



Middlefork Audubon Society

a chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society

The Audubonite

January 2018

January Program: *Feeding Birds in Your Backyard*,

Presented by Wild Birds & More

Thursday, January 25 @ 7:00 PM at the Danville Public Library

In December of 2017, Nancy and Jim Householder bought and moved Wild Birds & More to 2141 S. Neil Street in Champaign (in the strip mall behind Biaggi's Restaurant). They are a local provider of premium wild bird products, specializing in high-quality bird seed, feeders, bird houses, and other unique gifts. They are coming to Middlefork Audubon with a fun power-point presentation and a little show-and-tell as they talk about attracting birds to our backyard. Hope you can join us!

If the weather is bad we may need to cancel and reschedule this program for February. Check our website, middleforkaudubon.org, for updates or call Sue Smith at 217-621-7258.

February is Members' Night

Thursday, February 22 @ 7:00 PM at the Danville Public Library

Come join us for some refreshments and conversation on a winter evening. No fuss. We seldom have time to get to know each other so we thought it might be nice to just gather and share our love of birds, talk about our favorite trails or natural areas, and maybe swap a few good animal stories. If you have something interesting to share, feel free to bring it along! In the event we have to reschedule the January program due to inclement weather, Members' Night will be pushed to a later meeting. Check next month's newsletter or our website for updates.

Editor's Note: Newsletter Schedule

Beginning in March 2018 our newsletter will move to a bi-monthly schedule to help save on costs and bring everyone editions more rich with content. The first newsletter to follow the new schedule will be the March-April issue, our February issue will be the last of the monthly editions. Please check our website, middleforkaudubon.org for news in-between newsletters.

Boardwalk Birdwalk - New Date & Time

The monthly boardwalk birdwalks have been moved from 2:00 PM on the first Sunday of every month to 7:00 AM on the first Saturday of every month. The location at the Heron Park Boardwalk in Danville, IL remains the same. Please contact Bud Lewsader if you have any questions, his contact info is listed on page 3.

Happy New Year from Middlefork Audubon!

As I sit at my computer, the calendar has just rolled over to 2018 in a deep freeze, and the Champaign and Vermilion County winter bird counts are now behind us. Contrast that to last year at count time when it was so mild great blue heron tracks were found in the snow and yellow-rumped warblers were sighted below the Homer Lake spillway. The cold weather was no obstacle to those who spent the day in the field, however. We had birders as young as 10, and as young-at-heart as 91, out counting on January 3rd! Whether donning long-johns, winter boots, or warm hats and gloves to drive and/or hike, or sitting in that comfy chair near the window feeders at your home, teams within the designated circle areas set out once again to identify and tally as many birds as possible in one day (with additional species being recorded 3 days before and after during count week).

Middlefork Audubon is pleased to announce that there were three new coordinator/compiler for the Vermilion County winter bird counts this year. Jesse Runner and Susan Stearns took over the Middle Fork count for Steve Bailey, and Mary Jane Easterday took on the Forest Glen count after losing our dear friend, Marilyn Campbell, last fall. A big thank you to all three women for picking up the ball so we could have another successful winter season! The information collected on these count days is sent to the National Audubon Society (www.audubon.org/conservation/join-christmas-bird-count) where it is added to a worldwide database of census information. If you have never participated in a count before, I hope you will consider joining a group in 2018. The spring bird count is already on the calendar for May 5th, 2018.



Photo: Bob Schifo

Getting back to the cold weather for a moment, I'd like to share a few observations from the recent counts and my personal experiences at our farm. Following well-established natural winter behaviors, horned larks and Lapland longspurs continue to be found primarily along rural roads where gravel is exposed, bald eagles are seen perching in trees around Lake Vermilion, along river corridors, or soaring overhead, and Canada geese are usually found near open water, feeding in corn fields, or flying overhead in large v-shaped flocks. However, due to the very cold weather this year, many of the birds we saw during this year's count were found clustered near bird feeding stations at private homes or public feeders. They were benefiting from the shelter around buildings and the seeds, suet, and fresh, open water set out by people during these cold winter days. The red-shouldered hawk seen perched near feeders in a subdivision, along with the Cooper's hawk coming to feeders at our farm, indicates predatory birds are learning how to survive winter by hanging around feeding areas, too!

Research is telling us that bird feeding is beneficial. Guest speakers at past IAS meetings, who are conducting research on feeder birds, have discovered that birds who supplement their diet at feeding stations are generally healthier. They have more body mass overall and are more likely to survive and reproduce. Bird feeding is worthwhile and enjoyable! Those of us who feed the birds know the pleasure of seeing them come to the yard, and take delight in those unusual species that visit from time to time, and if you are unable to feed birds at home, perhaps you have visited a nature center where you can enjoy some of our winter birds up close!



Photo: Sue Smith

May your hearts and spirits stay warm on these chilly winter days!

Happy birding,

Sue Smith

Sixty Years of Bird Feeding

By James O. Smith

I started feeding birds in my yard about 60 years ago, give or take a few years. At first I was skeptical if such a hobby was good for birds, but now, I think that it is. Especially during weather that we have had since Christmas, when the weather was so very cold and snowy. During this time, the large number of birds certainly ate a lot of sunflower seeds. I now enjoy feeding birds all year long. I started out feeding corn screenings, which the grain trade called "Foreign Matter". All grain used in the grain trade is cleaned at some time or the other. The screenings consists mostly of cracked kernels, weed seed, dust, dirt, dead insects, and other grains. It is traded just like regular grain, and is priced less than pure grain. It is used in livestock and pet feed plus other uses. I bought it for bird seed, because it was cheap, and locally available, and most birds will scratch in it and pick out what they want. Grain handling has changed, and screenings are no longer locally available. As a result, I now use only black oil sunflower seed.

Why feed all year long? First of all, I like to watch birds, and they are attracted all days of the year. Summer brings a few different additional species to feeders, such as hummingbirds, orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings, and Chipping Sparrows. You never know when some very unusual bird appears. Some, or many, of you would prefer not to attract starlings or house sparrows that may also pay a visit. When you put out a feeder with feed, you cannot control species, come what may. And this would include rats, mice, opossums, skunks, raccoons, chipmunks, deer, squirrels, and the neighborhood pet cats. There are times when a particular bird makes a one-time appearance at the feeders during winter. Here is a brief list of such birds (I do not remember the year) My one-time visitors include: Evening Grosbeak, White-winged Crossbill, Lapland Longspur, and Dickcissel.

There is an organization that specifically records feeder birds during winter months, throughout the United States and Canada, called PROJECT FEEDER WATCH (feederwatch.org/community). It is run by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in New York. I have been taking part in this for 21 years. If you cooperate, and enter your feeder bird data, your feeder birds will be entered into a national database, along with thousands of other feeder watchers. These records will indicate over the years which species, if any, are increasing or decreasing.

Middlefork Audubon Society Board

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Middlefork Audubon Society

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	<i>Calendar</i>	
Date & Time	Location	Event
Thursday, January 25 @ 7:00 PM	Danville Public Library	January Meeting & Program
Saturday, February 3 @ 7:00 AM	Heron Park Boardwalk	Boardwalk Birdwalk
Thursday, February 22 @ 7:00 PM	Danville Public Library	Members' Night



Thanks to Betty's Garden Center in Danville, IL for
hosting our annual Bird Seed Sale.
www.berrysgarden.com • (217)-446-3076