



The Audubonite

April 2020

Middlefork Audubon Events On Hold

Who knew when we started reaching out to speakers last winter that we would be facing a pandemic causing us to shelter in place? We hope you are well and safely taking care to follow all necessary precautions at this time. Here at MFA, in following all guidelines from our state and federal agencies, we are reluctantly cancelling all programs and events until we receive word that it is safe to resume gatherings once again.

After over a year of planning, we were ready to send out the final invitation to the Beech Grove Trail dedication in memory of Marilyn Campbell, but now the dedication has been postponed for a safer time to be determined later. So for now, these programs and events are on hold but we are looking at some creative ways that we can reach out to you so stay tuned! We have some tech-savvy speakers so we are exploring how MFA might be able to connect those speakers and our members. Until then, we hope you are able to get outside and enjoy the spring migratory birds, the fleeting splendor of spring wildflowers, and all the beauty that nature around us affords.

A reminder....A FEW THINGS THAT ARE NOT CANCELLED! As nature lovers, we all know that stillness in the out-of-doors can offer some up-close encounters with wildlife. Consider embracing this still space with a few activities we suggest below:

1. Sit outside and watch a bird build its nest, or better yet, monitor a nest-check out NestWatch at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology: www.nestwatch.org
2. Monitor a nest box. MFA works with almost 40 volunteers who are already in the field checking nearly 400 boxes for Eastern Bluebirds and other cavity nesters. If you have some trees and open fields around your home or nearby, consider adding a nest box or two and tend it. We can help you get started.
3. Study up on your bird call identification! Sibley Birds, Merlin Bird ID (by Cornell Lab of Ornithology), and Audubon Birding by Ear are a just a few great online resources. Sibley and Merlin both have downloadable smart phone apps for birding on the go!
4. Use your binoculars and look at nature close up. It is a wonderful pastime and a great learning tool.
5. Don't forget to go outside at dusk or dark, too. Watching bats fly overhead and feed, or listening to night sounds of frogs, other wildlife, and perhaps an owl, is so enjoyable, along with watching for shooting stars and constellations.

Migration Time

Migration is underway. Almost everyday we see or hear another migrant or welcome back a feathered friend who is a summer resident.

What has been striking to us this April has been the prevalence of Yellow-Bellied Sapsuckers. We cannot remember ever seeing so many in one spring nor hearing about so many others reporting them as well. A recent trip to Homer Lake netted us 6 sapsuckers in one place! We have also had 2 or 3 at a time in our own backyard.

Of all seven woodpecker species seen in Illinois, sapsuckers are the most migratory. Some winter as far south as Panama, but many can be found as close as southern Illinois and even further north than that in recent winters. Best time to see them is mid March to early May, and from September to mid November.

Both males and females have a red forehead patch, and a prominent large white wing patch, but only the males have a red throat. Their call is a nasal "mew" and their drumming is rather uneven. They are similar in size to a Hairy Woodpecker, larger than a Downy.

There is a good reason for their name. Sapsuckers will "drill" parallel holes in the barks of trees and the ensuing sap will attract insects. Sapsuckers lap up the sap with their long tongues (and enjoy the extra insect protein too)! The sap is beneficial to other birds as well, such as hummingbirds, waxwings, and warblers, especially the Cape May Warbler.

Back on the subject of migration: the warblers are coming! In fact, some are already here. These beautiful little gems of our woodlands and wild lands are the coveted species for many birders to see. Our earliest ones, and most numerous, are the Yellow-Rumped Warblers. These small birds are white and black with yellow rumps, a yellow cap, and yellow sides. Often seen in small flocks, they are not very shy, allowing birders to observe fairly close. Other early migrating warblers to see are Pine Warbler, and the Black and White. The handsome Yellow Throated Warbler returns early and nests here as well. We are fortunate to be able to see some warblers stay around to nest rather than continuing a northward journey to the boreal forests of Canada or far northern states.

Common Yellowthroat, Northern Parula, Prothonotary, Yellow Warbler, Blue-Winged, and the more rare Prairie Warbler are a few that nest in our area. Birding apps and good bird books are very handy to help with navigating the identity of these colorful small birds. And binoculars help too!

-Sue Tinkle



Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker

Photo: Bob Schifo

Middlefork Audubon Dues Increase

Middlefork Audubon Society has not raised our dues in many years. Most chapters affiliated with Illinois Audubon Society have an annual membership fee of \$10, which will be our new membership fee as well going forward.

We appreciate your understanding and are grateful for your continued membership loyalty and your interest in Middlefork Audubon Society. Thank you!

Spring Bird Count May 9, 2020

I received an email from Tara Beveroth of the Natural History Survey. She and Jim Herkert, Executive Director of Illinois Audubon, discussed the possibility of moving the date of the count. In the end, they felt it made little difference with the virus. The count will take place on May 9th.

There is a new category for the count. For those who wish to remain in quarantine, you may count from your home. You may bird from the safety of your car. For those searching in natural areas, Kickapoo may still be closed. County parks are open, but restrooms were locked in April. If you wish to participate, please email me at birdeaster@hotmail.com or phone 217-213-8359. We want to cover as much of Vermilion County as possible. Please follow social distancing. Hoping for a lovely day and we can feel Nature's healing.

-Mary Jane Easterday

Bluebird Volunteer Coordinator Needed



Photo: Bob Schifo

Middlefork Audubon is looking for a volunteer coordinator for the bluebird nest box project this season. Approximately 390 boxes in Vermilion County are monitored from April through August/September by almost 40 volunteers. Lee Solter will continue to collect, collate, and submit our data, but a volunteer coordinator is needed who can communicate periodically with the volunteers and the Middlefork Audubon president, updating them with seasonal reminders and fielding questions. We are looking for someone with computer skills to send info via email and who enjoys bluebirds and people, as this task requires the ability to interact with all of our volunteers. Sound like something you might enjoy taking on?

If you are interested please contact Sue Smith at suzanne56smith@gmail.com

Thank You, Bud!

Bud Lewsader has served our organization for many years as a member at large on the MFA board. In addition, he was the monthly MFA representative at the Boardwalk Birdwalks at Heron County Park. In the event someone had questions about any birds on the boardwalk, Bud was there to answer them.

Bud has decided to retire from the board but remains an MFA member and a friend. We wish him well! See you around on the boardwalk, Bud!

Middlefork Audubon Society Board

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Middlefork Audubon Society

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	<i>Calendar</i>	
Date & Time	Location	Event
Thursday, April 23	-	Meeting & Program Canceled
May 9	-	Spring Bird Count



Thanks to Berry's Garden Center in Danville, IL for
hosting our annual Bird Seed Sale.

www.berrysgarden.com • (217)-446-3076