



The Meadowlark Messenger

ChampaignCountyAudubon.org

Champaign County Audubon Society • A Chapter of the National Audubon Society

Don't Miss the Magic Stump!

Sunday, February 19, 2:00–3:30 pm, Virginia Theatre
 Free tickets: www.GrandPrairieFriends.Org/Magicstump



Years ago a farmer decided to leave a stump in a field. Little did that farmer know that that stump would serve as a winter roost for an amazing number of raptors over the years, including the state's only pair of prairie falcons. With funding from the Champaign County Audubon Society and Grand Prairie Friends producer Bob Dolgan created a documentary about the birds of prey which have perched on this isolated Coles County landing spot.

With added support from the Champaign Park District, Champaign County Forest Preserve District, Urbana Park District, Prairie Rivers Network, Land Conservation Foundation, Faith in Place, and Ecologic, the CCAS and Grand Prairie Friends invite you to be our guests at a special showing of The Magic Stump at the Virginia Theater on Sunday, February 19. The event begins at 2 pm with a Conservation Reception where attendees can nibble, chat, and trade stories with members of these local conservation community members. Snacks are provided and a cash bar will be available. The documentary will be shown at 3 pm and features not only the activity of the various raptors, but also the stories and commentary of three local birders who have observed them. Following the showing, enjoy a behind-the-scenes discussion with producer Bob Dolgan and his human cast, and ask questions about the stump, the birds, the birders, and Bob's work. After the Q&A, attendees can mingle again with members of the sponsoring conservation agencies. All the sponsoring agencies including Champaign County Audubon Society encourage you to attend this unique event and invite your friends as well. Obtain free entry tickets at the Grand Prairie Friends website: www.GrandPrairieFriends.Org/Magicstump.

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Champaign County Audubon Society

Officers

- President: Colin Dobson
- Vice President: Roger Digges
- Secretary: Jennifer Wick
- Treasurer: Todd Kinney

Members at Large

- Beth Chato
- Megan Skrip
- vacant

Committee Chairs

- Bylaws: Roger Digges
- Conservation: Zachary Sutton
- Education: (vacant)
- Field Trip: (vacant);
Beth Chato, Colin Dobson, Brody Dunn
- Finance: (vacant)
- Membership: Brock Martin
- Program: vacant
- Communications: Sara Johnson (Chair);
Shoshie Bauer, Jeff Bryant (Birdnotes
Listserv), Susan Pollock, Megan Skrip,
Sarah Stewart

Champaign County Audubon publishes *The Meadowlark Messenger* nine times per year. **Comments regarding the newsletter, or articles for submission, are welcome.**

Contact us!

P.O. Box 882, Urbana, IL 61803
ChampaignCountyAudubon.org
mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org

Get this newsletter in your inbox!



Would you like to go paperless and help our funds go further? Please visit the [Membership](#) page on our website and enter

your name and email address.

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Field Notes

Colin Dobson, CCAS President

Although for the most part it has been a warmer winter, I hope everyone has been enjoying the winter weather! Hopefully, you have seen plenty of winter species as spring is only in a couple months! If not, get out and see those White-throated Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos while you can! We will have a few field trips coming this spring so stay tuned, along with our usual bird walks!



Merlin. Photo by Jeff Bryant.

Christmas Bird Count

Over 15 participants helped during the Champaign County Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on December 17. At least 65 species were found during the day, and the best species found included Northern Saw-whet Owl, Merlin, and Eurasian Tree Sparrow!

Champaign County Audubon's first count was in 1941. Count circles are set with a 15-mile diameter to be covered. Our original circle included the Lake of the Woods Preserve. In 1978, the circle was shifted east to remove Lake of the Woods and add Homer Lake. The circle is now centered on Deers. A total of 142 species have been seen on any count since the beginning. The highest year's count was 80 species in 2008.



Northern Pintail. Photo by Jeff Bryant.

Bird of the Month

Roger Digges, CCAS Vice President

February is the month when we begin to see birds arrive in Champaign County which have spent the winter someplace warmer. Such is the case with February's bird of the month, the Turkey Vulture. Although these large soaring birds have been found in our area every month of the year, and some overwinter as close as Vermilion County to our east, birders rarely report them in our county in December or January. But as the air begins to warm, making soaring easier, snow and ice recede, and mammals become more active and prey on or become prey of other animals (or are hit by automobiles), Turkey Vultures move into our area, looking for their favorite food, carrion. Although Turkey Vultures can look like hawks or even eagles from a distance, unlike those fierce birds of prey or December's bird of the month, the Great Horned Owl, vultures are not true raptors. They soar like raptors (more or less) and eat meat like raptors but lack the razor-sharp talons and powerful beak of a raptor. They don't need them. Turkey Vultures don't kill their prey. They wait until the animal they eat has died or been killed by something or someone else. Locating a dead animal with their keen sense of smell, vultures descend on the corpse and begin to feast. While that may sound disgusting, think of turkey vultures as providing a key garbage disposal service in nature. They help reduce dead animals to pieces smaller carrion eaters can manage, and they in turn convert it to even smaller parts until insects and bacteria return to the soil what remains of the once living animal.



Turkey Vulture. Photo by Jeff Bryant.



Turkey Vulture. Photo by Jeff Bryant.

So how can you identify these early migrants? Up close, whether they're in the air, on the ground, or perched in a tree, look for a smallish red featherless head, which makes it easier for them to tear into corpses without getting their feathers soiled. From a distance, many birders can identify Turkey Vultures because of their distinctive flight. Unlike Bald Eagles, which soar with wings straight and steady, Turkey Vultures hold their wings slightly raised, forming a shallow "V" shape when seen head-on, and rock from side to side in flight. According to Cornell Lab's [All About Birds](#), these flight characteristics help Turkey Vultures maintain stability while they fly low enough to smell carrion. Also look for a two-toned wing, black on the leading edge, gray on the trailing edge, as well as a gray tail.

Where can you find Turkey Vultures? During the day, you'll see them soaring in open areas. Keep your eyes on the sky from mid-morning to late afternoon. You may spot the first Turkey Vulture of the season! They can also be found roosting in trees near open areas. Unless you have several acres of yard and provide dead animals, you cannot feed Turkey Vultures as you could Dark-eyed Juncos and chickadees.

How are Turkey Vultures doing? According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, these birds have increased 1.8% annually between 1966 and 2019. Partners in Flight estimates there are 28 million Turkey Vultures in North, Central, and South America. They're doing well.

Welcome, New Member!

Art Banister

Thank You, Renewing Members!

Jenny Applequist, Kathleen Brinkmann, Beth Chato, Nancy Dietrich, Maggie Dougherty-Roberts, Susan Farner, Steve M. Heater, Joyce Hoffman, Chris & Louise Johns, Julia Kellman, Amy Lynch, Brock Martin, Art Sievers, Megan Skrip, Judy Strange, Aerin Tedesco, Grant Thomas, Alison Williams, Ted Veselsky, Shirley Walker, Allison Williams

Thank You, Renewing Member Donors!

A special thanks to renewing members who donated above and beyond annual dues:

Miriam Bauers, T.J. Benson, Marsha Clark, Roger & Cathy Digges, Carol Elliot, Beverly & Peter Fagan, Karen Folk, Beverly Foote, Denise Green, Rich Howard, Philip Hult, Chad Hyman, Doug Jackson, Elisabeth Jenicek, Rob Kanter, Anna Moore, Kathy O'Neill, Elain & Russel Peppers, Susan Pollock, Brock Price, Norman Denzin & Katherine Ryan, Mary Jean Sattazahn, Grace Schoedel, Dawn Schultz, Marilyn Silkwood, Audrey Ishii & Charlie Smyth, David Thomas, Megan & Greg Van Horn, Joe & Phyllis Williams

Special Donation

Thank you to David and Eurora Tharp for their generous donation.

Birdnotes Listserv



Join our Birdnotes Listserv to get the latest local bird sightings in your inbox!

Visit our [Stay Connected](#) page and click the "Join Birdnotes" button.

Upcoming Events

See our latest updates at <https://www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/all-events>

CCAS Board Meeting

Monday, February 20, 6:30 pm

All CCAS members are welcome to attend our board meetings. For information, mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org.

Sunday Morning Bird Walks

*Sundays, from March 5 to May 28, 7:30–9:00 am
Anita Purves Nature Center*

Our Sunday morning bird walks resume on March 5. Gather in the parking lot just before start time and see who is visiting each week. All ages and all skill levels are welcome to join this group event.

Almost-Empty Nesters: Investigating the Post-fledging Ecology of Eastern Whip-poor-wills

Thursday, April 6, 7:00–8:00 pm

Presenter: Sarah Stewart, UIUC, Kendeigh Grant recipient.

Exploring Children's Value Development Through Mist-netting Experiences

Thursday, May 4, 7:00–8:00 pm

Presenter: Seunguk Shin, UIUC, Kendeigh Grant recipient.

Grassland Bird Stopover Habitat Use and Migratory Behavior in Illinois

Thursday, May 4, 7:00–8:00 pm

Presenter: Nicole Suckow, UIUC, Kendeigh Grant recipient.

Barn Owl Box Installed

Zachary (Zak) Sutton, CCAS Conservation Chair

On Sunday, December 11, 2022, Mike Ward (a professor in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign) and I installed a Barn Owl box, purchased by CCAS, adjacent to the Barnhart Prairie at the Bluestem Hall Nature School! They will keep an eye on it, and I'll venture out to check on it throughout the year for signs of it being used by a Barn Owl. I took it as a good omen that while we were installing the box, a large flock of Greater White-fronted Geese flew over, plus a Bald Eagle soared over as we were leaving.

Interested in helping with future Conservation Committee activities? Reach us at mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org!



Zak Sutton and newly installed Barn Owl box.



Where to Go Birding in Champaign County?

Check out some CCAS recommendations at <https://www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/go-birding>. Our list of top local spots to go birding includes accessible areas that are mobility-friendly.

Volunteers Welcome

Please consider serving on a CCAS committee as a member or chair in order to support our organization and our community. Committee meetings are held on an as-needed basis to plan and coordinate activities for the CCAS membership. Check out a committee and learn how you can engage with our local efforts or attend our next Board meeting to learn more.

- *Communications:* Print and email newsletter, email announcements, website maintenance, graphic design, social media management and outreach
- *Conservation:* Funding local projects, facilitating workdays, helping select Kendeigh Grant recipients, monitoring legislative and administrative actions that affect the environment
- *Education:* Advertising and selecting Mini-Grant recipients, liaising with local schools, youth education
- *Field Trip:* Coordinating short- and long-distance field trips, assisting with Bird Walks and outdoor programs
- *Finance:* Assisting with membership, budgets, auditing, taxes, database needs, and financial reports
- *Programs:* Contacting potential presenters, organizing and assisting with events, coordinating promotion and advertisement.

For more information: <https://www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/volunteer> or mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org.

Join Champaign County Audubon Society!

Yes, I'd like to become a member!

When you join the Champaign County Audubon Society, 100% of your dues and donations support our efforts (and they're tax deductible!).

\$ _____ CCAS Membership (\$15 due each January).

\$ _____ Additional donation to CCAS

\$ _____ TOTAL

Or Join Online!

Save time by contributing via your mobile device or computer! [Visit our website to join or donate online.](#)

I am a new member I am renewing my membership

Name: _____

Email: _____ Phone # (_____) _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ - _____

CCAS members will be automatically enrolled to receive our newsletter by email; check this box if you would prefer to receive a **paper** copy.

Checks should be made payable to CCAS. Send this form and your payment to: CCAS Membership Chair, P.O. Box 882, Urbana, IL 61803-0882. Thank you!

Our Mission:

Promote interest, enjoyment, and understanding of all aspects of our natural environment, and actively encourage the protection of wildlife and native habitats.

Join National Audubon Society

When you join National Audubon Society you receive one year of Audubon magazine. You also have the option to receive local birding and community events delivered to your inbox from CCAS.

- **New members:** Go online to <http://bit.ly/nas-g50> or call 1-844-428-3826. Please tell them Champaign County Audubon Society sent you using our chapter code "G50."
- **Renewing members:** Go online to <http://bit.ly/renew-nas> or call 1-844-428-3826.



Audubon

The Champaign County Audubon Society is a Chapter of National Audubon Society, Inc.