

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

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Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

TEACHING FOR THE BIRDS

Story and Photos by Eleonora di Liscia

My daughter was lucky to have a fourth grade teacher, who was particularly imaginative when it came to teaching science. So he seemed like a good candidate for me to offer bird feeders for his classroom.

James O'Malley jumped at the offer, and since 2005, the feeders at Edison School in Morton Grove have helped nurture the students' interest in nature. The feeders, filled with sunflower or niger thistle, hang in the school's courtyard where both students and teachers, passing through the hallway, avidly look for the birds.

"We'll be walking to the gym, and we'll see a finch or a chickadee. And it's not just our class. We could not ask for a better spot," said Mr. O'Malley. "We'll have conversations. I'll see a kid over there, and I'll ask what they're looking at. It opens up conversations about birds. Every school should have an observation station."

The students enjoy taking turns filling the feeders. Fourth grader Chy likes to fill the feeders because it helps the birds. Sarah said "it's like helping save lots of birds. Some birds don't get enough food, and the birds will starve and die."

"Birds migrate thousands of miles," said Mia. "And if they see the food in the feeder, they'll come and eat it"

Corey's favorite bird is the Chickadee. Evan likes Goldfinches, and others preferred Cardinals and Robins. When the students were asked whether they were more likely to notice birds when they were



Mr. O'Malley and 4th grade class observe the birdfeeders in the courtyard.

outside, nearly every hand shot up.

"If every school had a couple feeders, it would be beneficial for all the reasons it has worked here," said Mr. O'Malley. "Kids have a natural inclination for science and birding, and the feeders allow that to be developed."

Besides the feeders, Mr. O'Malley maintains a shelf of bird books, many of them donations. The children especially love Birdscapes, a pop-up book showing birds in their natural habitat. Wild Birds Unlimited in Glenview generously donated the book along with some of the classes' birdseed.

One student especially liked a set of bird cards that identified different species because "when I see a bird, I can know what it's called."

Watching the feeders, Evan has learned how the birds change colors. Lizzy observed "when the birds see you, they don't always go away. They watch you." But Phillip said when "we walk in the hallway, if the birds hear people talking, they leave." Chayne said she notices how they're always pushing each other trying to get at the food.

According to Mr. O'Malley, the feeders have become part of the



Mr. O'Malley found these owl feathers while teaching at Chicago Botanic Garden.

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curriculum as a means of exposing children to wildlife, nature and ecosystems. "We'll talk about adaptations, and I might show a video, but it's not the same thing as walking up to the feeders and seeing a finch and talking about how their colors have a specific purpose. It's a real concrete way of learning."

"Children are naturally inspired by science, and this provides an outlet for them," he added. "If we talk about Africa, we can't observe those animals here. But the feeders allow them to make connections with living organisms that they can't do in a text."

In the past, the feeders have helped special needs students. One child who needed to walk was put in charge of filling the feeders. Animals are often used in special needs classrooms as a means of engaging students, Mr. O'Malley said.

The feeders have inspired not just the students, but Mr. O'Malley. He even took a course for teachers offered by Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

"I always loved nature but the combination of getting the feeders and my doing the Cornell class raised the level of my interest. We'd gone camping in the past, but I didn't appreciate birds the way I do now," he said.

Cornell does offer a Classroom Feederwatch, which I initially sponsored along with the feeders.

Mr. O'Malley has taught elementary school for 20 years. Every year, his class presents a Hands-on Science museum. Each student creates an exhibit, which might include tarantulas, bee nests, fossils and sharks. Every year, there are bird exhibits including an owl's talon, a stuffed pheasant and a replica of a Bald Eagle. The rest of the school is invited to view the exhibits and ask the exhibitors questions.

While Mr. O'Malley was always interested in nature, his own passion for teaching science teaching was sparked when a student teacher.

"My cooperating teacher gave me a hummingbird's nest. I had that on the shelf, and the kids said 'Wow!' I brought in something else, and then something else. Now the kids have brought in things. It's really about creating an environment," he said.



A National Board-Certified Teacher, O'Malley also teaches summer camp at Chicago Botanic Garden. He has been a three-time state finalist for the Presidential Math and Science Award.

Edison School teacher, Jim O'Malley. Photo by

MEMBERSHIP NOTES

The Evanston North Shore Bird Club relies on members like you in order to offer our many fine program nights and field trips. Please take a moment and renew your membership today!

KEEPING IN TOUCH! Need reminders about upcoming field trip or program nights? Want to keep abreast of local birding news? Sign up for ENSBC's eNews! Suzanne Checchia compiles the latest events to keep you on top of club news and other events of interest. If you are not receiving our eNews notices and wish to do so, email ensbcenews@aol.com.

REMEMBERING MARGOT MERRICK

By Lynne P. Carpenter

I first met Margot Merrick 40 years ago through the ENSBC. Over the years we shared a lot of experiences. Some were funny like the time we found ourselves completely lost at Ryerson Woods with the group we were "leading" at the first Smith Symposium back in the 80's. Others were mind-blowing like the time we saw 25,000 Swainson's and Broad-wing Hawks settle down into the trees in front of us at Santa Ana Wildlife Refuge in Texas. (April 1, 1978)



*Margot Merrick
Photo by Margot Wyncoop*

Whether we were walking on Waukegan beach or cross-country-skiing at Ryerson Woods, Margot had a childlike sense of wonder and excitement about everything in the natural world until her last days. This enthusiasm led her to volunteer at the Field Museum and Ryerson Woods and to give programs of the slides she took of birds and butterflies to various groups.

She will be missed on our Friday bird walks in the lagoons, but her memory will live on in the program her family is establishing to promote bird research and education programs at Ryerson Woods. Memorial donations may be made to The Nature Conservancy, P.O. Box 6014, Albert Lea, MN 56007 or The Nature Conservancy in Illinois, 8 S. Michigan Avenue, Suite 900, Chicago, IL 60603.

(Margo died February 8, 2013 after a long illness.)

A GENEROSITY OF SPIRIT: GEOFFREY A. WILLIAMSON

By Eleonora di Liscia

Roger Tory Peterson. Kenn Kaufmann. Ted Parker. Geoffrey A. Williamson. What do these names have in common? Each received the American Birding Association (ABA) Ludlow Griscom Award for Outstanding Contribution in Regional Ornithology.

ENSBC member Geoffrey Williamson is this year's honoree. According to the ABA website, the award is "given to individuals who have dramatically advanced the state of ornithological knowledge for a particular region. This may be through their long-time contributions in monitoring avian status and distribution, facilitating the publication of state bird books, breeding bird atlases and significant papers on the regional natural history of birds. This may also be through the force of their personality, teaching and inspiration."

So of all the people who dedicate themselves to the birding community, why Geoff? The answer is nearly all the above and more. Geoff has led field trips and workshops, given presentations, done bird surveys and written articles for *North American Birds*.

And he's just a real nice guy.

According to ABA Director D.H. Michael Bowen, Geoff's award was largely based on ABA member Tom Kelly's recommendation.

"We immediately thought of Geoff's nomination document as being very germane to the requirements of the Griscom Award. The fact that Geoff has served both at the local (Chicagoland) and State levels was a big plus. His generosity of spirit is quite typical of winners of this award," Michael said.

Tom explained, "I stumbled upon the description of the award, and the first person I thought of was Geoff. He's very dedicated. He puts in a lot of time. He's very patient and kind with people in the field. He puts a lot of time into record keeping. Geoff does more than anybody."

And he does it with a complete lack of ego. Geoff still can't quite believe the award is his.

"Michael Bowen called me up," Geoff recalled. "He left a voicemail message. He says, 'You've been awarded the Ludlow Griscom Award, so please call me at this number.' So I thought this is some sort of mistake. But I called him back and said, 'Got your message. I'm very curious about this.' I still didn't really believe it."

Geoff became interested in birds at age 8 after receiving a field guide for Christmas. Later, he attended bird walks led by a dedicated teacher. "He had a trunk full of binoculars," Geoff said.

In the 1980s, Geoff studied engineering at Cornell University, biking over to bird Sapsucker Woods. There, he joined his first club.

"That was the first big shift. Otherwise, it was just me alone, or I would drag some friends along. Before, it was sort of a self taught

thing. At Cayuga Bird Club, Dick Evans took me under his wing, and I learned a bunch of stuff from him," Geoff said.

In 1989, Geoff came to Chicago, where he is professor and interim chair at the Illinois Institute of Technology Electrical and Computer Engineering Department.

"I was trying to get hooked up with a bird club here, which turned out to be very difficult," he said. "A lot of my motivation has been to

create the stuff that I wish I had had. How difficult it was to get a contact with a bird club. How difficult it was within COS. I wanted to volunteer my time, and there were barriers to that as well."

Geoff eventually joined the Chicago Ornithological Society (COS) and began leading field trips. At that time, the club had one organizational meeting per year. "Everything happened at the meeting, and everything was done ahead of time. There was not a lot of opportunity for new blood to inject itself into the organization. People were interested in that happening. The infrastructure was not in place," Geoff explained.

When Geoff became president, he made changes to allow greater input. He also put COS and later Illinois Ornithological (IOS) Society on the web.

A kind of birding ambassador, Geoff seeks out newcomers, learns what they need and points them in the right direction. In September, 2000, he started the Wednesday North Pond walks, which has drawn birders from 18 states and countries such as South Korea, South Africa, Algeria and India.

In 1992, Geoff met his wife Christine when he agreed to be COS newsletter editor if she would sign on too. The couple birded weekly as part of a Cook County Big Year contest. They married in 1995.

In the 1990s, Geoff joined the budding IOS. A past President, he now chairs its Ornithological Research and Data Committee. He established the Committee's mission to create a database enabling birders to contribute their sightings.

"I wrote up my vision of the thing and tried to find takers," said Geoff. "I took it on myself. It's been a work in progress. I was trying to put in place something I would have benefited from had it existed. It's not easy to figure out how to contribute to knowledge through your bird sightings. Once we have all the information on there, it can port into a bunch of things."

For example, if you saw a Magnolia Warbler in April, the database would allow you to look up the earliest Magnolia Warbler sightings for your area.

Geoff is currently writing a book on the birds in Lincoln Park.



Geoffrey A. Williamson.

Photo by Christine Williamson

C A L E N D A R

PROGRAM NIGHTS

All programs are held on the fourth Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. at the Evanston Ecology Center, 2024 McCormick Blvd., Evanston, IL. Free admission, parking and refreshments. For more details on programs, check our website at www.ensbc.org.

April 23, 2013: "Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation." Learn about Flint Creek Wildlife's work in saving the lives of injured and orphaned Chicago-area birds. Director Dawn Keller, will bring some of Flint Creek's amazing birds of prey.

FIELD TRIPS

APRIL 27, MAY 4, MAY 11, MAY 18, 2013 - SATURDAY

Spring Saturday Mornings at Northwestern University's Campus. This area is a stopover for migrants of all kinds heading north. The May 4 trip will be included in the Spring Bird Count. Park on the lake side of the upper deck of the south parking lot off of Sheridan Rd. and Clark St., north of Clark St. beach, at 8:30 a.m. Leaders: Libby Hill with Josh Engel on April 27, Nancy Halliday on May 11 and Wayne Svoboda on May 4 & 18.

MAY 3, MAY 10, MAY 17, 2013 – FRIDAY

Fridays at Skokie Lagoons. These Friday trips pack a great list of warbler species during spring migration. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Forest Preserve parking lot north of Willow Rd. just east of the Edens Expressway. Leader: Joel Greenberg on May 3 and 17, Lynne Carpenter on May 10.

MAY 4, 2013 – SATURDAY

Perkins Woods Garlic Mustard Pull and Birding. Help rid the woods of this aggressive non-native weed. Perform a good deed, be among friends, and enjoy birds and wildflowers. Come for an hour or a morning, 10 a.m. to 12 noon. Perkins Woods is at Colfax and Ewing between Central St. and Golf Rd. in Evanston. Leader: Libby Hill.

MAY 4, 2013 – SATURDAY

Illinois State Spring Bird Count. Contact Joel Greenberg for Lake Co. assignments (630-725-6660). Contact Alan Anderson for Cook Co. assignments (casresearch@comcast.net or 847-390-7437).

MAY 8, 2013 – WEDNESDAY (PLEASE NOTE DATE HAS BEEN CHANGED!!!)

Ryerson Woods. Check out the spring migrants and returning breeders at this beautiful Lake County forest preserve. Meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Brushwood parking lot. Ryerson Woods is on Riverwoods Rd, northwest of Deerfield. Leader: Gary Hantsbarger.

MAY 15, 2013 – WEDNESDAY

The Grove, Glenview. Expect warblers and other passerines. Meet at 8:00 a.m. at The Grove: east side of Milwaukee Ave., just south of Lake Ave., in the second parking lot that leads to the Interpretive Center. Leader: Nancy Halliday

MAY 19 – SUNDAY

Jackson Park and Lakefront – Wooded Isle. We will look for migrating passerines. Meet at 7:00 a.m. Park south of the Museum of Science and Industry after driving on the east side of the building. Leader: Dick Young.

NEW! MAY 24 – FRIDAY

Weekend Getaway Trip for Kirtland's Warblers in Wisconsin. Limited availability. Contact Leader David B. Johnson for details at djohnsoda@comcast.net or 224-567-9650.

MAY 25 – SATURDAY

Swallow Cliff Woods, Palos. This half-day walk will target spring migrants including Hooded, Blue-winged, and Chestnut-sided warblers, Louisiana water-thrush, and Summer tanagers. Meet at 7 a.m. at McClaughry Springs on Kean Ave. The parking lot is one block south of Rte 83. Leader: Amar Ayyash.

JUNE 1 – SATURDAY

Illinois Beach State Park Whip-poor-wills. This unique trip will allow you a great chance to see Whip-poor-wills, a bird in serious decline, after hours in the South Unit of the State Park. Meet at 7:00 pm at the Nature Center parking lot to bird the area for local nesters prior to looking for the Whip-poor-wills. The Nature Center entrance is just west of the Illinois Beach Resort in the South Unit. Leader: Joel Greenberg.

NEW! JUNE 7-9 JUNE 2013 – FRIDAY – SUNDAY

Weekend Getaway Trip: 3-4 days in N. Wisconsin for summer breeding warblers. Contact leader David B. Johnson for details at djohnsoda@comcast.net or 224-567-9650.

NEW! : JUNE 22, 2013 – SATURDAY

Plum Creek Forest Preserve. Meet at 7:30am at the forest preserve parking lot on the east side of Burnham Rd., about 1 mile south of Sauk Trail. We'll spend the morning at Josh's favorite local summer birding spot, looking especially for Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows, Dickcissel, Yellow-breasted Chat, and White-eyed Vireo, which all breed there. Leader: Josh Engel.

JULY 21, 2013 – SUNDAY

Rollins Savanna. One of Lake County's hottest birding spots and home to nesting Least Bitterns, Sedge Wrens, Henslow's and Grasshopper Sparrows, and Bobolinks. Possible early shorebirds. Meet at 6:30 a.m. at the Washington Road parking area. Water and sun protection are good ideas for this 4-hour trip. Leader: Beau Schaefer

AUGUST 18, 2013 – SUNDAY - 7:15 A.M.

Calumet Sewage Ponds. Don't miss this opportunity to visit the region's premier shorebird site. Registration forms required by July 10. Trip limited to 25. Call or email Walter Marcisz for details and forms: wmarcisz@att.net or 773-646-3034 or 312-206-9889.