowa and Illinois shotgun deer season, late December is a great time to hike the forested bottomlands of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife and Fish Refuge. My favorite area to hike, cross-country ski or snowshoe (depending on the depth of the snow) is the Pleasant Creek Refuge, just north of Green Island, Iowa. There is plenty of solitude and a well-developed hiking trail allows easy access to floodplain and backwater areas. Hikers are likely to view Bald Eagles, tiny Winter Wrens scurrying along fallen trees, and raucous Pileated Woodpeckers. Mammals found here include mink, otters and the best bottomland survivor of all, the coyote.

Spend some time in our great outdoors this December and enjoy the beauty of this special season. You may participate in many organized activities in the next two months: Audubon Christmas Bird Counts, Bald Eagle Days, and Lost Mound Birding Van Tours offered by the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge. Have a great holiday season.
Jr. Stewards Chatter

Saturday, November 1st, at Jr. Stewards’ "Migration Sensation" we had a day of ducks. We talked about the difference between dabbling and diving ducks. We studied some of the ducks we might see and off we went to Spring Lake and Sloane Marsh to look for them. We saw 14 species of ducks, plus Canada Geese, Tundra Swans and Sandhill Cranes. It was a great duck day!

The Jr Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge finished up their final session on December 6th, by doing their version of the Christmas Bird Count. The following was written by Sophia Guenzler, 6th grader, Savanna Illinois.

The Christmas bird count started in 1900. It’s still being done today. There were about 35 species found. Most of the waterfowl were Tundra Swans; a few others were Canada Geese and Mallards. Some of the song birds were Eastern Blue Birds, Juncos, and Black-capped Chickadees. Birds of Prey like the Bald Eagles and Kestrels were seen. In all, we got about 1,000 total birds.

A book on Insects was presented to each Jr. Steward.

Left to Right (all youth are from Savanna, IL)
Ethan Brown, Brennon Cavanaugh, Sophia Guenzler, Emma Swiderski, Shayla Roberts and Jacob McLuckie.

Missing are Logan and Allison Zimmerman from Clinton, IA and Alyssa Smith from Savanna, IL.
There are so many opportunities for some really excellent shots when the air is cold and crisp. Taking photos of wintertime landscapes can sometimes be challenging, though. The bright sun bouncing off the snow and ice can cause the whites in your picture to be blown out. You can combat this by using a polarizing filter or changing the settings on your camera. If you have never done winter photography before, begin by just taking some shots in your back yard and then move out from there. City streets and wildlife refuges offer some excellent subjects for spectacular wintertime shots.

Here in Illinois, we have Bald Eagles that show up by the thousands in the winter. If you want to have a good look at large numbers of Bald Eagles, visit Lock and Dam 13 in Fulton, IL. The Army Corps of Engineers has an observation deck at this location to give you a wonderful view of the Bald Eagles fishing in the Mississippi River and interacting with each other. Be sure to dress warm so you can stay for a while. You won’t be disappointed.

Another excellent place to do some eagle watching is Lock and Dam 14 near Le Claire, IA. You will get a lot closer to the eagles here, but be prepared to share your viewing platform with many others as this location gets quite busy with photographers every weekend in the winter.

Until next time, get out and do some wintertime photography. Remember to dress warm and have fun!

Connie Inskeep - Moline, IL.
Clinton’s skyline marquee is featuring one of America’s greatest wildlife success stories, the winter migration of bald eagles. This national troupe of migrants performs daily along the riverfront. The staging area for each performance is located across the river at Lock & Dam 13. A live streaming Internet video camera is located at Lock and Dam 13 that provides bald eagle viewing from the comfort of your home. The Stewards of Upper Mississippi River Refuge, Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service provide the camera at the Stewards website www.stewardsumrr.org.

Eagle numbers at Lock & Dam 13 vary daily and typically range from a few individuals to several hundred. In January 2014, over 1,000 bald eagles were counted from the observation deck at the lock. Viewing opportunities are usually better in early morning. The sky dancers perform aerial acrobatics and talon clinching cartwheels while soaring along the Mississippi River shoreline. These performances spotlight the social interaction between eagles in flight that may be courtship, family bonding or aggression. Two eagles relentlessly pursue each other when one suddenly flips upside down grasping the talons or prey being held by the other. The entangled eagles spiral downward seemingly out of control, but with the grace of skilled acrobats, release talons and resume their game of pursuit.

Bald eagles are one of the greatest wildlife success stories in North America. Their population numbered several hundred thousand in the 1800’s. Industrialization plunged them to the brink of extinction by mid-1950 with only a few hundred pair remaining. Populations rebounded through protection and restoration programs. After 35 years on the federal endangered species list, their population recovered to a level they were removed from the federal list in 2007.

Ice conditions along the Mississippi River determine eagle concentration areas. Fish are a primary food source but river ice-up precludes most fishing opportunities. Eagles then concentrate at the locks and dams where water flowing over the dam keeps the tailwaters open and stuns fish passing through that provides a floating sushi buffet.

Eagles are opportunistic feeders and will dine on road-killed critters, fatally wounded but not retrieved deer, and deer gut piles left in the field by hunters. They vigilantly patrol pockets of open water where our local non-migratory ducks and geese frequent. A slow moving or injured bird will become the eagle’s next meal.

Bald eagles typically use the same nest year after year and add more branches each season. Older nests can weigh as much as a ton and may cause a tree to topple during high wind. An eagle pair may build more than one nest and use the alternate nest as a feeding station. One or two eaglets per nest are common, but five have been documented. Eagle nesting is occurring farther away from the river and nearer to human activity.

Bald eagle nesting is increasing on the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. In 1971, only one bald eagle nest occurred within this 261 mile long Refuge. In 2014, there were over 300 active nests with several in the Clinton area.

The 31st Annual Clinton Bald Eagle Watch will be held Saturday, January 10 from 9AM-2PM at Clinton Community College. Exhibits will be on display and free bus tours are provided from 10AM-2PM to Lock & Dam 13 for eagle viewing.

We are fortunate to have the Mississippi River at our front door. Take time to visit the riverfront to view our grand river and the aerial minuets of the sky dancers.
“This Ol Walnut Tree” by Debbie Cram

The seasons have changed and This Ol Walnut Tree is still continuing to capture the beauty that surrounds her on the refuge land she calls home. She has awakened to beautiful pink sunrises and has watched as the sun sets with all the glory that mother nature provides. The temperatures have fallen and have brought her the first blanket of snow. But in between the cold and snow she has had time to reflect on the year behind her. All of the grasses have browned and the pretty prairie flowers have gone into a deep sleep. She awaits the next season and all the life that will return to her. Spring seems so far away. Two weeks until Christmas and then onto the New Year. Somewhere between night and day the two of us meet and I will continue our journey. She calls to me and I follow. Please continue to follow the progress on Face Book of Debbie’s “This Ol Walnut Tree”. https://www.facebook.com/pages/This Ol Walnut Tree/1484600211756249.
“Sightings Around the Refuge”

Bald Eagle by Juliet D’Souza

Canvasback By Richard Cox

Northern Cardinal by Connie Zink

Bald Eagle by Richard Cox

Bald Eagle by Michael Fitzgerald
“More Sightings Around the Refuge”

Northern Cardinal by Connie Zink

Tufted Titmouse by Connie and Wade Inskeep

Bald Eagle by Stan Bousson

Bald Eagle by Stan Bousson

Northern Cardinal by Connie and Wade Inskeep

Tundra Swans by Connie Zink
“Even More Sightings Around the Refuge”

Bald Eagle by Michael Fitzgerald

Bald Eagle by Stan Bousson

Ice Fishing at Thomson Causeway by Debbie Cram

Bald Eagle by Michael Fitzgerald

Deer at Lost Mound Unit by Debbie Cram
Schedule of Events

Saturday, December 13th  “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:45)
Friday, December 19th  Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting and Christmas Party 11:00 am - 1:30 pm
Sunday, December 21st  “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:45)
Saturday, January 10th  “Bald Eagle Watch” Clinton, Ia. (Complete schedule included)
Friday, January 16th  Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting and Christmas Party 11:00 am - 1:30 pm
Saturday, January 17th  “Bald Eagle Viewing Tour” 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm (Meet at Ingersoll Center at 1:45 pm)
Sunday, January 18th  “Lost Mound Birding Van Tour” 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm (Meet at Lost Mound Unit Office by 12:45)

Saturday, January 24th  “Bald Eagle Viewing Tour” 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm (Meet at Ingersoll Center at 1:45 pm)
Saturday, January 31st  “Bald Eagle Viewing Tour” 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm (Meet at Ingersoll Center at 1:45 pm)
Saturday, February 7th  “Bald Eagle Viewing Tour” 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm (Meet at Ingersoll Center at 1:45 pm)
Saturday, February 14th  “Bald Eagle Viewing Tour” 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm (Meet at Ingersoll Center at 1:45 pm)
Friday, February 20th  Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting and Christmas Party 11:00 am - 1:30 pm

All events are free and open to the public but registration is required. Please call 815-273-2732 or email stewardsumrr@gmail.com

Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

815-273-2732

Primary Business Address  stewardsumrr@gmail.com

Check out our Website:
www.stewardsumrr.org

Membership Form

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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.
31st Annual Clinton Bald Eagle Watch
Saturday, January 10, 2015
Clinton, Iowa & Fulton, Illinois

Schedule of Events

8:30 a.m.—2:30 p.m.  Eagle Watching at Lock and Dam #13, Fulton, IL, five miles north of Fulton, IL. off Highway 84.

9:00 a.m.—2:00 p.m.  Free Educational Programs & Exhibits
                      Bald Eagle Photo Contest
                      Clinton Community College, 1000 Lincoln Blvd., Clinton, IA.

9:30 a.m.  Welcome—Trevor Pomkin, US Corps of Engineers,
           Pam Steinhaus US Fish and Wildlife Service

9:45 a.m.  “Live Birds of Prey” - Owls
           Candy Ridlbauer, Northern IL. Raptor Rehab and Education

11:00 a.m.  Who Lives with Eagles?
            David Stokes, Naturalist - West Berlin, IL

12:15 p.m.  Lead Exposure in Bald Eagles — Ed Britton, USFWS

1:00 p.m.  “Live Birds of Prey” - Hawks and Falcons
           Candy Ridlbauer, Northern IL. Raptor Rehab and Education

Programs and Exhibits will feature: Live Animals, Exhibits, Puppets, Song, Door Prizes, Food and Drinks. People’s Choice—Bald Eagle Photo Contest

- Free Courtesy Bus Service from the College to Lock and Dam 13 viewing area. (Wiersema Charter Bus Service)
- Refreshments available at the Dam.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CALL:
US Fish and Wildlife Service (815)273-2732
US Army Corps of Engineers—(815)259-3628