



# Middlefork Audubon Society

a chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society

## The Audubonite

April 2021

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### April Updates from Sue Tinkle

We had some very challenging weather in February which meant that many birds relied on bird feeders to ensure their survival. We were glad we had dried mealworms, suet, and peanuts available for our winter birds.

Being an irruption year, there were many reports of seldom seen species from the northern tier of the U.S. and Canada. A lucky few were able to see Evening Grosbeaks. Others saw Snowy Owls, Common Redpolls, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and even White-winged Crossbills.

As our winter visitors begin to return north, our thoughts turn to the spring migrants to come. It is a good time to clean oriole and hummingbird feeders for their return mid to late April, and clean out nest boxes (if not done last fall). It is also time to brush up on our bird sounds and visual identification skills for preparation of our retuning and migrant species. Cornell Lab of Ornithology offers courses and various tools for that. The Merlin app is a really good one for identification. Many people also find eBird useful. Another favorite is the Birding by Ear series with Lang Elliott. Of course, there are many great bird books too. Find what works for you!

When birds have similar songs, such as Pine Warblers, Swamp Sparrows, Chipping Sparrows, Worm-eating Warblers, and even Dark-eyed Juncos, it can be helpful to look around and note the habitat. You are highly unlikely to have a Worm-eating Warbler in your urban backyard, but Chipping Sparrows might be right at home there. Pine Warblers are early migrants and prefer stands of conifer trees, so you would not find them in a marsh. But with that said all of this gets trickier during migration. I once had a seasoned birder say that "anything can be found anywhere during migration". Case in point: we once saw an exhausted Sora, a marsh bird, drop out of the sky in front of us during a hike in a dense forest! But, in general, species will be in their preferred habitat.

*Sue Tinkle*

*Middlefork Audubon President*

## The Bluebirds are Back!

The Middlefork Audubon (MFA) bluebird nest box monitoring program is gearing up! With nearly 35 monitors overseeing 375 boxes in Vermilion County through the Middlefork Audubon bluebird monitoring program, we want to shout out a bit THANK YOU once again to all our eager volunteers for the work you do! Even in the midst of a pandemic last year our dedicated volunteers helped fledge 438 bluebirds (plus 267 tree swallows, 115 house wrens, and miscellaneous wrens and chickadees)!



Photo: Bob Schifo

It is spring once again and bluebirds are in the area selecting nesting territory and that means it's time to get nest boxes ready. MFA monitors are beginning to walk their trails or yards now checking nest boxes to ensure they are all in good condition and cleaned out for the incoming cavity nesters including the Eastern bluebird, tree swallow, Carolina chickadee, and house wren. Once the birds establish a site monitors will check boxes weekly and record species of bird, number of eggs, number of young fledged, and any interesting observations along the way which might include finding ants, a mouse, or any other interesting guests in the box. Other encounters along the trail might include butterflies and dragonflies, a fawn in the grass, or other birds in the tree canopy nearby. Nature's delights are infinite and spectacular when we take the time to show up!

If you are not yet a monitor but are interested in participating in this enjoyable summer project please contact Suzanne Smith at the email address below. We would love to have more nest boxes in suitable habitat for our beloved bluebirds, and we would love to add you to our volunteer group! It is a great way to get outside, observe and learn more about cavity nesters, and at the same time, enjoy nature along the trail or in your backyard. Plus, it helps our local cavity nesting bird populations and provides important data that tracks the status of these bird populations from year to year. It's a win-win for us and the natural world!

Middlefork Audubon has a bluebird fund for equipment to establish new nesting sites or upgrade existing ones. If you need new boxes, baffles, or posts contact:

Jim Smith at [smithsje@gmail.com](mailto:smithsje@gmail.com)

Suzanne Smith at [suzanne56smith@gmail.com](mailto:suzanne56smith@gmail.com)

Happy trails!

*Suzanne Smith*

*Bluebird nest box monitoring coordinator*

## Big Day May 1st

As many of you reading this already know, the Illinois Audubon Society Spring Gathering is a bit different this year because of COVID concerns. Instead of the usual weekend programs, field trips, speakers and banquet, a Big Day has been planned along with a virtual presentation in the evening. Big Day is simply listing as many bird species as possible in a designated time frame. A thousand robins in a flock or just one, it counts as one species. For this Big Day, you can look for birds from 12:00 AM to 4:00 PM on May 1st. Non-members are welcome and you can bird anywhere in Illinois. There are few restrictions other than normal birding etiquette and protocols. Registered participants will receive the rules and relevant info. There will be prizes for the individual and also for the chapter with the highest count.

To participate, entrants must register at the Illinois Audubon website and pay \$10 (which gets returned to the chapter "team"), which in this case is Middlefork Audubon. So far we have 8 people signed up! Registration continues until April 30th, so there is ample time to get on board! If you can't get up at midnight to bird, that's okay! Just do what you can, where you can. Hope you can join us, just make sure you designate Middlefork as your Team Chapter!

For more information on the Big Day Event , and to register, please visit the Illinois Audubon website  
(Make sure to register for "Team Middlefork Audubon"):  
[www.illinoisaudubon.org/field-trip/2021-chapter-big-day-competition](http://www.illinoisaudubon.org/field-trip/2021-chapter-big-day-competition)

Champaign County Audubon has kindly given information in their newsletter to encourage their members to participate in our Big Day. In the spirit of reciprocation we are presenting info here on their annual fund raiser called Bird-A-Thon, which takes place May 9th through May 16th. Pledges are accepted for "teams" finding as many bird species as possible. Pledge donations are based on number of species seen (like certain amount of money for each bird species), or supporters can pledge a flat amount.

For more info please go to their website:  
[www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/bird-counts-and-bird-a-thon/](http://www.champaigncountyaudubon.org/bird-counts-and-bird-a-thon/)  
or contact Beth Chato by email at [ejchato@gmail.com](mailto:ejchato@gmail.com).

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### **Marilyn Campbell Memorial**

We are slowly moving forward on the various projects to complete the Beech Grove trail that is dedicated to honoring Marilyn Campbell. The paved pathway is completed, wheelchair accessible picnic tables have been purchased, signage and plaques are in the works, and other improvements will be started as soon as weather permits. Our sincere hope is to have a gathering for this dedication at some point later this year, so we will keep you posted as to the situation as the year unfolds.

## January 3rd Christmas Bird Count Results

The January 3rd CBC was quite successful! There was a total of 83 different species recorded by 18 observers for a total number of 10,868 birds PLUS 41,304 Crows (due to Mary Jane finding 2 roost sites), for a grand total of 52,172 birds!

Some species had record high numbers such as these:

Hooded Mergansers:	48
Red shouldered Hawks:	27
Tundra Swans:	14
Mourning Doves:	1,259
American:	1,133
American Kestrel:	24
Grackles:	444

And most surprising of all, Rob Kanter's discovery of 20 American Pipits at the boardwalk at Heron Park in Danville!

Other numbers perhaps of interest:

Coopers Hawk:	6
Cardinals:	136 (record was 387)
European Starling:	1,709 (record was 6,521)
Red -bellied Woodpecker:	83
Bald Eagle:	8 (last year 51)
American Tree Sparrow:	435
Horned Larks:	723
House Sparrow:	611
Dark-eyed Junco:	336
Northern Shrike:	2

Thank you to all the participants, and special thanks to our compiler, Jessie Runner, and to Susan Stearns, for her important tech support. A job well done! Thank you!

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## Spring Bird Count

The annual SBC will be on May 8th this year. The Big Day event the week before is a great time to find your favorite birding spots for the SBC! More info to follow.

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## Birds of a Feather Exhibit

The Birds of a Feather Exhibit at the Danville Art League is a wonderful show that has been very well received and enjoyed by all who have seen it. The art league is located at 320 N. Franklin Street in Danville (parking on west side of building on Seminary). It is open to the public for free exhibit viewing on Saturdays from 9AM to 12PM . For private showings with individuals or small groups during the week, please call Sue Tinkle at 217-427-6109, or call Danville Art League at 217-442-9264 for other possible times.

We appreciate our Middlefork Audubon members who contributed their beautiful bird photos or paintings to this interesting exhibit. Some items in the show are for sale. Sincere thanks go to Bob Schifo, Tom Marriage, Brenda Tellier, Jim Smith, Melissa Rome, and Mo Hennley for their part in making this exhibit a success. Many art league members submitted paintings of birds in different mediums along with sculptures also. Grateful thanks to the Danville Art League for partnering with Middlefork Audubon and giving our photographers and artists a place to share their love for birds with others through their talents.

Please feel free to join us at the open house for this exhibit on Sunday afternoon, April 18th from 2:00 PM to 4:00 PM and meet the artists and photographers. The show will be up in the gallery for public viewing until sometime in May.

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### New Members

Middlefork Audubon is pleased to announce new members:

Germaine Light, Melissa Rome, Elisabeth Jenicek, Mary Kraft and Paul Kenis

Welcome to our flock!

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### Middlefork Audubon Society Board

**President:** Sue Tinkle • (217)-427-6109 • tinkandtom@sbcglobal.net

**Vice President & Program Director:** Sue Smith • suzanne56smith@gmail.com

**Treasurer:** Bob Schifo • bschifo@yahoo.com

**Secretary:** Germaine Light • germainelight53@gmail.com

**Newsletter & Website Editor:** Sam Schifo • samschifo@gmail.com

**Members at Large:** Jim Smith • smithsje@gmail.com

Connie Cunningham • conniejcunningham@gmail.com

Jessie Runner • jal\_sa@yahoo.com

Brian Wallen • mfa@bnphoto.org

Middlefork Audubon Society

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	<i>Calendar</i>	
<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Event</b>
<b>Sunday, April 18 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM</b>	<b>Danville Art League 320 N Franklin Street</b>	<b>Birds of a Feather Exhibit Open House</b>
<b>May 1</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Illinois Audubon Big Day Event</b>
<b>May 8</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Spring Bird Count</b>



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

[www.berrysgarden.com](http://www.berrysgarden.com) • (217)-446-3076