

DECEMBER 2020 - JANUARY 2021

NORTHWEST ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

A chapter of the National Audubon Society

www.nwilaudubon.org

NIAS MONTHLY PROGRAMS

Join us the first Tuesday of every month, September through May. All of our programs are open to the public.

Please note: schedule and location of programs are subject to change due to COVID-19 restrictions; please see newsletter and website for up-to-date information.

Most programs are held at the St John United Church of Christ, 1010 Park Blvd., in Freeport.

Most programs begin at 7 PM with announcements, followed by the program at 7:30 and then refreshments.

Check the current newsletter or our website nwilaudubon.org for specific monthly details, special events or any changes to the usual time and place.

Please join us!

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7. Thank You

Questions About Your Membership?

Contact Teresa Smith at 815-238-3963 or timtreetsmith@gmail.com

- Bird ID text: allaboutbirds.org
- Bird ID photo: "dfaulder"
- 12/1 Program photo provided by the presenter
- Illustrations by Carol Litus



Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivali*

Cold and dark winter days come alive with the flurry of black-and-white Snow Buntings tumbling in flight across barren fields and lakeshores. These restless birds flock up by the hundreds in winter, scattering across Canada and the United States. Snow Buntings breed in the high Arctic among rocky crevices where their crisp white plumage blends in with the snowy landscape. In the winter they acquire rusty tones that help them blend in with their winter homes of bare ground and crop stubble.

A "Gone Solar" Story: St. John United Church of Christ

Virtual Program through Zoom Tuesday, December 1, 7pm

Our speaker for Tuesday, December 1 will be Pastor Hank Fairman, Senior Pastor at St. John United Church of Christ and he will share the story of their solar project.

In the summer of 2019, the members and friends at St. John nto action " the congregation embarked on a major project in

United Church of Christ made a bold choice. "Putting their faith into action," the congregation embarked on a major project in creation care and environmental justice by going solar with the installation of solar panels to provide electricity for the church.

The solar panels have been installed at the church and are producing enough renewable electric energy to provide the power needed to operate the church campus. The goal of the project is to make St. John UCC the first 100% self-generated solar powered faith community in Illinois, and the first 100% renewable electric powered business in Freeport and Stephenson County.

For all individuals who want to join the program, please email nwilaudubon@gmail.com to receive the link and password to join this Zoom program.

We will begin at 7:00 pm, first with any chapter announcements from the president and board members. The program will follow with time for questions and discussions at the end.

Aldo Leopold at Faville Grove

Virtual Program through Zoom Tuesday, January 5th, 7:00 pm

The beginning of prairie preservation and ecological restoration by the efforts of writer/scientist/ecologist Aldo Leopold. The first piece of virgin prairie saved as public land. Leopold called this property "...one of the largest and best remnants of unplowed, ungrazed prairie sod left in the State." The story focuses on Leopold's graduate students and local farmers who appreciated the wild orchids growing on the prairie. Personal narratives are provided by three of Aldo Leopold's children, some of his graduate students, and the Faville/Tillotson family of Lake Mills. The video includes Leopold's essay 'Exit Orchis'. Video traces the history of this prairie remnant since it was saved from the plow - the slow learning curve of prairie maintenance,



difficulties with neighboring farmers and, finally, the purchase of adjoining land for ecological restoration. An epilogue (2010) recounts the damage caused by the floods of 2008, as the climate and watershed have changed.

Charles Johannsen produced and recorded this video in 2005. Charles' passion is as a videographer and has produced numerous videos, many for not for profits in the region. His interviews with the Leopold family and Leopold's first graduate students in this video are a historical treasure! Charles' has a great love for the natural world and spends much time exploring it.

For all individuals who want to join the program, please email nwilaudubon@gmail.com to receive the link and password to join this Zoom program. We will begin at 7:00 pm, first with any chapter announcements from the president and board members. The program will follow with time for questions and discussions at the end.

ENJOY OPEN-LAND BIRDS THIS WINTER

Snowy Owl, by Patty Weik

Every year open-land birds that nest in habitats at northern latitudes spend their winters in more southern locales, including northwest Illinois. Traditionally

our chapter sponsors two field trips to focus on these species. Because of the pandemic and our inability to carpool, we are unable to offer those trips this year. However, individually we can venture out to observe and admire these fascinating birds.

The Species – Horned Larks, Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs, along with an occasional Snowy Owl and Roughwinged Hawk. While Horned Larks do nest in

our area, the big numbers of this species occur in the winter as northerly nesting birds move south.

The Habitat – These species can be found primarily in open-lands that were presettlement prairie. Larks, buntings and longspurs are chiefly seed eaters in winter, feeding on waste grain and weed seeds in harvested fields, field entrances, pastures, swaths of spread manure and roadsides. They also are attracted to gravel roadsides

> for grit. Roadside observations are more easily made than field observations and are most numerous if snow fields. Note: covers small flocks of birds on roadsides adjacent to woodlands most often American Tree are Sparrows and Northern Juncos, both also winter visitors.

The Locations – We have had good luck slowly cruising country roads, using our vehicles as

blinds, in the area where Stephenson, Carroll and Ogle counties meet, but observations have been made in many other areas as well. A few favorite roads are Prairie Dell, Fork Creek, Brookville, Coffman and Maple Grove.

The Preparation – Study these species in your field guide and especially note

behaviors, i.e. Rough-legged Hawks can be seen to hover, reminding you a really big kestrel. None of the birds are colorful so keep in mind distinct light or dark field marks, i.e. the white patches on the wings of Snow Buntings, more evident when they fly.

Most of all, have fun with your explorations. You'll often see birds you weren't looking for like Bald Eagles and Wild Turkeys, as well as a variety of mammals. Openland birding typically requires a bit more patience, but the observations can be spectacular, and the experiences are some of the best I've had. You never know just what you'll see and where you'll see it on an open-land birding adventure.

– Mary Blackmore

BIRDSEED SALE SUCCESSFUL

We were fortunate to complete this annual October fundraiser prior to the second wave of coronavirus that has hit our region of Illinois. The members of the Birdseed Sale Committee – Tim Smith, Chris Kruger and Mary Blackmore – are very grateful to all of the volunteers and customers who cooperated with social-distancing and mask wearing on our distribution days. Your actions were very much appreciated as we all work together to undertake projects like this during the pandemic. Our profit of around \$4000 will be used to fund our many programs, activities and publications.

The sale would not have been possible without our team of dedicated volunteers who helped with seed distribution and delivery, ear corn picking and bagging, order processing, flier creation and mailing, and sale planning/coordinating: Tim and Teresa Smith, Mary Blackmore, Chris Kruger, Lynn Feaver, Rex Sides, Dave Derwent, Bob Curtis, Jean Shipley, Adam and Juliet Moderow, Gary Gordon, Paul Brown, Laura and Doug Dufford, Nancy and Randy Ocken, Richard

Benning, John Akins, Judy and Harlan Corrie, Anne Straight, Dan Barron and Fred Redmore. Thank you so much!

Many thanks go to the folks at O'Mara Transport Company for not only hosting our main pickup site in Freeport, but also for their flexibility in accommodating the second seed delivery. Thanks also go to Audubon members who hosted our regional pickup sites: John and Kay Day, Alice Akins, Chris Kruger and Richard Benning, and to Joe and Brenda Akins for donating our ear corn and to Cub Foods of Freeport for donating the bags for the ear corn.



While historically we've had a little extra seed to sell during the winter, this is not the case this year. The few extra bags we ordered already have been sold.

In spite of our many challenges this year – from the pandemic to glitches with our seed supplier – we got it done. A special thank you goes to all of our wonderful volunteers who stepped up to fill in for others, work an extra shift, adjust the distribution schedule and in other ways make this project a success.

THE PRESIDENT'S TWEET

2020 has been an "interesting" year thus far at a national, regional and local level. As I write this, the election is finally over, and COVID-19 infections in our area are on the rise

On a national level we have seen a substantial erosion of what we thought had been framed as permanent protections for the wild and untouched areas of our country. Every few days National Audubon issues alerts requesting action and advocacy due to another attempted government intrusion or relaxation of rules and laws to attempt to take us on a path backwards to a greater use of fossil fuels. At the regional level we continue to see the effects of agricultural practices that at times lack sustainability. At a local level our organization is hampered by the mandates of the COVID restrictions which is preventing us from enjoying our typical chapter range of activities.

During 2020, at a national level, we experienced the death of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other people of color which has grabbed the national attention and has created a desire to have discussions to include issues of systemic racism, mass incarceration and racial inequity. At a regional level we have seen and continue to witness mostly peaceful protests about these important issues. And at our local level we are holding discussions at our board meetings concerning what impact these issues should have on us and how we can make a positive impact and address these issues within our community.

What relevance do the typical causes championed by Audubon regarding environmental issues have with the issue of race? At the national level. National Audubon is publicly reviewing the history of John James Audubon while wrestling with his previously undiscussed racial issues. He was a visionary genius who changed American art and ornithology. but he was also a man who enslaved Black people during part of his life and held racist and white supremacist viewpoints. At a regional level we watched the intersection of race and birding in Central Park in New York City when a black man, while attempting to bird, was viciously and verbally accosted with a racist attack which fortunately did not have a tragic ending. At our local level we have recognized a clear lack of diversity in our local chapter despite being in a diverse community.

Despite the challenges at all levels, we see positive steps. National Audubon diving deep into the life of John James Audubon and is opening that conversation to include people of color to offer and assist in the planning and direction of the organization going forward. One of their stated goals is to make Audubon an antiracist institution. At the regional level following the Central Park attack we are seeing a greater opportunity for diverse voices to express the challenges they often face doing things the average birder takes for granted. Locally we are committed to exploring how we can as an organization have a greater impact within our community across racial, ethnic social and economic lines to be an organization which stretches itself beyond our normal boundaries. (An example is our Binocular project). We also agree in our support of the goals of National Audubon.

In addition, we recognize there is so much going on at so many levels and we are currently working on how to disseminate information quickly and pointedly to our members. We believe each of us wants to be informed and we are exploring the use of a text and email system that can be tailored to provide each of us with our own selected interest in local, regional or even national issues. We are in the early stages but are working out the bugs and look forward to providing further details in the future.

To say 2020 has been a challenge would be an understatement. But we are optimistic and are hoping for brighter days ahead. Please let it be so! G3

> Gary G Gordon 815-541-1228 gary.gordon@comcast.net

2020 BIRDATHON FUNDS DISTRIBUTED



This year's May Birdathon raised over \$2600, only \$300 less than last year. Considering our Birdathon limitations in this pandemic year – no team birding, no pre-Birdathon chapter functions at which to promote this fundraiser – we are really pleased with this result. The funds raised were distributed to organizations that work to protect birds and the habitats they rely on. Our chapter retained 30% of the funds raised to assist with our many programs and activities.

Many thanks go to both the Birdathon birders and individuals who sponsored one or more birders. Their generosity provided much needed funds for bird protection projects in both wintering and nesting areas, as well as migration routes.

We all look forward to the 2021 Birdathon!

ORGANIZATIONS SUPPORTED INCLUDE:

- Northwest Illinois Audubon
 Society
- National Audubon's Mississippi River Initiative
- Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin
- Stewards of the Upper Mississippi
- Sand Bluff Bird Observatory
- Belize Audubon Society

CHECK OUT PROJECT FEEDERWATCH



Evening Grosbeak taken at Severson Dells bird feeder | by Andrew Elgin

One of my most rewarding birding experiences of the past decades has been participating in Project FeederWatch, a citizen science initiative of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. I've seen unusual species, enjoyed typical feeder visitors, observed interesting bird behavior and witnessed the struggles of House Finches and American Goldfinches with eye disease. All that was required was for me to look out my window at my bird feeders. From the sensational to the sad, taking part in Project FeederWatch continues to be a fascinating journey.

With us staying close to home this winter, it's a perfect time for you to participate. No particular expertise is necessary. All you need is a bird feeder. To join, contact:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology 159 Sapsucker Woods Road Ithaca NY 14850 1-800-843-BIRD (2473) feederwatch@cornell.edu feederwatch.org

Help scientists monitor winter bird populations while you learn more about the birds in your neighborhood. You'll be glad you did.

– Mary Blackmore

Juliet Moderow recently brought up an idea to the board to help get young children and their family members more involved in birding.



Pictured is Willow, showing how easy it is to use the binoculars, with the bird guides next to her. | Photo by Juliet Moderow

While field trips and programs have been more restricted for us to work with kids, she came up with an idea that can encourage children to learn about birds. NIAS purchased three sets of children's binoculars, a few age-appropriate bird guides, pamphlets about common birds in the area, and a "Identiflyer" machine, that plays 100 bird songs and calls, and donated them to the Freeport Public Library. Now, children can check out a bird kit at the library and start learning about birds at home!

FREE Virtual Film Screening of THE STORY OF PLASTIC followed by Q/A & Discussion

DATE: Watch the film any time after receiving the link and join us for a Zoom discussion on Tuesday, January 19, 2021 at 7:00 pm.

Produced by the Story of Stuff Project, The Story of Plastic takes a sweeping look at the human-made crisis of plastic pollution and the worldwide effect it has on the health of our planet and the people who inhabit it. The film features interviews with experts and activists on the frontlines of the fight, revealing the disastrous consequences of the flood of plastic smothering ecosystems and poisoning communities around the world, and the global movement that is rising up in response.

If you are interested in watching the film, please send an email to nwilaudubon@ gmail.com with your request and we will send you a link to the film and the link for the optional online discussion via Zoom on Tuesday, January 19 at 7:00 pm. The

goal for this discussion is to find ways to take action and make changes in our use of plastic.

The film screening link will be sent to you about a week before the film (as regulated by the screening rights of the film producers) so you can watch at your leisure. The link to watch the film will expire sometime on January 19. It is recommended to have high speed internet to be able to watch the film without interruption.

If you have questions, please contact us at nwilaudubon@gmail.com.

To learn more about the film, visit storyofplastic.org

WHAT IS **ZOOM**?

Yes, zoom is a feature on your binoculars to see a bird more clearly, but lately, Zoom is also an online platform that allows online meetings and audio/video conferencing.

Although most people use a computer to use Zoom to watch and participate in programs, you are also able to use a phone to listen to the program and still participate.

Now that NIAS is using Zoom for special events and programs, please contact Juliet Moderow at nwilaudubon@gmail.com or 815-599-3578 if you need instructions on how to use Zoom.

The Plastic Story

Plastics to the right of me... plastics to the left of me... in fact, plastics are all around me.

How did it end up this way and what can we do? Northwest Illinois Audubon Society is hoping that you watch a free repeat showing in January of the documentary called, "The Story of Plastics" and join a discussion with others searching for those answers. (see newsletter for details to sign up)

If we go back to the beginning of the plastic phenomenon, we find in 1869, the first synthetic polymer, "celluloid" was invented. It was the result of a New York firm offering a \$10,000 prize for someone to come up with a substitute for the use of the ivory from elephant tusks to make billiard balls for the then fastgrowing sport. It seemed at that time, the invention was good for people as well as elephants. The first fully synthetic plastic, meaning "it contained no molecules found in nature," came about in 1907. In a search for an electric insulator, a product was discovered that was also "durable, heat resistant, and, unlike celluloid, ideally suited for mechanical mass production." It was marketed as "the material of a thousand uses."

Out of necessity during World War II, plastic production increased by 300% and continued to increase after the war ended. The possibilities of plastics gave some observers "an almost utopian vision of a future with abundant material wealth thanks to an inexpensive, safe, sanitary substance that could be shaped by humans



plastic's reputation fell because people became more aware of product waste. Most plastic products are disposable and because plastic lasts virtually forever in the environment, the waste was piling up in the environment. Therefore, it was a targeted focus of activists. It was at this time that recycling was offered as a solution by the plastic industries. [That is another story!] The webpage sciencehistory.org was used for information for the above material.

environmental

enlightenment,

Plastic is a remarkably useful material, but too much plastic is termed as "single use" and very little of it gets recycled. Only 9% of the plastic ever created has been recycled (Nat'l Geographic, Dec 18, 2018). If we continue on the path we are on, the United Nations estimates that by 2050, there will be more plastic than fish by weight in the ocean. Identifying and eliminating these single-use, low-value plastics is the first step to ending plastic pollution according to the website storyofplastic.org. #breakfreefromplastic is an organization that is building momentum to solve the plastic pollution problem. (Visit breakfreefromplastic.org). Their vision is... We believe in a world where the land, sky, oceans, and water is home to an abundance of life, not an abundance of plastic, and where the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat is free of toxic by-products of plastic pollution.

Please check out the websites above for details on how you can make a difference. Please put watching the documentary, "The Story of Plastic" on your calendar for January. We can't be overwhelmed by this tremendous problem; every and any action that you take is a step in the right direction. The Earth needs you!

– Don Miller



Photos by Dan Barron



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

It's time once again for the Northwest Illinois Audubon Society to participate in the annual Christmas Bird Count. This will be the 45th time that our chapter has taken part in this endeavor to take one-day snapshots of types of bird species and numbers of each in approximately 2500 count circles throughout the Western Hemisphere. Our local count day is planned for December 19, 2020.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will cause this year's CBC to be carried out with safety measures in place. All state and local guidelines must be adhered to. The typical pre-count breakfast, mid-day lunch and post-count pizza will not take place. Field counters will only be allowed to be with other "in-house" family members while doing the count. The local compiler will assign territories to certain individuals and family units. The pandemic should not affect participating in the CBC as a feeder counter as long as you stay in your house with only other family members. To be a feeder counter you must be within our official count circle which extends seven and one-half miles out from its center in Read Park in Freeport. The information below tells about being a feeder counter and includes a form to fill in with your observations.

Anyone who wishes to be a feeder counter, or has questions about this year's Christmas Bird Count, should call the local compiler, Richard Benning at 815-865-5279.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT FEEDER COUNT PARTICIPATION

Participating in the CBC as a feeder counter can be a rewarding way to be a citizen scientist. Your observations will be included with our local data. You must be sure that your feeders are in our official count circle which is described above. If you are not sure that you meet this requirement call Richard Benning at the number listed above. You must do your counting on the day of our local count, December 19th.

It is asked that you spend at least a cumulative (not necessarily all at once) two hours doing your feeder observations on the day of the count. You don't have to be glued to the window watching every bird for every minute. Just check your feeder often during the hours you are counting. Then complete the form included here and mail it as indicated. Each species that you observe should include the largest number of that species seen at any one time. For example, if you see eight juncos at 8:30 a.m. and eleven juncos at 9:45 a.m. the number you should record is eleven because that is the largest number of juncos seen at any one time.

Name:		
Phone:		
Address:		
Email:		
Start Time:	End Time:	

Mourning dove	American Tree Sparrow
Red-headed Woodpecker	Song Sparrow
Red-bellied Woodpecker	White-throated Sparrow
Downy Woodpecker	White-crowned Sparrow
Hairy Woodpecker	Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Flicker	Northern Cardinal
Blue Jay	Purple Finch
American Crow	House Finch
Black-capped Chickadee	Pine Siskin
Tufted Titmouse	American Goldfinch
Red-breasted Nuthatch	House Sparrow
White-breasted Nuthatch	(other)
Brown Creeper	(other)
European Starling	(other)
(other)	(other)
(other)	(other)
(other)	(other)

Please mail form to: RICHARD BENNING, P.O. BOX 11, DAVIS, IL 61019 <u>NO LATER</u> THAN December 23rd. THANKS!

MUST BE DONE ON DECEMBER 19TH

or give a GIFT membership? Two types of membership are available:		
1. Northwest Illinois Audubon Society and Nation includes this local newsletter, local mailings and the	-	
All renewals for national memberships need to use the	National Membership \$20 e national membership form.	
2. Northwest Illinois Audubon Society Local only includes this newsletter and other mailings from our l	-	
	Local Only \$15	
Name of new member or gift recipient		
PhoneEmail		
Address		
City State _	Zip Code	
If this is a gift membership, please indicate the name membership:		
Name		

Would you like to join Audubon as a NEW Member

Make check payable to **NORTHWEST ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY** and mail to: Treasurer, Northwest Illinois Audubon Society, P.O. Box 771, Freeport, IL 61032

THANK YOU!

Fall seed collecting at both Elkhorn Creek and Silver Creek Biodiversity Preserves: Kara Gallup, Anne Straight, Bernard and Deb Lischwe, Mary Blackmore, Judy and Harlan Corrie, Nancy Ocken, Paul Brown, Molly Doolittle, Don Miller, Laura Dufford, Pam Richards, Merry Blake, Tim and Teresa Smith, Maria Gilsillan, Bob Curtis, Anita Nienhuis and Kayse Rushford.

Lynn Feaver for mowing firebreaks at our Elkhorn Creek preserve.

Tim Smith for providing assistance with a flat tire on our mower and for winterizing the mower.

Shey Lowman for creating the activity calendar every two months for our website. Mary Blackmore for organizing our summer and fall campfires and providing the s'mores packets.



Thank you to the following individuals for their recent donation to Northwest Illinois Audubon: Darrell Windle, Mary and Ernie Johnson, Brenda Calvert, Mary Blackmore, Bob Remmer, John Day

Preserves fall stewardship volunteers through November 4: Don Miller, Nancy Ocken, Pam Richards, Kara Gallup, Merry Blake, Bernard Lischwe, Judy Corrie, Mary Blackmore, Maria Gilsillan, Bob Curtis, Molly Doolittle, Paul Brown, Tim Smith, Keri Rainsberger, and Anita Nienhuis.

BOARD MEMBERS

President | Gary GordonVice-President | Linda BlackSecretary | Pam RichardsTreasurer | Tim Smith

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Conservation | Laura Dufford Programs | Don Miller Education | Richard Benning Publicity | Deborah Lischwe Membership | Paul Brown Field Trips | Chris Kruger

Sustainable Agriculture Richard Benning, Mary Blackmore, Laura Dufford and Heidi Thorp

Newsletter Editor | Dan Barron 1706 Johnson Street | La Crosse WI, 54601 815-541-3261 | dan@beewise.us

nwilaudubon@gmail.com

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Norma Thruman – Freeport Sharon Butts – Freeport Patricia Weigel – Freeport Matt Hamilton – Freeport Mary Weller – Mount Morris Lydia Root – Savanna Joan Walsh – Cedarville

Northwest Illinois Audubon Society

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ADDRESSES/EMAILS OF YOUR LEGISLATORS

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When using the state switchboard simply ask to be connected to the legislators office. When using the capitol switchboard follow the series of prompts.

FEDERAL

Senator Richard Durbin

Kluczynski Building 38th Floor 230 S. Dearborn, Chicago, IL 60604 www.durbin.senate.gov/contact/

Senator Tammy Duckworth

230 S Dearborn Suite 3900, Chicago, IL 60604 312-886-3506 | www.duckworth.senate.gov

16th District Rep. Adam Kinzinger

628 Columbus Street, Suite 507, Ottawa, IL 61350 www.kinzinger.house.gov

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2401 4th Ave., Rock Island IL 61201 http://bustos.house.gov/contact

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45th District Sen. Brian Stewart

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