



The Meadowlark Messenger

ChampaignCountyAudubon.org

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

March Program

Whooping Cranes in the Eastern Migratory Population

Thursday, March 7; 7:00 pm
Zoom meeting ID: 893 2837 0260
Passcode: CCAS

In the 1940s Whooping Cranes, once found through North America, faced near extinction as a result of increased threats from habitat loss, hunting, and more. It wasn't until 2001 that Whooping Cranes returned to the eastern United States following a collaborative reintroduction program led by the International Crane Foundation (ICF). Today over 70 Whooping Cranes make up this population and many will migrate through or winter in eastern Illinois each year. Please join Stephanie Schmidt, Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator for the International Crane Foundation, to learn about the Whooping Cranes of the Eastern Migratory Population and the work ICF and crane conservation partners are doing to safeguard their future.

Speaker Bio: Stephanie Schmidt graduated with honors from the University of Wisconsin Madison with a Bachelor of Science in Zoology and a certificate in Environmental Studies in 2018. Following graduation, she began working with cranes



as an intern at the International Crane Foundation in Baraboo, WI and the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center in New Orleans, LA. She then went on to earn her master's degree in Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign where she studied nesting marsh birds and predation risk following wetland management practices. Following graduation in 2022, she returned to the International Crane Foundation where she now works as the Whooping Crane Outreach Coordinator.

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Champaign County Audubon Society

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

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- Beth Chato
- Megan Skrip
- Susan Pollock

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- Bylaws: Roger Digges
- Conservation: Zachary Sutton
- Education: Janet Enos
- Field Trip: Aerin Tedesco; Beth Chato, Colin Dobson
- Finance: (vacant)
- Membership: Brock Martin
- Program: Elizabeth Rodriguez
- Communications: Colin Dobson (Chair); Jeff Bryant (Birdnotes Listserv), Susan Pollock (newsletter), Megan Skrip (webmaster)

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
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Northern Harrier. Photo by Colin Dobson.

Field Notes

Colin Dobson, CCAS President

Spring is here, or just about! We hope everyone made it through the winter with the weird variation of weather this year! I know I am ready to see the forests full of green colors and, of course, birds bursting into song with the arrival of warm weather to come. Get out and see the last of our wintering species, such as the wintering diving ducks at Riverbend or Northern Harriers gliding local agriculture fields, migratory species such as Golden-crowned Kinglets and Fox Sparrows at Busey Woods, or the arrival of Eastern Phoebes at any creek crossing or Eastern Towhees at any forest with some understory. March is a great month to see a wide array of species! Whether it is attending a bird walk, a field trip, or our (Zoom) monthly program, or just interacting or watching our social media for future trips and events, we also hope that you can attend one of our events this month and later this spring!



Eastern Towhee. Photo by Colin Dobson.

Bird of the Month

Roger Digges, CCAS Vice President

I found it difficult to choose a bird of the month for March because so many are moving into or through our area as we enter spring. Red-winged Blackbirds have begun claiming territory at Meadowbrook as I write this on Valentine's Day, but I made them bird of the month last March. Growing numbers of Killdeer are already calling their loud, high-pitched "kill-deer, kill-deer." Eastern Phoebes, members of the flycatcher family, are beginning to trickle in as March begins. Soon Tree Swallows, those striking aerial acrobats, will be contesting ownership of nest boxes and tree cavities

in local parks and preserves and a few fortunate backyards. But there is only one March arrival I am willing to get up early for and brave blustery March dawns, or stand in the cold in the fading light of dusk.

How can I describe the **American Woodcock**? Although technically a shorebird, you won't find a woodcock anywhere near a shoreline.

Instead, they tend to occupy younger forests where they are so well camouflaged as they search for worms in the leaf litter that you may not see them at all. In the daytime, that is. But when the sun goes down, this odd-looking bird with the plump body, long beak, its comic back and forth walk, and eyes on top of its head, undergoes an extraordinary transformation. It dances. In the sky. Or at least the male does. Females watch from some hidden spot and rate his performance, to see if he would be a good enough mate.

Males find an open area near the woods where they forage. From their chosen spot, they issue a nasal "peent!" to any listening female, turning toward a different direction after each call so that no potential mate is left out. Then he leaps into the air, flying in an ascending spiral until he reaches anywhere from 200

to 350 feet above the ground, his wings beginning to make a twittering sound as he rises. Once he reaches the height of his display, he descends in a series of zig-zag flights, uttering high pitched chirps on the way down. He lands where he took off and begins the entire process again and again until the sky becomes too dark (or, if he's displaying in the dim light of early dawn, too bright, which invites aerial predators to make a meal of him). Some males will display at several dance sites and mate with multiple females. Females may also visit multiple locations where males are sky dancing. Once they mate, the female is on her own. He will forage for himself alone and continue to dance. She will lay and incubate 1 to 5 eggs in a shallow depression in leaf litter.



American Woodcock. Photo by Colin Dobson.

When and where can you observe these sky dancing shorebirds? March is the best time to see these birds, although they put on another show in October.

The best way to start is to go on an evening woodcock walk with Urbana Park District ([https://www.active.com/urbana-il/classes/](https://www.active.com/urbana-il/classes/woodcock-walk-free-2024)

[woodcock-walk-free-2024](https://www.active.com/urbana-il/classes/woodcock-walk-free-2024)) or Champaign County

Forest Preserves (<https://ccfpd.org/events>) staff. They know the best places to go and the best way to observe this unique display. You can go back to those sites on your own, although make sure that's all right.

CCAS is also hosting a field trip to view loons and American Woodcocks on March 16 (see coming events column).

How are American Woodcocks doing? Unfortunately, woodcock numbers are declining, perhaps due to habitat loss or ingesting pesticides in their diet of earthworms. Partners in Flight estimate that there are 3.5 million birds still, but we need to preserve woodcock habitat and health.

Kendeigh Grant Applications

Deadline: March 31

Each year we offer grants of up to \$2000 each to three researchers conducting work in the field of ornithology in Illinois.

Proposals must contain:

1. The applicant's name, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address
2. Description of the research to be carried out
3. Proposed budget
4. Evidence of your qualifications to do the research, including a brief CV and at least two references.

Submit to Roger Digges, CCAS Vice President, at rogerdigges49@gmail.com.

Proposals must be received by March 31, 2024.
Notification of awards will be made in April.

After the completion of the research, grantees must present the results in writing to CCAS. Awardees will also be asked to give a presentation at a CCAS general meeting (typically the first Thursday in April or May, the year following grant award).

What Kinds of Projects have been funded?

A wide variety of research projects have been funded by Kendeigh Grants, ranging from studies of bird behavior to bird physiology, ecology and conservation, nutrition and health, and everything in between! For example, researchers have used Kendeigh funds to investigate singing behavior, the growth patterns of young birds, the factors that affect nest parasitism by cowbirds, how birds choose habitats and respond to predators, the population distributions of rare birds, the impacts of prairie restoration on prairie-dependent birds, and disease transmission risk at bird feeders.

Preference is given to applied projects or those that advance bird conservation, habitat management, or education.

Find summaries of recent projects on our blog at <https://www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/our-blog-the-meadowlark-messenger/tag/Kendeigh+Grant>.

To learn more about these awards, visit <https://www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/research-grants>.

Volunteer Event: Invasive Woody Removal

Saturday, April 13, 2024

9:00 – 11:00 am

Interpretive Center at Homer Lake Forest Preserve
2573 South Homer Lake Road, Homer, IL

CCAS volunteers are invited to help the Champaign County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) remove woody invasive plants from Homer Lake Forest Preserve! Work will likely take place along the Oak Ridge Trail or the Timberdoodle Trail.

CCFPD will supply all the tools and provide a cooler to refill water bottles.

Volunteers should wear long pants and closed toe shoes. Folks should also bring their own work gloves, if they wish, and a refillable water bottle.

Meet at the Interpretive Center parking lot at 9:00 AM.

Please contact CCAS Conservation Chair Zak Sutton (zaksutton2@gmail.com) with any questions.

Welcome, New Members!

Amy Banner, Catherine Schneider, Ellen Schonken

Renewing Members

Marsha Daniels, Joyce Hofmann, Paula Luesse, Charles Nixon

Renewing Members with Donation

Miriam Bauers, Rosemary Buck, Beth Chato, Cami and Gary Cutler, Lucinda Duffy, Charles and Ann Helm, Curtis Krock, Kay Lindsay, Elaine and Russel Peppers, Tod and Beth Satterhwaite

Special Thanks for Donations

*Marilyn and Larry Silkwood
Ellen Jacobsen-Isserman*

Coming Events

Sunday Morning Bird Walks

Sundays, March 3–May 26; 7:30–9:00 am
Anita Purves Nature Center, Urbana

All ages and skill levels welcome. Meet in the parking lot at Anita Purves Nature Center, where we'll begin our walk in the surrounding park areas. If a later arrival works better for your schedule, please feel welcome to seek out and join the group on these informal walks.

Whooping Cranes in the Eastern Migratory Populations

Thursday, March 7; 7:00 pm
Zoom meeting ID: 893 2837 0260
Passcode: CCAS

Stephanie Schmidt from the International Crane Foundation will make a presentation on this population of Whooping Cranes.

CCAS Board Meeting

Monday, March 18, 2024, 7:00 pm

All CCAS members are welcome to attend board meetings; if you are interested in how to join, please email mail@champaigncountyaudubon.org.

Urbana Park District Woodcock Walk

Wednesday, March 20, 6:45–8:15 pm
Meadowbrook Park, Urbana, IL

Treat yourself to an evening performance in the prairie as we witness the “sky dance” of the American woodcock, visible only during the first few weeks of spring. After a short presentation inside the barn, head down the accessible path to the prairie. Bring a pair of binoculars if you have them. For more info: <https://www.active.com/urbana-il/classes/woodcock-walk-free-2024>.

CCFPD Woodcock Walk

Wednesday, March 13, 6:45–8:15 pm
and Friday, March 29, 6:45–8:15 pm
Lake of the Woods, Buffalo Trace Prairie (East Parking Lot)

Join CCFPD in a search for the elusive wood snipe, AKA the American Woodcock, as the males perform their amazing courtship display at dusk. A short

presentation will be followed by a walk to look for the sky dancers. *Register by 2 days before event.* For more info: <https://ccfpd.org/events>.

CCAS Loons and Woodcocks Field Trip

Saturday, March 30, 4:00 pm
Riverbend Forest Preserve and Buffalo Trace Prairie, Mahomet, IL

Join CCAS on our first loons and woodcocks field trip. Begins at 4 pm, walking from the main parking area at Riverbend. We will first look for ducks, grebes, and even loons at the lakes at Riverbend Forest Preserve, as well as any sparrows or other passerines that may be around! Near sunset, we will drive over to Buffalo Trace Prairie to view American Woodcocks displaying!

Kendeigh Grant Presentations

Thursday, April 4; 7:00 pm
Zoom meeting ID: 833 0787 7940
Passcode: CCAS

Recipients of our 2023 grant awards will present their research projects. Join to learn about the research we are helping to fund.

CCAS Volunteer Event: Invasive Woody Removal

Saturday, April 13, 2024
9:00–11:00 am
Interpretive Center at Homer Lake Forest Preserve

CCAS volunteers are invited to help the Champaign County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) remove woody invasive plants from Homer Lake Forest Preserve! Work will likely take place along the Oak Ridge Trail or the Timberdoodle Trail. Please contact CCAS Conservation Chair Zak Sutton (zaksutton2@gmail.com) with any questions.

Fluddles Film Viewing

April 26, 2024, 4:00–6:00 pm
Champaign Public Library

Come see Fluddles, a documentary film from the producers of *The Magic Stump*. We will be joined by filmmaker Bob Dolgan to share behind-the-scenes information on the project.

For more info: <https://www.grandprairiefriends.org/events/fluddles-film-viewing-spring-membership-meeting>.

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 our website.
[*Visit our website to join or donate online.*](#)

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.

Check this box if you would be interested in learning about volunteer opportunities with CCAS.

Check this box if you agree to have your name listed in the CCAS newsletter for giving beyond membership dues.

I am a new member.

I am renewing my membership.

Make check payable to CCAS and send with this form to: CCAS Membership Chair, P.O. Box 882, Urbana, IL 61803-0882.

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

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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.



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