BirdCalls

Newsletter of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club

SEPTEMBER 2015 www.ensbc.org

Northern Shrike by Nancy Halliday

MAKING IT HAPPEN:
CHARLOTTE ADELMAN AND THE CENTENNIAL PARK PRAIRIE

By Eleonora di Liscia

Driving by the corner of Wilmette and Crawford on a summer day, an observer is treated to the swathes of purple and yellow flowers that make up Wilmette's Centennial Park Prairie. At night, tens of thousands of fireflies glitter while swallows swoop and bats flutter overhead.

A time traveler would have seen wetland at this spot which later gave way to a farm. This little piece of prairie paradise, however, did not take root on its own. It took someone with the persistence and ability to make it happen. And it took a village willing to help.

Charlotte Adelman, propelled by her passion for native plants, originally approached Wilmette about converting the lawn-covered retention area into prairie. Charlotte noted how only about 2,000 acres of prairie remain out of the 22 million once found in the Prairie State. (She and her husband, Bernard L. Schwartz, are the authors of ***The Midwestern Native Garden*** and ***Prairie Directory of North America.***)

"I thought, why don't we create a prairie in Wilmette? I came up with my idea and I approached the park district, and I said if they would let me create a prairie at that retention basin, I would pay for it," said Adelman.

In 2009, Adelman made her pitch before the park district committee.

"A supervisor said that a prairie would be the best use of the site. He probably felt that way because a storm water retention basin is sometimes wet and always damp. On one occasion, it rained so much someone was kayaking in it, and geese were swimming. Mowing it can be a problem."

Eagle scout Joe Bruner's 2010 photo of Centennial Park Prairie can also be seen at http://www.wilmettepark.org/prairie-garden.

Charlotte now had permission, but there were delays. Enter the Boy Scouts. High school student Joe Bruner wanted to earn his Eagle Scout badge and became interested in helping.

"This is what made it possible to finally go forward," Charlotte said. "I ordered the plants. I worked with the landscaper to make sure they were true native plants and that it was laid out the way I wanted it to be. My vision was to have large areas of the same plant. The prairie is at a busy corner so it's mainly seen by people driving in cars. I wanted them to be pleasantly surprised by something beautiful and dramatic and eye popping. There would be large areas of purple and large areas of yellow, so that's how I designed it," said Charlotte.

First, the park district moved soil around the land bordering the basin. Planting requires a clean surface. Then, Joe directed a team of scouts to plant the seedlings that Charlotte

continued on pg. 2

THE CENTENNIAL PARK PRAIRIE
CONTINUED FROM COVER

had ordered from the Prairie Moon Nursery in Minnesota.

"This first planting was June 2010. Joe took a picture in Sept. 2010, and you could already get an idea of how beautiful it had become," said Charlotte.

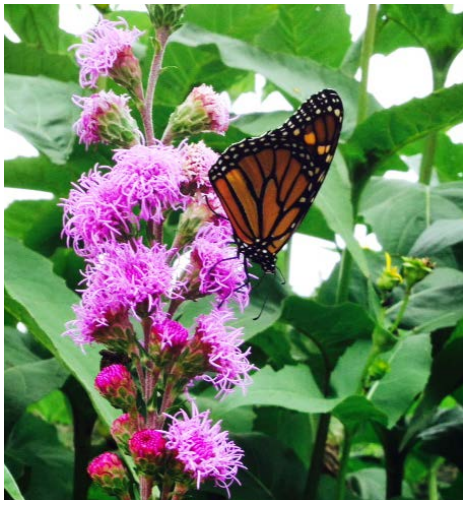
Later that summer, the park district killed the vegetation in the retention basin. In November, the park district hired a company to machine inject the seeds that Charlotte had bought. In 2011, the retention basin was now growing the seeds planted in 2010, so the park district mowed to allow the native plants' roots to grow and to prevent shading out by competing big weeds.

In 2012, Charlotte continued planting and the prairie "was allowed just to grow, and it grew. The vision that I had did occur because the prairie has these large dramatic areas of color, which are also not just for the people to see but to attract butterflies.

"From 2013 on it's just been growing, and I have kept planting. I have been going there at least once a week to weed. Over the years, the park district has assigned some staff to help me weed, because nonnative invasive plants are a big problem. And even in this prairie, you think how did they get there? Like all contemporary landscapes, it needs consistent attention," she said, referring especially to the Eurasian Canadian Thistle.

The prairie now provides important habitat for native butterflies, bees and other insects. Eurasian plants do not provide the habitat required for native insects which are in turn necessary for birds to feed their young.

"Some people were skeptical," Charlotte said. "There was this guy who would walk with his dogs, and he said I don't like that at all. And I said, 'Why don't you look at it a little differently. Look at the goldfinches and other birds flying here. Look at the butterflies. They are nectaring. Look at the dragonflies'. 'Oh, OK.' A couple weeks later, he came up and said 'You know, you've convinced me. I really like it now.' I go places and people thank me for creating the prairie. Both this year and last year, Red-winged Blackbirds nested in the basin, and that's pretty exciting because it shows it's a living ecosystem that is actually supporting nesting birds."



Above: Charlotte Adelman,
Below: Meadow Blazing star with Monarch.
Photos by Elsa Malinsky

CONSERVATION COLUMN: CONDOR SURVIVAL

By Lloyd Davidson

The California condor, with a wingspan of about 10 feet, is America's largest bird and one of its most endangered, due to the twin threats of lead poisoning and electrocution by power utility lines.

The lead poisoning occurs when hunters kill a deer, for example, and remove the most desirable meat but leave behind the intestines and other less desirable tissues, along with at least some of the embedded bullets that killed it. When ingested along with the animal's remains, these lead bullets can cause deadly lead poisoning. There has been a supposed partial ban on lead cartridges throughout the condors' range but this has been largely ineffectual, either because the rules are not stringent enough or because of non-enforcement.

In 1980, all 22 of the last remaining condors were trapped and removed from the wild and raised thereafter in protective captivity until their numbers recovered sufficiently that they could be reintroduced into the wild. Reintroduction began in 1992 and there are now about 150 of these magnificent birds living in the mountains of California and Arizona.

The threat of their extinction persists, however, and their survival currently depends on two long-term, human-intensive, protection programs that require that each of the wild birds be trapped at least twice a year for training and testing for lead poisoning.

The danger from their interaction with power lines is due to their great wingspan that can contact two wires at once, causing their electrocution. To save the birds from this danger, the captured birds are given utility wire aversion training while in captivity, which consists of giving them mild but painful shocks when their wings simultaneously touch two utility-like wires in their training pens. They soon learn to avoid such lines and since this shock treatment was instituted deaths from electrocution in the wild have dropped from 66% of the population over its lifetime to less than 20%.

The problem of lead poisoning has been addressed by sending the 20% of captured birds that are found to have lead in their blood to the San Diego Zoo where they are treated with the chemical

continued on pg. 4

MAKING IT HAPPEN:
THE CLARK STREET BEACH BIRD SANCTUARY

By Eleonora di Liscia

The patch of land just west of Northwestern University's sailing beach on Sheridan was scrubby and neglected. If you were birding, you had to skirt around boat trailers and an occasional scantily clothed sunbather. But you could also find some pretty terrific birds during migration, such as a Summer Tanager or Yellow-breasted Chat.

But then Northwestern decided it needed a new visitor center. The scrubby patch that had attracted migrating birds along with the cottonwoods where Baltimore Orioles and Warbling Vireos nested had to go.

In another community, that might have been that. But this was Evanston. The scrubby area might be gone, but the potential for some sort of bird sanctuary still exists in the newly designated Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary located on the north end of Clark Street Beach.

The genesis for the sanctuary began when Libby Hill saw an article in a Northwestern publication complete with a drawing of the four-story glass building.

"When I saw a drawing of this new visitor center, I knew the time was up for this little wonderful, wild place. I didn't know why the wild place was there, but I just knew it had grown up and it was a great place to bird," said Libby.

Because the proposal included windows that would endanger birds migrating along the lakefront, Libby wanted to be sure the complex used bird safe glass. (It does in the top three parking garage floors.) Further, Libby knew that under city ordinance, Northwestern would be required to pay Evanston for every tree removed ($173,850 in total), and she wanted that money to go toward a new sanctuary. Libby contacted Northwestern about the building and the Evanston mayor about creating the sanctuary as a citizen's project.

From there, Libby along with ENSBC member Judy Pollock worked with city staff to learn what could be done. Judy further served as a consultant to the sanctuary design.

"We found out how much acreage we were going to lose, and how much we would like to replace. We also took city staff down to Montrose to show them what a bird sanctuary would look like," Libby said.

The city agreed to take what was left of the wild patch along with part of Clark Street Beach. While the project had initial funds for planning and planting, no money was earmarked for maintenance.

"So it seemed to me that since this was a bird sanctuary that somebody needed to be in charge of not necessarily doing all the work but of bringing together the people who wanted to do the work, and that it made sense for ENSBC to do that," said Libby.

As a result, the ENSBC board voted to take on the sanctuary through Evanston's "Adopt a Park," program. ENSBC would serve as a communications center and would work with Evanston Treekeepers, Citizens for a Greener Evanston, Lakedance and the Ecology Center in supporting the sanctuary.

"Anybody could have a program there. Anybody could take a monitoring day. Anybody could take a work day. But ENSBC would coordinate the activities and make sure we were all communicating. ENSBC would maintain the kiosk that would let people know what activities are taking place, what plants are planted and what birds people are seeing," Libby explained.

Libby is hopeful that club members will volunteer to help.

"There is the opportunity to monitor. We need to make sure the place is safe so if a fence is broken, we need to report that to the city. We need volunteers to get out invasive species, we may need to replace plants that succumb to weather and rabbits, and we need a plan to raise money to pay for maintenance, which could include new plants," she said.

Planting will begin September 8th. On Sept. 26th and October 3rd, ENSBC is sponsoring "Birds and Bagels at 10:30 a.m. at the sanctuary following the club's Northwestern campus bird walks. A dedication ceremony is slated for October 17th at 3:30 p.m. Visit **www.ensbc.org** for details.

Money for the sanctuary can be donated through the Evanston Parks Foundation. Checks should be made out to the Evanston Parks Foundation and must state "Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary" on the memo line. **Mail checks to Evanston Parks Foundation, City of Evanston, 2100 Ridge Ave, Evanston, IL 60201.**

Brown Thrasher Eggs in a Nest. *Photo by Lloyd Davidson*

MAP OF LIFE WEBSITE AS THE ULTIMATE FIELD GUIDE *By Lloyd Davidson*

While this is still a work in progress, the Map of Life (**https://mol.org/**) website and app promises to become an exceptionally useful field guide for use around the world. This project was launched in 2012 at Yale University as a means of compiling range maps of all living plant and animal species and now includes photographs and descriptions of species along with maps of their distribution. It works on both iOS and Android platforms and is available through any computer with Web access. Both scientific and common names can be searched for many species, though scientific names are more reliable. The range of groups available so far include Amphibians, Birds, Bumblebees, Butterflies, Cacti, Conifers, Dragonflies, Fishes, Mammals, Moths, Palms, Reptiles, Trees and Turtles, but the list will be expanded in the future as more dependable data becomes available. Flowering plants in general, for example, is a major group missing from the current list.

One of the benefits of this application is that it combines the GPS or other data about a device's current location on the globe and generates a list of species that might be found in that specific area. Species from this list can then easily be explored through their photographs and descriptions. It is also possible to add your own geo-located, time stamped species observations, although it's not yet clear how such information will be vetted and used to improve or change species range maps.

How this and other such resources, e.g. **www.iNaturalist.org**, might become economically sustainable is not yet clear. Traditionally field guides are supported through their book sales and perhaps it might become necessary to institute a small subscription charge or per-use micropayments system to support such endeavors over the long term. Currently there are an average of about 500 unique daily users of the MOL.org application but this number will grow quickly as awareness of its advantages spreads among naturalists, bird watchers and others interested in learning about their natural environments in more detail. Surely, the more people know about the biodiversity within their surroundings the more interest there will be in protecting it.

LLOYD DAVIDSON IS A REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR OF BOTH ARTICLES AND PHOTOS TO BIRD CALLS.

You can see more of Lloyd's photos, along with those of his also super-talented spouse Arden's, in the exhibit ***"Nature as Art: Designs and Patterns, A Photographic Exhibit by Lloyd and Arden Davidson"*** from September 1 through 30 at the Evanston Public Library, 2nd Floor. Opening for the exhibit will be held Tuesday, Sept. 8 from 7 to 9 p.m. Lloyd will also give a talk on "Chicago Area Insects and Your Garden," to the Northtown Garden Society at Warren Park, 6601 N. Western Ave., Chicago on Sept. 3 at 7:15 p.m. All events are open to the public.

Kildeer Family. *Photo by Lloyd Davidson*

Brown Thrasher at James Park Community Garden. *Photo by Lloyd Davidson*

CONSERVATION COLUMN: CONTINUED FROM PG 2

calcium-EDTA that sequesters such metals and allows them to be harmlessly excreted.

Through this intervention program annual mortality rates of birds in the wild have dropped from 38% to 5.4% and if the rate can be brought down to 5.3% the population might become self-sustaining. Even then, however, until utility wires are required by regulation to be separated by more than 10 feet from one another and lead ammunition is entirely outlawed, there is probably no long-term way of protecting these magnificent birds other than by continuing these human-intensive and expensive programs of capture, aversion training, lead treatment and re-release each year.

Bird Calls Editor: Eleonora di Liscia • Bird Calls Designer: Chris Tomczak