



## Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge



# The Pelican Scoop

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### Welcome New Members

John Cochran  
Richard Cox

### Renewing Members

Bill and Joan Scott

## Message From The President

Welcome to 2014! It is amazing to me how fast the years seem to fly by. One common thing, birders do at the beginning of each year, is to start a new bird list. For those that don't know, that means keeping a yearly list of all the different species of birds you seen each year and the dates you saw them. I have started keeping a yearly list of all the birds Dennis and I see, along with our life list. (The list of all the species of birds we have seen through our birding years.) I am finding it really interesting to be able to compare dates from year to year, as to when that specie first appeared in the Spring, or what time it migrated in the Fall. It is amazing to observe how the time clocks in their little bodies work, and they

come back year after year on almost the exact same date. Winter is always an exciting time to get out and see the birds that have braved the extreme cold and snowy conditions in our area. We have a Carolina Wren that has overwintered at our house for the second year now. He has been here since Fall and it is always a joy to look for him everyday to see if he is still here and surviving the cold. On last week's Bald Eagle viewing trip we encountered a Wilson's Snipe at Lock and Dam 13. It was so much fun to watch that bird, so dedicated to probing the mud he found near one little open spot of water for whatever food sources he could find. It was hard to get a good photo of him because he never stood still, constantly searching the mud for food. Each birding van tour and



Connie Zink - Savanna, IL.

Bald Eagle viewing trip we do is new and different. You never know what you might see when you are really looking. If you have cabin fever this winter please join us on one of our tours. Spending some time with nature and the wonders that surround us really will help to get through the long days of winter. Soon those long winter days will turn into Spring and new opportunities to add to your birding list! Happy Birding!



Cackling Goose by Anne Straight

## Anne's Birding Corner

The Cackling Goose was formerly considered a subspecies of Canada Goose. It is smaller than a typical Canada Goose with a rounder head, stubbier bill, and shorter neck, and is about Mallard-sized. There are four subspecies of Cackling Goose, Richardson's, Aleutian, Cackling, and the Taverner's.

The "Richardson's" is the subspecies we typically see in

northern Illinois during migration. Their call is higher pitched than the Canada. The "Richardson's" Cackling Geese breed in the Canada's Arctic and winter from the southern Great Plains to the western Gulf Coast region. They are rare to casual in the East. They graze on a variety of plants, grains, and berries.



Anne Straight - Forreston, IL.

## *Backwater Birding with Bob*



Bob Walton - Zwingle, Ia,

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

**The best foods to offer birds in colder weather have a higher fat or oil content which will provide abundant energy for winter survival such as: Black oil sunflower seed, hulled peanuts, Niger seed, suet mixes with seeds or fruit, peanut butter and white millet seed.**

With the arrival of January, winter has certainly established an icy grip (actually more like a stranglehold) on the backwaters and main channel of the Mississippi River. The recent -20° F temperatures have sent most birdwatchers into hibernation mode, with their bird watching confined to spying on backyard bird feeders through frosty windows or they are into migration mode and have followed our fair weather birds to a warmer climate for the winter. In spite of the frigid weather, a January birding adventure can be quite rewarding in terms of viewing spectacular birds and crystal-coated landscapes normally found only on Christmas cards. The keys to finding birds in January are finding food sources and areas of open water, which are mostly below lock and dams. Constant turbulence from the dam's rollers keeps the water open for several hundred yards downstream. Oxygen deprived Gizzard Shad concentrate in the open water, creating a veritable smorgasbord for Bald Eagles that accumulate in large numbers to take advantage of the easy food supply. On a recent trip to L&D 12 at Belle-

vue there were over 50 Bald Eagles putting on a show as they fed in the open water and even in the lock chamber, a mere 30 foot from the parking lot. It was particularly encouraging to observe that the majority were dark colored first year birds and mottled 2-4 year old birds, as this indicates that they are reproducing in good numbers. Fifty eagles feeding and fighting for possession of fish is an exciting site to see but it pales in comparison to L&D 13, near Fulton, which currently holds over 800 birds, along with a White Pelican, several Double-crested Cormorants, and a Thayer's Gull. January is a great time to strap on some snowshoes or cross country skis and head to the floodplain forests--my favorite destination is Pleasant Creek Unit. This unit features a 5 mile trail that winds through a forest with many oak and hickory trees. These trees provide an excellent winter food source for a wide variety of wildlife. It is common to encounter Pileated and Red-headed Woodpeckers, and two of my favorite little winter birds—Brown Creepers and Winter Wrens. Lesser traveled, hard-

surfaced roads can also offer excellent birding at this time of year. Following a snowstorm, the windswept shoulders are often teeming with hundreds of Horned Larks, Lapland Longspurs, and Snow Buntings. My favorite section for viewing these birds is County Road D61 from Highway 61 at Otter Creek to Bellevue, Iowa. Mid-January is a good time to survey tall grass prairie areas and newly established CRP fields for Short-eared Owls. Dusk and dawn are the best times to observe these ground roosting birds as they search for mice in the grasslands with a low, swallow-like flight. Watch carefully and scan nearby tall trees and you may even see a Golden Eagle! A search of small stands of conifers may reveal other wintertime visitors including Long-eared Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls. I encourage everyone to bundle up, grab your binoculars and head to one of our many public, natural areas. You will enjoy the solitude and the artistry of the Midwest's winter landscapes, and you may just discover that bird of a lifetime. Good luck and have a Happy Birding New Year!

## *Jr. Stewards Chatter*

On Saturday December 7, six members of the Jr. Stewards and their parents participated in the annual Jr. Steward Christmas bird count. With the help of Stewards of the Upper Mississippi the junior birders saw more than thirteen hundred birds. They saw hundreds of Bald Eagles, ducks, gulls, chickadees, a hawk, a Barred owl, and other types of birds. Members also received a field guide titled "

Dragonflies and Damselflies of the East".



Jacob McLuckie  
5th grade Savanna,  
IL

## Flash Point - "Keeping Your Distance"



Connie Inskeep - Moline, IL.

It is our nature to try and get as close as possible to a subject to get a good shot. This is a very bad idea for birds of prey and Bald Eagles because they do spook easily and will expend needless energy to get away. They must conserve their energy in the cold to hunt for food for their survival. When a bird of prey is perched, they are conserving their energy to stay warm. If we approach them too closely, they will take flight and expend their energy needlessly.

There are places you can go where the action is right in front of you. For Bald Eagle photography, there is no better place than a Lock and Dam where the water is open all winter. Two particularly exceptional places are Lock and Dam #14 near LeClaire, IA and Lock and Dam 13 near Fulton, IL. Lock 14 has a long boardwalk that runs along the river and the Bald Eagles will fish right in front of you. They fly from the Dam to the trees surrounding the parking lot which gives you lots of photo opportunities without disturbing the birds at all. The backdrop is lovely and you don't need a large zoom to get awesome shots. Lock 13 has an observation deck that gives you an excellent view of the eagle's activities over the river.

You do not need expensive photography equipment to get a good picture. There are point-and-shoot cameras on the market now that have exceptional zoom capabilities and large file formats. There are a few trade-offs though when using high zoom. You will want to keep your camera as steady as possible to avoid camera shake from pressing the shutter. You can use a tripod or monopod to help with this problem. If you don't have that, lean against something sturdy like a tree or even your car door. Keep your elbows close to your body to keep from shaking the camera when pressing the shutter.

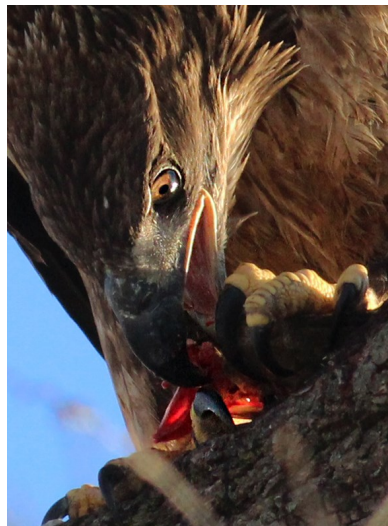
I do not have a top of the line camera but some shots I get will rival those that do. I do have one fairly expensive lens that I use for bird photography. It is a 100-400mm F4.5 to 5.6 lens. It costs around \$1200. Is it top of the line? No. Does it result in good pictures? Yes.

The end product is that you can get superior shots with a large format camera with zoom capabilities and not be right upon your subject. Here is one example. This was shot full out at 400mm. Original file size is 72 x 48 inches (wow) at only 72 dpi. This was taken from the car so the bird was not disturbed at all and could go about its business of eating its well-deserved meal.

Now, when you factor in the post processing (crop), you get a picture that will match any other high end zoom lens.

In closing, when you are out photographing birds of prey in the winter, please consider their comfort and needs and not get too close.

Until next time, happy snapping!



## *“Lost Mound Disabled Deer Hunt” by Ed Britton*

Hail, drenching rains and howling winds may have dampened the spirits but not the enthusiasm of 35 hunters and their assistants that participated in the special deer hunt for sportsmen with disabilities held November 16/17 at the Lost Mound Unit of Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge. Field surveys showed the deer population was high and the rutting season was at its peak. Quadriplegics, paraplegics, amputees, and other physically challenged hunters harvested 26 deer that included 18 does and 8 bucks. The largest buck, an atypical 12 pointer with a field dressed weight of 171 pounds, was taken by Floyd Kempfer from Southern Illinois. This special event has gained national attention and provides a boost to the local economy with hunters traveling from 10 states: Louisiana, Ohio, Tennessee, Iowa, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Georgia, Minnesota and Illinois. Wildlife Refuge Manager Ed Britton stated “Success is attributed to the high quality hunting experience and to partnerships. The Southern Illinois based “Seasons of Hope” non-profit organization has provided many disabled hunters the opportunity to participate at Lost Mound.” An intriguing part of the hunt is the personal stories of the hunters. Terry, a quadriplegic from Ohio, was a college student attending a fraternity party when two party-goers got into an argument; one was kicked out and returned to conduct a drive-by shooting into the frat house injuring several students and paralyzing Terry. He maneuvers his specially mounted gun on target by manipulating a controller box with his chin. When a deer is in the crosshairs, he blows through a tube to engage an electronic trigger to fire the shotgun. For a second year, hunters were provided a free box of copper shotgun slugs prior to the hunt and were encouraged to use this non-lead ammunition. This voluntary program was initiated to reduce the potential for lead poisoning in bald eagles that scavenge on the offal (gut piles) left in the field. The copper ammunition was provided under partnership by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, American Bird Conservancy and Saving Our Avian Resources. Also for a second year, hunters that shot deer with lead slugs were required to collect and turn in the offal to researchers. Last year, offal from deer shot with lead were x-rayed to reveal that 39% contained lead ranging between 1-107 fragments per offal specimen. Small amounts of lead may be deadly when ingested by bald eagles. Hundreds of bald eagles winter at Lost Mound and were routinely observed circling the hunt area. Lost Mound Site Manager Alan Anderson was excited about the continued success of this program and stated “It is a unique hunting experience by a special group of sportsmen. Their daily challenges of life were overshadowed by the enthusiasm and determination for deer hunting. They provided both inspiration and encouragement to the staff and volunteers that administered the hunt.”



Terry Greenwood



Floyd Kempfer

*“Sightings Around the Refuge”*



Female Mallard by Michael Fitzgerald



Bald Eagle by Michael Fitzgerald



Blue Jay by Connie Zink



Tundra Swans by Connie and Wade Inskeep



Wilson's Snipe by Dennis Zink

## Bald Eagle Days January 4th 2014



Immature Bald Eagle at Lock and Dam 13



Immature Bald Eagle at Lock and Dam 13



Ed Britton Family with Was'aka



Katie Rymer and Was'aka from The National Eagle Center



The National Eagle Center Program

**Date For Next Years 31st Bald Eagle Days is Jan. 10th 2015**

## Schedule of Events



Bald Eagle Days at Clinton Community College



Jr. Stewards Project "Circle of Life"

- Friday, January 17th Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00am - 1:30pm
- Saturday, January 18th "Bald Eagle Viewing Tour" 1:00pm - 4:00 pm (Destination Subject to Change)
- Sunday, January 19th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00pm – 5:00pm
- Saturday, January 25th "Bald Eagle Viewing Tour" 1:00pm - 4:00 pm (Destination Subject to Change)
- Friday, February 7th "Bald Eagle Viewing Tour" 9:00am - 12:00 pm (Destination Subject to Change)
- Saturday, February 8th "Monthly Bird Walk" 9:00am - 11:00am ( Meet at Sloane Marsh)
- Saturday, February 8th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00pm – 5:00pm
- Sunday, February 16th "Bald Eagle Viewing Tour" 2:00pm - 5:00 pm (Destination Subject to Change)
- Friday, February 21st "Bald Eagle Viewing Tour" 9:00am - 12:00 pm (Destination Subject to Change)
- Friday, February 21st Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 12:00pm - 2:30pm (Note time Change)
- Saturday, March 8th "Monthly Bird Walk" 9:00am - 11:00am ( Meet at Sloane Marsh)
- Saturday, March 8th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00pm – 5:00pm
- Sunday, March 16th "Lost Mound Birding Van Tour" 1:00pm – 5:00pm
- Friday, March 21st Monthly Stewards Potluck Meeting 11:00am - 1:30pm
- Saturday, March 22nd - "Curing Cabin Fever V".

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

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



### Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

815-273-2732

Primary Business Address [stewardsumrr@gmail.com](mailto:stewardsumrr@gmail.com)



Like us on Facebook

Check out our Website:  
[www.stewardsumrr.org](http://www.stewardsumrr.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.stewardsumrr.org](http://www.stewardsumrr.org)



Make a difference and Join today.



*Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge  
Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge  
Website - [stewardsumrr.org](http://stewardsumrr.org)*



*Junior Stewards Program 2014*



The US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Stewards of the Upper Mississippi River Refuge are offering an exciting program called Jr. Stewards for youth ages 9 - 14+. You are invited to join us for a year of exciting wildlife discovery. We will learn about and explore the wonders of the Upper Mississippi River NWFR.

Enrollment is free and limited to 16 youth and it is first come first serve. Please fill out the registration form and send it to 7071 Riverview Rd, Thomson, IL 61285. Or Email to [stewardsumrr@gmail.com](mailto:stewardsumrr@gmail.com). We will begin March 1st. Registrations must be received by February 15<sup>th</sup>.

**Dates:** The first Saturday of each month, beginning March 1<sup>st</sup>, year round. **Time:** 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Topics may change.

**Location:** Ingersoll Wetlands Learning Center, 7071 Riverview Rd, Thomson, IL 61285 (815-273-2732)

**Program:**

March 1st: Winter Survival Animal Style	August 2nd: Mosquito Hawks. Grab a net and let's discover the difference between dragonflies and damselflies.
April 5th: Discovering Art in Nature	September 6th: Kids Fishing Day at Frog Pond.
May 4th: Discover Life Down Under: Denny Weis, Iowa DNR Fisheries Biologist will take us on a watery adventure. Turtles, Salamanders, Fish oh my...	October 4th: Off Refuge exploration. We will travel to Swiss Valley Nature Center near Dubuque, IA.
June 7th: What's in your water? Dip nets + Boots+ Microscopes = macro invertebrates.	November 1st: Migration Sensation - spend the morning with expert birders and learn to identify various species of ducks as they migrate south.
July 13th: (All Day) Trip to Neal Smith NWR, Prairie City, Iowa.	December 6th - Christmas Bird Count