



the
almanac

Newsletter of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society, Inc.

April 2012

Aldo Leopold Audubon Society
presents

DESIGN A BIRD-FRIENDLY YARD

**Wednesday,
April 18
7 p.m.**

**Craig Thompson,
speaker**

Lincoln Center
1519 Water Street, Stevens Point

Upcoming Events

Apr 18	ALAS program
Apr 19	BCW program
Apr 21	ALAS field trip
May 5	ALAS field trip
May 12	ALAS field trip

<i>Designing a Bird-friendly Yard</i>
<i>Midwestern Aquatic Plants</i>
<i>Sunrise on the Buena Vista</i>
<i>International Migratory Bird Day</i>
<i>What's Blooming at Powers Bluff</i>

www.aldoleopoldaudubon.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Botanical Club of Wisconsin
Adaptations of Midwestern Aquatic Plants
Thursday April 19, 7:30 pm

Presented by Paul Skawinski, Author-*Aquatic Plants of the Upper Midwest*, Vice President of the Botanical Club of Wisconsin, UWSP CNR Graduate Student UWSP-TNR 170. The event is free and open to the public!



Prairie Chicken Festival
April 13-15
Events too numerous to mention!
Go to prairiechickenfestival.org or
call 715.343.6215 for information

ALAS Field Trip
Sunrise on the Buena Vista
Saturday, April 21, 5:00 am



Our annual trip to the grasslands south of Plover is a time to reconnect with the sights and sounds of spring. The dawn chorus, ritualistic dances, and aerial ballets of avian courtship are available in front row seats at one of nature's finest shows.

In the pre-dawn darkness we'll listen to the cackling laughter and low booming of prairie chickens and the bugling clamour of Sandhill cranes. As daylight increases, song sparrows tune up, western meadowlarks add bubbling calls, and red-winged blackbirds begin their raucous calling.

We may see short-eared owls hunting in moth-like flight just before sunrise, or witness the broken-wing act of the killdeer, calling plaintively near her nest. The lispy buzz of the savannah sparrow, the eerie winnowing of snipe aloft, the soft warble of an eastern bluebird swell the chorus; the magic grows.

Cars will leave promptly at 5 am from the Plover Municipal Center. Dress warmly for early morning chill, bring a thermos, snack, binocs, etc. First stop is a prairie chicken lec where we will observe from our cars. There will be other stops and brief walks to look and listen for additional grassland species. Join us as we welcome spring and celebrate the earth. For more information contact Gerry Janz at 715-341-6384.

DESIGNING A BIRD-FRIENDLY YARD



Many of Wisconsin's most beloved migratory birds are in decline due to habitat loss. Add to that, millions of these birds burn their fat reserves every spring by flying thousands of miles from their wintering grounds in Central and South America to Wisconsin. Many do not survive the grueling journey. "Birdscaping" your backyard habitat can provide real conservation benefits to these tiny, long-distance avian sojourners.

Craig Thompson will provide practical landscaping tips to help make your yard an oasis for migratory birds at the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society monthly presentation, "Designing A Bird-Friendly Yard: Lending Tweety A Helping Hand" at 7:00 PM on Wednesday, April 18, 2012 in the Lincoln Center at 1519 Water Street in Stevens Point. Topics will include landscape design, use of native plant materials and yard maintenance considerations. The La Crosse resident and conservationist will also show what he has planted in his own backyard buffet of flowers, bushes, and trees to satisfy these hungry birds and why a well-planted backyard habitat can make a difference to the birds' survival.

Craig is a District Land Program Manager with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and coordinates the department's international bird conservation program. He has also been featured in Wisconsin Public Television's "In Wisconsin" special titled, "Our Birds." He has lead conservation birding trips to Latin America for the past 20 years, but has yet to see a Rufous-vented Ground Cuckoo.

For "Tweets" sake, please come. Bring your green thumb!

ALAS programs are free and open to the public and families are encouraged to attend.

*Rufous-vented ground
cuckoo*



Continued from page 2



ALAS Field Trip
International Migratory Bird Day
Saturday, May 5, 8:00 am

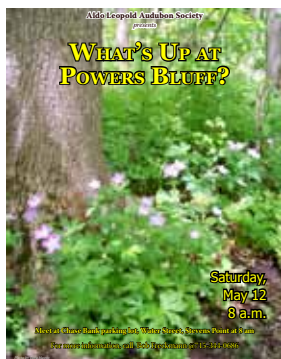
One of the major requirements of the Bird City Wisconsin recognition is involvement in International Migratory Bird Day. This year our celebration will be on May 5 at Iverson Park in the Parking Lot right along Hwy. 66 (old Hwy 10) near the Plover River. Starting time is 8 a.m. and we will observe birds until 10 a.m.

The day will start with a brief discussion about how this day is being celebrated throughout the Americas and will then break up into small groups led by birding experts from ALAS. Binoculars will be provided by those who lack them and guides will have spotting scopes available for distant views of birds.

This outstanding birding adventure is specially designed for families with children 10 years and older.

At 10:00 a.m., in the open air Pavilion just as you enter Iverson from Hwy. 66, Andrew Halverson, Mayor of Stevens Point, will make a short presentation related to both Bird City Wisconsin and Arbor Day Foundation. That will be followed by an Arbor Day celebration involving the planting of several dozen trees.

The current raffle ticket sales by ALAS are helping support the purchase of some of these trees. Participants are welcome to stay at this event as well. Planting will continue until all trees are planted—for a period of a couple of hours.



ALAS Field Trip
What's Blooming at Powers Bluff
Saturday, May 12 8:00 am

Powers Bluff is a prominent high hill about two miles southwest of Arpin in Wood County. Part of the bluff is in a county park, and about 80 acres of the park have been designated as a State Natural Area. The Natural Area includes one of the best examples of a sugar maple woods free of alien invasive species left in Wisconsin. The understory flora in May is spectacular. It is an

almost unbroken carpet of trilliums, spring beauty, trout lilies, bellworts, Dutchman's breeches, and many other species.

For our field trip to Powers Bluff on Saturday, May 12, meet in the public parking lot on the east side of the Wisconsin River north of the Clark Street bridge and the Chase Bank at 8:00 AM to car pool, or meet the group at the parking lot near the shelter building at Powers Bluff at about 8:45. Bluff Drive, the road to the Park, is one mile south of county highway N, and runs between county highways E and T. We expect to complete the field trip at Powers Bluff around noon.

REPORT OF THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

2012-2014

The Nominating Committee* for the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society presents the following slate of Officers and members of the Board of Directors for 2012-2014. Officers, serving two year terms, and Directors, serving one year terms, will be elected by the members present at our Annual Meeting which will take place during our regular public meeting on May 16.

Officers:

President: Maureen Brocken
Vice President: Gerry Janz
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Treasurer: Larry Graham

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Eric Anderson	Lauren Ebbecke
Ned Grossnickle	Kent Hall
Sue Hall	Alan Haney
Jean Klein	Carol Kropidlowski
Debbie Manthey	Pat Perzynski
Joe Schultz	Jeremy Solin

Committee Chairs are appointed by the President, approved by the Board of Directors, and have full voting rights.

*Anne Graham, Alan Haney, Sue Hall

PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS

Larry Graham

March is practically gone as I start this penultimate ramble. April Fool's Day is this weekend already. The Spring Equinox, the advent of daylight savings time and a streak of unprecedented warm weather have all come together to make this a very atypical March. What little snow we had this past winter melted rapidly with very little of the usual flooding of our lower wild pasture. Because we had a very warm stretch without low nighttime temperatures the maple tree buds popped without giving us a good sap flow; maple syrup will definitely be a luxury this year. Daylight savings time and the warm weather conspired to keep us outside more than usual in March. It's been dry enough that we were able to get half of the garden tilled and some early planting done. Anne has started plants under lights and they are really looking good. Ten days ago I was putting the tractor in the shed as the sun was going down, and I noticed that the photovoltaic trackers were pointing due west as they should at the beginning of spring.

Starting with that early warm stretch we have enjoyed a constant amphibian chorus: wood frogs, spring peepers, chorus frogs, American toads and now leopard frogs in the scrapes we excavated a year ago. The pools are loaded with green frog tadpoles, and we expect that species to start calling soon. The one to the south of the house has held water all year, and these amphibians have definitely taken advantage of this new habitat. A number of water loving birds have also used the area as a stopover site: Sandhill cranes, green-winged teals, hooded mergansers, buffleheads, mallards, Canada geese, wood ducks, blue-winged teals, and today, April Fool's Day, a trumpeter swan!! (confirmed by Gerry Janz). Anne has the spotting scope set up and is keeping track. A red fox visited last week, and we spied a muskrat today- wonder if it will decide to stay. It will be interesting to see what other critters take advantage of these scrapes as the vegetation develops.

We took advantage of the weather to remove old fencing on our property. Much of the wire was buried in the ground and tangled with vegetation. I counted at least four generations of barbed wire. We also encountered a lot of what I call "turkey" wire. This is a rectangular mesh. I could not figure out why the earlier owners had used this to fence cattle. As it turns out, the "turkey" wire was used during WWII nearly 70 years ago when barbed wire was hard to get. It was tough to clean up, but all the old fencing around the fields is now scrap metal in a dumpster at the transfer station.

It will be interesting to see what April will be like during this unusual year.

I am concerned that it will be a dry summer; we probably have a significant moisture deficit already. Recall that ALAS is raising funds to help the city of Stevens Point replace trees blown down during those storms last summer. We seem to be having good support for this effort with both raffle ticket sales and outright donations to the cause. Be sure you get your raffle tickets before the May drawing to help us with this worthy cause. It will be important for us to insure that the trees planted this spring are adequately watered throughout what will probably be a dry summer.

The April program on bird friendly yards should be very interesting. Craig Thompson is a great speaker and has some good suggestions for all of us. You may have seen him on *In Wisconsin* on Public Television. Speaking of good programs, the ALAS board of directors and committee chairs will devote significant time at the May Board Meeting to brainstorming program ideas for our 2012-13 season. If you have any program suggestions, please forward them to me at larrygraham@hughes.net.

CITY OF STEVENS POINT AND VILLAGE OF PLOVER RECEIVE BIRD CITY WISCONSIN RECOGNITION

by Kent Hall

This year, ALAS members helped prepare the successful Bird City Wisconsin Applications for both the City of Stevens Point and the Village of Plover.

For Stevens Point, it was a successful renewal from a year ago and they also received a special "High Flyer" Award, one of only five of 50 recognized bird cities in Wisconsin to do so. The selection committee was especially impressed with 10 different conservation accomplishment (up from 8 a year ago) for the renewal application and 6 additional conservation measures for the High Flyer Award.

Chief among these High Flyer Award measures cited by the selection committee were: 1) Green Circle Birding Trail with accompanying bird check list, 2) erection of Chimney Swift Towers, and 3) award winning bluebird trail.

The Village of Plover met the 7 criteria necessary to be awarded the Basic Bird City Wisconsin Award. Cited in the receipt of their award were: 1) Extensive Christmas Bird Count Data, 2) Outstanding use of the Village website to highlight their Bird City application and, 3) acquisition for land to preserve the Little Plover River.

THE SKY SAYS “CRANES”

Gerry Janz

Turning onto Lake Road the eastern sky began to brighten and night slipped away into the dawn. A friend and I had been out for several hours attempting to see (or rather hear) how many owls were out and about on what had turned out to be a rather balmy and breezy spring night. Despite the persistent wind things had gone pretty well. Now as the sun broke over the horizon we stopped, and taking a short walk, heard with the rising sun, spring arriving on the Buena Vista.

The grassland was charged with sound. Geese at first, then; "Wait... Sandhill?" "Pretty far out...I don't know...maybe". "THERE, Prairie Chickens!" Off to the west the low jug-band sound of dancing Prairie Chickens rolled across winter's bent and drying meadow grass. A Western Meadowlark sang from an old mullein top and a pair of Eastern's counter sang beneath the delicate notes of a Horned Lark. A pair of American Kestrels perched alongside a nearby nest box, Northern Harriers flashed and banked over the grasslands, and everywhere Red-winged Blackbirds laid claim to new-found territories with song. One of those mornings, one of those magic Buena Vista sunrises.

"Welcome", I heard my friend say, "Welcome back".

"What's that?", I said, still a little disoriented by the shift from the quiet pace of night-time owling to the frenetic activity now swirling across the grassland.

"Over there... Cranes".

I looked off to the South and noted a small flock of broad-winged, long-necked birds dropping into an open meadow. Putting up my binoculars more flocks materialized above, behind and below them. The Cranes had returned, were returning right here, right now. Yesterday, other than a great contingent of Red-winged Blackbirds, things on the Buena Vista were pretty much as they had been all winter. The Sandhills I was watching now had indeed just arrived- had ridden the south wind that had caused us so many problems owling during the night and were now home.

As the sun continued to rise, the air was filled with a call absent from the grasslands since last November. Here was Leopold's "baying of some sweet throated hound...the clamor of a resounding pack, and the far clear blast of hunting horns." Flocks continued to arrive. Wings set, legs extended they appeared to be as glad to get here as we were to welcome them. Cranes

were visible in all quarters of the sky, flocks of ducks streamed over the grass and skeins of Canada Geese added to the glory of spring coming home on the wings of cranes.

I know it's still pretty early and there's much more yet to come; Bobolinks and Upland Sandpipers, Kingbirds, Orioles, and all those sparrows, but that's all for later. Today belongs to the cranes. It's time to revel in that. I have been in the grasslands on all kinds of days but have never before been present when the sun rose, the sky opened up, and the morning said "Cranes".



Sandhill Crane

photo by Gerry Janz

DELIGHTFUL BIRDS I HAVE KNOWN

Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*)

Alan Haney

There are 37 species of true flycatchers found in North America, and many are drab of plumage and not easily distinguished. The Eastern Phoebe, however, is a common bird in central Wisconsin that is easily recognized, and perhaps a good introduction to the Tyrant Flycatchers (Family: Tyrannidae). It is the earliest flycatcher to return in the spring, usually arriving back on our area between middle March to early April. Migration of Eastern Phoebes, however, is tied to emergence of insects, so unusually warm springs will bring them back sooner. They seem to prefer to hang around homes and buildings, more often than not nesting on artificial platforms under cover. They prefer some woody cover such as open woodland or scattered trees, such as commonly found in yards. One of the most noticeable traits is a tendency to bob their tails when perched. Their “emphatic and insistent” fee-bee, fee-bee, fee-bee, and nearly constant tail-bobbing render them quite conspicuous.



Eastern Phoebe

Adult Eastern Phoebes have dusky-brown back and wings, with a darker gray head, and white throat and belly. Juveniles are similar, but with yellowish bellies and less conspicuous light-colored throats. No similar flycatcher is as likely to be seen around buildings or with the persistent tail-bob behavior.

Phoebe nests can be a nuisance. Historically, they nested primarily on cliffs, constructing nests of mud and plant fibers, lined with moss, feathers, and grass. There is nothing neat about their house-keeping, and much gets dropped in the vicinity of their nest, along with fecal material. If it is a lamp or shelf on your back porch or deck that they have chosen for their nest, you will notice their presence immediately.

Phoebes will often use the same nest for a second brood, or even in successive years if nesting has not been disturbed. They usually pair up and begin nest-building soon after arrival, and first of 2-6 eggs are often laid by early May. A second brood is common, and eggs are usually laid

by mid-June. Nests are often parasitized by Brown-headed Cowbirds, and phoebes sometimes will build second layer of their nest over their clutch in which a cowbird has deposited her egg. The phoebe will then begin a new clutch.

Eastern Phoebes catch insects on the wing, often swooping low over open water. They prefer habitats near water, but the availability of nest sites is more critical to their choice of location. Phoebes migrate to southern United States and Mexico for the winter, where their diets often expand to include berries, seeds, and even small fish or amphibians. In our area, they appear to be strictly insectivorous. Only the female will incubate the eggs, but both parents feed the young. After young have fledged, adults will continue to feed them for a week or two.

Although populations of Eastern Phoebe were steady or declining until the early '80s, they appear to be on the increase throughout their range, which extends from north-central Canada throughout United States east of the Rockies. They have adapted well to human development, and are expected to continue to increase with urban sprawl. While messy with their house-keeping, they help to control pesky insects. We could do worse for neighbors.



Garlic Mustard

GARLIC MUSTARD

NOW IS THE TIME TO ACT!

By Anne Graham

Garlic mustard is an extremely aggressive invasive exotic plant that has been barking at the door of Central Wisconsin for the past several years. Scientists are close to finding a “safe” biological control for this plant much like the one they released for purple loosestrife several years ago. Until such a control is available, it is extremely important that we try to keep garlic mustard from taking over natural areas so that if and when a safe biological control is found, bringing it under control will be a much easier task.

Garlic mustard is a cool-season biennial that is sometimes found along the edges of woodlands and can spread and completely take over a forest floor in only a few years. Seeds are often spread in mud transported on the tires of heavy equipment or boots from someone who walked or worked in an area infested by this plant. First year plants have rosette shaped leaves with scalloped edges and look a bit like creeping Charlie. Second year plants are more robust and produce flower stalks in April or May. Leaves give off an unmistakable pungent garlic odor when crushed. If you aren't sure what to look for, go to Google and type in “garlic mustard” for a zillion images of this plant.

If you have discovered a small population of garlic mustard in your yard or in your neighborhood, NOW is the time to act to remove those plants and contain that population. Like everything else this spring, garlic mustard is up well ahead of schedule. But it not blooming yet, so right now, the first couple weeks of April is an ideal time to pull and destroy those plants before their flowers begin to appear. Once the flowers start to form they have the potential to continue to develop and produce seed even after they have been pulled. So safely disposing them is much more difficult.

According to Elizabeth Czarapata in *Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest*, there are three methods of mechanical control: pulling, cutting, and burning. If you have a small population and get them before the flowers appear, pulling is probably the easiest method. The plants can be dried in the sun and burned or bagged and placed in the trash. After the flowers begin to form, do NOT place them in piles where they can continue to develop. They should be burned or landfilled. If you have a larger population, they can be cut very close to the ground right after flower stalk elongation, but BEFORE the flowers have opened. For larger infestations I refer you to Elizabeth Czarapata's book, or the many good references available from the Wisconsin DNR or online for more suggestions. Be sure to thoroughly

clean your boots and equipment after working in an infested area so you do not inadvertently spread this plant yourself!

I have been monitoring a small population of garlic mustard discovered about four years ago on Highway M about two miles from my home. This week I successfully pulled and burned two large bags of second year plants- every single plant I could find. So far the spread has been contained, but I will be revisiting this site for the next several years. Garlic mustard seeds are viable in the soil for seven or more years. I'm hoping the three species of root weevils being tested by researchers in Minnesota out of over 100 insect species considered will prove safe and effective, and will be available soon- before this plants takes over even more woodlands in our state.

If you are concerned about terrestrial invasive plants in Central Wisconsin, I invite you to join the Terrestrial Invasive Plant Species Committee that our board formed about a year ago. Please let me know of your interest (715-344-0968). We will be meeting soon.

BLUEBIRD TRAIL ENTERS ITS 11TH SEASON

by Kent Hall

The ALAS Bluebird Trail is entering its 11th season. A total of 66 monitors will survey a total of 1,325 boxes on 39 different routes in six different counties.

For the past two years, the ALAS Trail has produced the most bluebirds of any trail in Wisconsin and is thought to be the largest trail in North America. In our ten years of production, we have produced nearly 30,000 bluebirds and another 8,000 cavity nesting songbirds (wrens, chickadees and Tree Swallows).

Last year was the coldest spring in our ABT history and this year is the warmest. Our first complete bluebird nest was found on March 17 and 77% of our 248 nest boxes at Ft. McCoy (Monroe Co.) had nesting activity by March 29. Egg laying should start in earnest the week of April 1-7. If we get a sustained cold spell in either April or May, many nests will be abandoned. If no cold spell occurs, this could be the most successful triple nesting season in ABT history.

Routes always open up from year to year. For those who think they might be interested in joining our ABT team, please contact me at: (715) 344-8081 or kentsue@charter.net . We will arrange for you to go on one of our ABT routes to see if a long-term commitment might be possible. Or, if you are just curious, we welcome your visit to one of our routes with some of our dedicated volunteers.

"April," by Haydn S. Pearson

"There are widely divergent opinions concerning the month of April. Some speak of the fourth month in harshly critical terms; they emphasize the cold winds and pelting rains, spring's timid advances and abrupt withdrawals. I admit that April can be almost as perverse as March, and some years it is a wearisome time from the end of March to the fulfillment of May.

"But the day spring comes is a memorable one. The sun is golden in a blue sky; the breeze is gentle and from the south. Crows call from the pasture elms and a hawk circles above. Woodchucks poke slowly about in the clover patch, and pheasants stalk regally along the woods edge. There is a good fragrance from the moist earth....

"Song sparrows call cheerfully from fence posts, and woodpeckers drum on weathered telephone poles.... At wood's edge the skunk cabbage's red-and-purple spathes are lush with maturity; wake robins and trilliums are pushing through brown, winter-sodden leaves.

"Pasture brooks run full. They come tumbling and leaping from the highlands and then hurry through meadow lowlands. A man should know a brook in all seasons of the year, but there is something exhilarating about an April brook. In a rocky ravine where the water falls over ledges and drops sparkle in the bright sun, you can feel the urgency of spring.

"Brooks are often born on the uplands where springs bubble from a ledge fissure; a small trickle flows from its birthplace and starts downward among grasses and ferns. It flows through upland woods and across open pastures. Other springs join in and the trickles become a brook. Its song grows in volume as the waters drop down toward the valley. Green mosses line rocky small waterfalls, the brook splashes through a cool ravine, half in shadow from the low-circling April sun. In shallow pools, small tan and cream-colored stones move restlessly in the surging water; sheets of gray-green flow smoothly over worn rock. There is beauty in an April stream, and in the music of the water you can hear the quickening tempo of the season.

"From now until June solstice, life forces surge forward with irresistible power. Each day you can see the changes. There is soft color as buds open, misty loveliness tints the woodlands as leaves push their way out and change hardwood ridges from gray-brown to fresh, light green. Spring is only one part of the annual cycle, a natural phenomenon. but it is always much more than that to a man who has been looking forward to the time of growth and gardening and green on the meadows."

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In this issue: Bird-friendly yards
Eastern Phoebe
Call of the Crane
and more....



the almanac

The mission of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society is to foster appreciation and concern for all living things, and to protect and preserve their ecosystems.