

The Northwest Illinois Audubon Society has met the following categories and criteria to earn the Bird City Designation in 2021:

## **CATEGORY 1 - HABITAT CREATION, PROTECTION, AND MONITORING OF NATURAL COMMUNITIES**

### **A. Organized bird monitoring and data collection (other than those that fall under 3C)**

Volunteers organized by Deb Schroeder monitor 49 Eastern Bluebird Houses at Park Hills Golf Course. Weekly data about egg number and success of hatchings, fledglings, and mortality is recorded for each house. Recorded for the 2021 season were 77 bluebirds successfully fledged.

### **B. Legal protections of existing bird habitat**

The Jane Addamsland Park Foundation owns a property in Freeport called the [Freeport Prairie](#), that is also managed occasionally by the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society. It was formally dedicated as a nature preserve and sanctuary in 1977 for native plants and animals by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, thus the property is protected by law from any individuals disturbing or removing any feature.

Oakdale Nature Preserve is 134 acres and is managed as a nature preserve with prairie, savanna, and forest plant communities. Taylor park has about 18 acres of managed field. Krape Park has 9 acres of managed savanna and 6 acres of managed forest. We also have 58-acre wetlands preserve and 4,250 feet of Yellow Creek running through Krape Park.

### **C. Future plans for providing additional bird habitat**

Freeport Park District has a concept plan that it hopes to fulfill for Winter Park in future years that would redistribute space for turf grass and add a butterfly prairie (which would provide bird habitat as well) and no mow grasses to buffer the perimeter. Final distribution would be 2.2 acres of mowed turf, 2.4 acres of no mow grass, and 1.4 acres of butterfly prairie.

### **D. Protection and growth of a favorable bird habitat (by a local group)**

The Jane Addamsland Park Foundation (JAPF) manages invasive plants at their properties in Stephenson county which includes cutting, spot-herbicide, and performing woodland controlled burns. JAPF holds and manages the following properties: Hartman-Lydon Wildlife Sanctuary (187 acres), Espenscheid Forest (40 acres), Wohlford Woods (28 acres), Butterfly Farm (82 acres), and Zaleskis (10 acres), Indian Gardens (48 acres)

### **H. Community-supported bird conservation projects by local youth groups or conservation groups**

The University of Illinois Extension offers Master Naturalist training, which trains participants to be an educated volunteer force that can go out and teach others about conservation and complete projects such as habitat restoration projects and managing bluebird trails and wood duck boxes

### **I. Management of a public golf course to benefit birds**

Park Hills Golf Course in Freeport is sanctioned by Audubon International as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program golf course. The golf course is also a certified Monarch Waystation site. The course maintains 49 bluebird houses and 27 acres of unmowed areas that are control burned once every 3 years by Highland Chapter Pheasants Forever members and Park Hills Golf Course personnel.

### **J. Education to community on controlling and removing invasive species**

The University of Illinois Extension provides education on identification and management of exotic invasive plants and insects. In addition to training homeowners and residents, Extension worked with the Freeport Park District and Northwest Illinois Invasive Plant Strike Team to demonstrate eradication techniques and positive outcomes at Oakdale Nature Preserve. Extension also hosted the first Master Naturalist training for Stephenson County in the fall of 2019, where participants were taught about the types of invasive species and control mechanisms.

Extension hosted several ash tree and Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) management meetings during 2012 – 2015. Extension along with other partnering organizations created a publication “Management of Invasive Plants and Pests of Illinois” as an educational tool to help the public identify and manage invasive species. These publications are available at the Extension office and distributed at educational programs hosted by Extension.

## **CATEGORY 2 - LIMITING OR REMOVING THREATS TO BIRDS**

The city of Freeport has not met the criteria for this category at this time, but hope to in the future.

## **CATEGORY 3 - PUBLIC EDUCATION & INCLUSION**

### **B. Educate property owners on methods to create and enhance backyard habitat for birds by providing web links or a community newsletter**

The University of Illinois Extension’s annual garden event, Joys of Gardening, features a full day of garden related programming. In 2020, three of the classes were conservation related topics: “Bees and Pollinators: Insects that Benefit our Landscape,” “If you Plant It, They Will Come: A Plan to Attract Birds,” and “Eastern Bluebirds: Little Blue Gem in your Garden.” In 2019, there were two classes with conservation topics: “Trends in Monarch Populations,” and “Woodpeckers of Illinois.” Each year at Joys of Gardening, Extension tries to feature several conservation related topics such as birds in the backyard, invasive species management, planting for pollinators, and more.

In 2021, Joys of Gardening was replaced with a virtual program called: “Think Spring Gardening Series” that had a presentation “Designing a Garden to Attract Birds” by Dr. Michael P. Ward, Associate Professor, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Science, University of Illinois. Dr. Ward presented his understanding of avian ecology and behavior and his knowledge of birds’ habitat selection, describing design features and plantings that can be introduced in home gardens to make them both inviting to and protective of the variety of song birds that frequent this area.

The Master Naturalist program trains volunteers in Forest Ecology and Invasive Species, Ornithology, Entomology, Land Use, Habitat, Ecology, and Agro-Ecology, Bluebird Trail, understanding the natural world and more.

**C. Representation by your community in at least one citizen science bird monitoring program (e.g., the Christmas Bird Count, Great Backyard Bird Count, Swift Night Out)**

The Northwest Illinois Audubon Society participates in the annual Midwest Crane Count in April. The Northwest Illinois Audubon Society participates annually in the Christmas Bird Count.

**E. Program that involves schools, garden clubs, or other organizations in bird conservation activities**

The University of Illinois Extension has partnered with the Freeport Park District to offer an Arbor day event for the students at Empire Elementary school to allow students to explore the benefits of trees, how to properly plant and care for a tree, and how to care for our environment.

**F. Substantial initiative to promote pollinator health such as participating in the Illinois Monarch project, or Bee City USA status.**

The University of Illinois Extension offers educational programming on pollinators including presentations and workshops on pollinators and pollinator-friendly plantings, demonstration gardens throughout the community that promote planting for pollinators, and news articles highlighting plants that benefit pollinators. Two of the demonstration gardens are designed for monarchs and are waiting to be approved as Monarch Waystations.

Park Hills Golf Course is sanctioned by [Audubon International](#) as an Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program golf course. The golf course is also a certified [Monarch Waystation](#) site.

**H. Program that educates young people on any of the following topics: climate change, energy efficiency, green/bird-safe buildings, or environmental sustainability**

Keepers of the Land is an annual event open to all 3rd graders in Stephenson County. University of Illinois Extension partners with the Stephenson County Soil and Water Conservation District and Conservation and Agriculture Partners to offer this educational event at Oakdale. Keepers of the Land session include: Animal Survivors, Conservation Police, Earth Studios, Going Buggy, Prairie & Soil Ecology, Vermicomposting, Watershed Table, Water Cycle, and Wild Animals in Human Hands.

**J. Increase public awareness of birds in your community. Examples include placing a remote web camera on a nest platform, offering regular, public bird watching field trips, or creating a significant educational resource on your community's bird life.**

Every April and May, the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society hosts bird walks open to the public in Freeport and surrounding community. In past years, these locations included: Krape Park, Oakdale Nature Preserve, wetland areas of eastern Stephenson County, Southern Jane Addams Trail, Northern Jane Addams trail, Orangeville Wetlands, Harry and Dorothy Espenscheid Forest Preserve, Pecatonica River Forest Preserve, and Elkhorn Creek Biodiversity Preserve.

**K. Increase the access of traditionally underserved communities to natural areas, environmental education, birding resources, and local environmental experts**

The University of Illinois Extension continues to work to reach new, diverse and underserved audiences by continuing to evaluate the programs we offer, looking for new ways to promote programs and information, working with stakeholders to identify community needs and by considering the date, time and location of events.

The Northwest Illinois Audubon Society received an Audubon in Action Grant for \$6,000 in 2021 with the project title: Building Partnerships to improve outdoor recreation for Freeport

communities of color. This was submitted by Audubon Great Lakes on Behalf of the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society. The proposed project was associated with a visit by Christian Cooper to bring attention to outdoor recreation and birding, specifically to the African American community of Freeport, IL. This set of events kicked off a series of facilitated conversations between Northwest Illinois Audubon Society (NIAS), Freeport Art Museum (FAM), Boys & Girls Club of Freeport (B&GC), and Citizen United for Rights, Respect, and Equity (CURRE). These encounters hope to foster durable connections and lead to new program ideas that speak to community concerns, interests, and aspirations.

NIAS has worked with Barry Treu at the Freeport Art Museum, CURRE (Citizens United for Rights, Respect, and Equity) and the Boys and Girls Club staff to bring Christian Cooper to Freeport on June 16, 2021 to talk to the children/teens at the Boys and Girls club about birding and his experience with racism in Central Park while bird watching and being a black bird enthusiast. The program was called "Christian Cooper in Conversation, Celebrating the Diversity of Birds and People. During this time, NIAS donated binoculars and bird guides to the children and teens that use the facility as well as have plans to provide ongoing and consistent education about birds.

The Christian Cooper event was facilitated by Jen Johnson, a Wild Indigo Associate through Audubon Great Lakes. Audubon Great Lakes also helped with the streaming of the program through Zoom to enhance the audience, which drew nearly 100 people from individuals in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, New York, and California. The next day, there was a bird walk with Christian Cooper at Taylor Park with the kids/teens/staff from the Boys and Girls club to use their new binoculars.

The NIAS Newsletter write-up of the entire Christian Cooper event can be found [here](#) and the program was also recorded and can be found on [YouTube](#).

#### **CATEGORY 4 - CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY**

##### **D. Participation in a community solar program or a municipal building receives a significant percentage of its electricity from renewable energy**

Since 2018, Freeport had developed and adopted a solar ordinance. The city of Freeport had received a gold designation from the national SolSmart program for making it easy for area homes and business to obtain and use solar power by creating an online permitting checklist, reviewing local ordinances to address impediments to solar development, and allowing solar use in all zones. The Freeport Wastewater Facility on Hancock street installed a large-scale solar array in 2020.

## **CATEGORY 5 - WORLD MIGRATORY BIRD DAY**

### **A. Proclamation: annual official proclamation of World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD).**

On May 3, 2021, an Honorary World Migratory Bird Day Resolution was voted on by Mayor Jodi Miller of Freeport and City Council members with a vote of 8-0, in support of resolution.

### **B. An event that incorporates the annual WMBD theme in some fashion. For information on the current year's theme and event materials, please visit the World Migratory Bird Day website**

The first WMBD event held in Freeport, following the theme, "Sing, Fly, Soar – Like a Bird!" was held on Saturday, May 8 at 11:00 a.m. at Taylor Park in Freeport. The Freeport Art Museum provided cardboard wings and paper beaks that attached outside of COVID masks for kids and families to take and paint in advance of the event. The event held socially-distanced activities that included nest-building, a "migration" obstacle course, bird seed feeders, egg drop game, and kite-flying.

Freeport Public Library had bird displays throughout April and early May with photographs taken by local photographers from the Freeport Camera Club. Other photographs were also displayed at two local coffee shops.

## **Category 6 - Official Resolution**

### **A. An officially-enacted Bird City Illinois resolution. This must be a resolution that is voted on and passed by the appropriate municipal council/board. (not a proclamation). The resolution must be voted on and passed every five years; triennially is preferred.**

On September 3, 2021, a Bird City Resolution was voted on by Mayor Jodi Miller of Freeport and City Council members with a vote of 8-0, in support of resolution.