

Bird Calls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

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Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

A QUICK GUIDE TO NORTHWESTERN'S SWALLOWS IN SPRING By Libby Hill

The bridge near Regenstein Hall on Northwestern's south campus is the site of an amazing aerial display during late spring and early summer. No, it is not the Blue Angels. Performers are four species of swallows.

Swallows are most often seen on the wing, skimming insects off the water or out of the air with graceful precision. Three species are named for their nesting locations – Cliff, Barn, and Bank. The fourth, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, is named after the tiny hooks or barbs on the leading edge of their primaries. You can't see them, you can only feel them. All have the same basic shape, with long pointed wings designed for fast flying. Cliff, Bank and

Barn nest in colonies; the Northern Rough-winged is more likely to be a loner.

Bank Swallows (*Riparia riparia*) are small sand-colored birds with cream-colored bellies, dark brown necklaces and bright white throats. They carve tunnels in vertical sand or dirt cliffs always near water. Their nest holes are easily detected in the sandbank just south of the bridge and may lead to tunnels 40 inches long before arriving at the nest.

Northern Rough-winged Swallows (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) are very similar in appearance to Bank Swallows, with warm brown back and white underparts, but may be distinguished from the Bank Swallow, if

CONSERVATION COLUMN TO FEED OR NOT TO FEED

By Lloyd Davidson

Isn't that always the question? Whether by keeping well stocked bird feeders in our yards we are making seed addicts of local birds or simply helping to keep them alive? I'll come back to this at the end, but the main concern of this article is another effect that bird feeders have on bird survival; the discovery that they can act as fomites, i.e. inanimate objects responsible for transmitting infections, and the measures we can take to keep our feeders and bird baths safe for the birds that use them.



American Goldfinch by Tim Wallace.

As many of us remember, an epidemic of a bacterial eye disease called mycoplasmal conjunctivitis struck in 1994 and killed up to 60% of all eastern and mid-western US house finches by making it difficult for them to find food and escape predators. This disease first appeared

NEWS OF THE FLOCK

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBER:

*Cathy Ricciardi of Des Plaines
Bonnie Duman of Deerfield.*

*ENSBC is saddened by the death of
Walter Krawiec. More will appear in the
next issue of Bird Calls.*



Cliff Swallows on the nest by Tim Wallace.

CONSERVATION COLUMN CONTINUED FROM COVER

in poultry in the eastern US but jumped from there to songbirds. Its latest outbreaks have been in California and it is spreading among American goldfinches as well. Unfortunately, Andre Dhondt of Cornell University discovered that the bacterium causing this disease, *Mycoplasma gallisepticum*, is primarily transferred to healthy birds from bird feeders and bird baths that infected birds visited. Even worse, a new and very lethal strain of this disease has now appeared in North Carolina where, according to Dhont, "... it spreads much faster and the eye infections are more severe"

In addition, Scott McBurney has reported that a virulent form of trichomoniasis (or "Trich" for short—pronounced like "Trike") has recently appeared in Canada. This is a throat infection caused by the single-celled protozoan parasite *Trichomonis* that makes it unable for birds to swallow food. In England, where Trich first appeared, it killed more than 500,000 greenfinches, about 20% of the total population, in 2007 alone. Infections can be passed by both bird feeders and bird baths.

Still, according to Rob Robinson of the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), so far these diseases are only affecting a very few species, and bird feeders and bird baths are still safe for the majority of birds. Mike Toms at the BTO says that simple measures like regularly washing feeders and baths with clean water can greatly reduce infection rates. Also, mesh or metal-frame feeders are less likely to spread disease than feeders with only one or a very few points of access. I think this is because by spreading access over a larger, more general area, healthy birds are less likely to visit the exact spots where infected birds have fed.

So, do bird feeders make seed addicts of local birds? Two recent studies have shown that during both UK's winter (demonstrated by following the path of radioactive tracers placed in the feeder food) and Australia's summer (based on nest feeding observations of the Australian magpie) wild birds still primarily depend on natural foods and use feeders only for supplemental "snacks." Such studies have not, to my knowledge, been done in the Chicago area, however, where snow is sometimes very deep, and where I suspect feeder food is likely to be essential for the survival of at least some individual birds.

SWALLOWS IN SPRING CONTINUED FROM COVER

you can get a quick enough look, by its dull dingy throat that fades into a whitish belly. No necklace here. Even Audubon confused these two at first. Years ago, they nested in crevices in the rusty uprights of the metal retaining wall along the path to the bridge. These days, they fly over land and water but we haven't found nests. Their smooth, comparatively slow wingbeats and slightly squarish tails may distinguish them from the other performers.

Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) are mud-nesters with dark backs, orange bellies and deeply forked tails. They nest out of sight under the bridge, the only evidence being their incessant flight as they pick off insects over the water.

Cliff Swallows (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) are the stars of the show. Our human infra-

structure, such as architectural overhangs, bridges, and culverts, mimics the natural rocky walls and canyons of the original cliff swallow breeding grounds in the western United States. They have rounded tails, white bellies, buff-colored rumps, chestnut throats, and black heads with a distinctive white "headlamp" on the forehead. They perch at their nests in full view. They are a quarrelsome bunch and can often be seen attacking one another with their beaks, either on the wing or at mud holes. For several years, they have nested on the "cliff" on Regenstein Hall's east wall, but if you look around campus, you'll find their nests on the library and on Norris Center, often tucked into a corner. So far, they have those sites to themselves. It appears the House Sparrows haven't wised up to these new locations.



Common Redpoll
by Tim Wallace.

AUSTRALIAN BIRDER ASKS FOR ENSBC RESEARCH HELP.

Denise Goodfellow, author of *Birds of Australia's Top End* and *Quiet Snake Dreaming*, has asked ENSBC members to assist her in her Ph.D. project, on American couples who travel internationally as couples, by filling out a survey at http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=h3NCqTwur3H_2bPIbFtk_2bSpw_3d_3d

"Most clients in my 27 years of guiding birders in the Top End of Australia have come as couples," said Goodfellow. "Indeed, most American birders may travel as couples, both in the US and internationally. However, there is a dearth of research. I have found that couples may differ from individual birders. For instance, combined, they often have a broader range of interests. One might simply wish to list new birds while the other likes to see other fauna as well or is interested in visiting galleries or visiting friends as well. Through this questionnaire and other research I hope to understand better the motives and characteristics of American couples who travel together for the purpose of birding."

FROM THE ARCHIVES

1945-1949:

THE POST WAR YEARS

By Eleonora di Liscia

The Post War years saw the return of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service among other government agencies to Washington, DC.

"Evanston learns of this measure with regret because it means the loss of some of its most valued citizens and the severing of numerous friendly ties," bemoaned one Evanston Review editorial.

As a result, the Club was saddened to lose their "guardian angel" from the service, Phillip Dumont, who had served as program chair and gave numerous talks and bird walks. The Club even composed an ode "Goodbye to Phil," including the lines: "This One was sent from Washington, to live on Central Street, His name is Phil and as for knowledge, he really can't be beat. His sweet Fran Jean so generously kept family together, while Phil led bird walks and taught us much, in good and pesky weather."

Evanston at this time was only one of eight Illinois cities to have its own bird club. The Club continued to expand its offerings, conducting 9 or 10 meetings a year, many of which featured color movies, along with numerous field trips. Club dues were \$1.00 for adults and 50 cents for children.

Club members received four issues of Illinois Audubon.

The 1940's club featured speakers at informal business meetings in the homes of club officer's. Membership Chair Mrs. Boswell spoke on "Where to Look for Birds" at the May 10, 1946 annual meeting. If one only had 30 minutes to bird, Mrs. Boswell recommended: 1) Northwestern campus, 2) Golf course and the canal near Lincoln St., 3) Coast guard and west park. For an hour or more: 1) Memorial Park, 2) Harrison St. north of cemetery, 3) Gravel pits, one north, one south of Central St. ending, 4) Church St. woods, 5) Harms woods, 6) Bobolink Field, and 7) Warbler Lane. For half day: 1) Deer Grove Park, 2) Dundee Road, 3) Eustus Place, 4) Morton Arboretum, 5) McGinnis Slough and 6) Highways. (As BC Editor, I personally will award homemade cookies to anyone who can correctly identify where all these places were located.)

The Club continued to take an active role in conservation, even making it the theme of 1948. Delegates attended the monthly Conservation Council meetings. The Bird Club wrote letters to various government officials a) asking to cooperate on the "Gravel Pit project,"

b) protesting a bill on the use of live ducks as decoys, c) requesting a songbird sanctuary and other nature preserves be include in the future Illinois Beach State Park, and d) protesting the trapping of cardinals.

The Club opposed a plan for the Lincolnwood Conservation Project that would make swampy areas more usable for children. A

Club subcommittee was to work with others to further the usefulness of the Touhy Clay Pit as a bird refuge. The Club circulated a Petition regarding the questionable legality of the handling of the Doetsch Brothers property west of Ridge Road urging the City to take steps to purchase the property for a wildlife refuge.

At the November 1946 meeting, Mrs. J.N. Mannix of Winnetka spoke about her experiences attracting pheasant and quail in an abandoned garden. In spring, 1946, The Club recommended the movie "Bill and Coo," a full-length feature film enacted entirely by 273 birds.

To raise money, the Club sold seals and Traindex (a type of photo card). Some Club members

objected, causing President Alice Weaver to defend the practice:

"In Evanston because of so many diverse activities, a group must work harder, advertise more, and have better programs in order to reach and arouse the dormant interests of many individuals... Money was the item we lacked... We have left \$22.00 worth of seals and \$10.00 worth of Traindex. Doesn't this seem too large an amount for the Board to absorb? This material we have left to sell represents pure profit to the amount of \$32.00 and to equal this we would need 32 new members. This amount also will pay for two or three programs next year."

The decade that sadly began with the death of the Club's first President closed with the death of the second one (causing yours truly to wail "Oh, no!" while sifting through the archives in a crowded café). Mrs. Benton (Mary Hall) Schaub died at her home at 1040 Isabella, Wilmette. Besides ably serving the Club as President from 1939-1945, she was a volunteer bird bander, director for the Illinois Audubon Society and an art teacher at Cleveland school.



Sandhill Cranes by Tim Wallace.

CALENDAR

FIELD TRIPS

Sunday, July 18, 2010, 7:15AM
Lake Calumet Sewage Ponds

Don't miss this opportunity to visit the region's premier shorebird site. Meet at Sewage Ponds. Directions: From I-94, exit at 130th St. Go west about 1/4 mile to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District sign. Turn right on the paved road and proceed to the guard house. Trip ends around 11 a.m. Limit: 20. Sign-up for this trip is required. Registration forms will be available through Libby Hill, 847-475-2096 or libbyhill@comcast.net. Completed forms must be turned in by June 10 for this trip. Forms must be sent by snail mail to 2715 Woodland Rd., Evanston, IL 60201 and must include a copy of a government-issued photo ID. Hosted by The Evanston North Shore Bird Club.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER

Don't forget! ENSBC memberships expired in April. Thanks to all those who have sent in their checks. If you haven't renewed yet, you will receive a second notice with this mailing of Bird Calls. Please fill it in and mail it, along with your check, to **ENSBC, P.O. Box 1313, Evanston, IL 60204**. Thank you!

DID YOU KNOW?

Evanston North Shore bird Club dues and donations qualify as charitable contributions on your federal income tax return if you itemize your deductions. Just one more reason to join ENSBC and to contribute to our Ruth Milgrom Fund for extra-special speakers.

DO YOU MIND!

By Eleonora di Liscia

I was rejoicing in the return of spring migration. One afternoon, with great anticipation, I ventured into my back yard to check out my trees and bushes. Imagine my delight at instantly viewing a Swainson's Thrush on my brush pile.

No sooner did I spot the bird, when



"Do you mind?" (Blackburnian Warbler by Jerry Goldner.)

it flew to a tree and glared sternly at me with an expression I can only describe as "miffed."

"Do you mind!" demanded the Thrush.

"I beg your pardon?" I responded, befuddled.

"For goodness sake, can't I even hunt for grub in peace. You birders are always staring at me. I forage, and you stare. I eat, and you stare. Didn't your mothers ever teach you it's rude?"

"Well, I..."

Before I could say more, a Blackburnian chimed in. (Of course, I was thrilled to see one in my yard, but now I was afraid to say so.)

"It's so true," said the Blackburnian. "I mean, I'm stunning. I get that. But honestly, isn't there something about your own species you could focus on? All I hear is, 'Oooo, look at the flame-orange throat.' Like I would want to be compared with something that roasts birds."

"Gee, I'm so sorry," I said, not knowing what else to say. "We certainly don't mean to offend you."

The two birds began conversing with each other.

"The other day, I was about to make

my moves on my sweetie, and wouldn't you know, there were the birders. Killed the mood. She flew right off," said the Swainson's.

"I hate it when that happens," agreed the Blackburnian. "One time, I was in this place, I think it was called Arizona. I don't know how I got there, but I was hanging out in this little park, and my God, I thought they'd never leave. Birders were flashing lights in my face and pointing at me from dawn till dusk."

"You know what I do sometimes? I fly behind them when their backs are turned," said the Swainson's.

"That's a good one," agreed the Blackburnian. "The ducks, they wait for the birders and then move to the other side of the pond! Is that hilarious! And how about turning on the old cloaking device, huh?"

"I knew it!" I interjected. "You do have cloaking devices! Just like in Star Trek!"

The Swainson's and Blackburnian both turned abruptly toward me and glared. "Do you mind! This is a private conversation."

And with that, they both flew off. Gosh, I would have apologized.