



The Goldfinch

February
2011

Daviess County Audubon Society, www.daviessaudubon.net

U of E professors will share wetland work at Feb. 1 meeting

Two professors from the University of Evansville will discuss environmental research at Vectren Conservation Park at the Feb. 1 meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society.

Dr. Cris Hochwender is an evolutionary ecologist in the Department of Biology at U of E. His research has focused on plant-herbivore interactions, but more recently, his work has explored issues related to restoration ecology.

Dr. Don Batema is a wetland ecologist who supervises the labs at the Department of Chemistry at U of E. In addition to studying wetland habitats and aquatic invertebrates, Dr. Batema is deeply involved in ornithological studies.

Together with a colleague from the chemistry department at UE, Drs. Batema and Hochwender are exploring environmental issues at Vectren Conservation Park (VCP), an 1,100-acre property on the Wabash River in southwestern Indiana. In addition to giving an overview of their work at VCP, their talk will introduce wetland ecology and the importance of wetland restoration and discuss the bird and plant diversity of the site.



Michael Autin, left, watches a Harlan's hawk through his spotting scope. Also watching are Charles and Laura Morris.

Westward, ho!

Habitat diversity pays off at West Daviess CBC

Western Daviess County was destination birding for bird watchers from as far away as Louisville Jan. 1 as 53 species and 25,258 individuals were spotted at the Daviess County Audubon Society/Kentucky Ornithological Society Christmas bird count.

CBC regulars were joined by David Ayer of Rockport, Ind., superintendent of Lincoln State Park in Spencer County, and Michael Autin of Louisville. Both made their presence felt, displaying superior birding skills and encouraging Daviess members to cope with the dim lighting conditions.

Ayer joined Bill and Brenda Little and Ken Hurm. They were in Jerry Bailey's yard when a flock of geese flew. At Ayer's urging, they took another

look and saw some greater white-fronted geese. "That was kind of neat," Ayer said. Golden-crowned kinglet was another highlight.

Autin may have been perfectly content to stay at Diamond Lake for hours, marveling at the campground's diverse habitat. He was a big reason his team – Charles and Laura

See *Westward*, Page 6

February calendar

*Meeting, 7 p.m. Feb. 1, First Christian Church, Seventh and J.R. Miller Blvd.

*Urban Girls/Urban Birds program, 4 p.m. Feb. 3 and 17, Girls Inc., Rolling Heights addition

*Board meeting, 11:30 a.m. Feb. 14, home of Judy Adams, 2245 Canonero Loop Drive.

*Field trip to Peabody Wildlife Management Area or Sloughs WMA, TBA.

*Backyard Bird Count, Feb. 18-21, community count at Joe Ford Nature Center, 2 p.m. Feb. 20.

Exploring artistry and restoration

Shea, Stratton discuss feasibility of native grasses plot

The time and cost of establishing a native grasses plot took center stage at the Jan. 2 meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society,

Margaret Shea of Goshen's Dropseed Nursery and David Stratton, the DCAS member who is spearheading a native grasses project for the David C. Adkisson Greenbelt Park, shared their thoughts about the project. The chapter has received more than \$500 in collaborative funding from the National Audubon Society to start it.

The Brescia University art professor said a site has yet to be chosen, and he is working with Anita Arends, Nature Resources Conservation Service of the USDA, to pursue matching



Margaret Shea discusses native plants.

funds. He is hoping to marry the concepts of ecological restoration and landscape art to teach the public about Kentucky's native grasses.

These grasses are a part of Kentucky's history, noted Margaret Shea, a Goshen native plant

nursery owner. Studies have estimated that up to 2 million acres of prairie was once present in the state. Now, the Nature Preserves Commission says, .5% remain.

Native grasses are a misnomer, she noted, because of the diversity of the plants.

"They're spectacularly beautiful, really diverse. It's not just the grasses. It's not just the plants. It's all of the other animals that are a part of it."

Restoration doesn't require a re-creation of state prairies. It can be accomplished on a smaller scale, for educational purposes. They also can be "functional" spaces to attract birds and butterflies, with the proper mix of grasses and flowering plants.

The selection of the plants will be critical to the project's success and public acceptance. It depends greatly on how much sun an area gets and how moist the land is. She emphasized the use of Kentucky species,

See Grasses, Page 5

Brescia to feature landscape art exhibit

What is landscape art all about?

Come see for yourself at "Landscapes," a new mixed-media sculpture exhibit by Doug DeWitt, an Illinois restoration ecologist for Tallgrass Restoration.

In the winter 2011 edition of "Way of the Wilds," author Kerry Leigh wrote that DeWitt turned to landscape art, created with found-object materials, "in an effort to relate his experience closer to the expression of the landscape itself."

"Each piece becomes physically, rather than visually, literal because the materials are those that make up his experience with the landscape instead of simply his view of it."

Just like his friend David Stratton's proposal, the art is blended with restoration ecology to help the land regain its health.

"DeWitt sees the removal of invasive species as stretching the canvas and starting the process. Existing and reintroduced native plants provide the textures and color palate," Leigh wrote. "Light, wind, soil, fire, water, creatures and time all combine to create the composition, or work of art."

His show will remain in the Anna Eaton Stout Art Gallery from Jan. 29 – March 5. The gallery, on the second floor of the Campus Center, is open from 8 to 4:30 p.m. weekdays. An opening reception will be held from 7 to 9 p.m. Jan. 29.



"Shred" is one of the pieces in the Doug DeWitt exhibit. (Photo courtesy of David Stratton).

Girls Inc. program to focus on urban birds

Daviess County Audubon educators are launching an Urban Girls/Urban Birds program this month, hoping to develop the next generation of bird watchers.

It's an extensive program, one that will be conducted from 4 to 5 p.m. on the first and third Thursday of the month from February through May at Girls Inc.'s Rolling Heights headquarters. Third- and fourth-graders will work to learn about 15 urban birds through sight and sound.

While all visitors to the property will be celebrated, in its bid to get a Cornell University Celebrate Urban Birds mini-grant, the team is required to work primarily with project birds designated by CU. That has been tweaked slightly, because some birds are simply not seen in the city of Owensboro. Birds that will be studied include: cedar waxwing, European starling, house finch, house sparrow, killdeer, mourning dove, peregrine falcon, rock pigeon, blue jay, northern cardinal, American crow, American robin, Baltimore oriole, barn swallow, brown-headed cowbird.

"It's going to be a learning experience for me," said Courtney Calhoun, Rolling Heights campus director. Director Tish Correa-Osborne is very excited about the possibilities, being an avid bird watcher herself.

DCAS president Brenda Little said the instruction would spread across many disciplines, with an emphasis on the arts. Working with pre-molded ceramic birds, nature journaling and music-based sessions also are being considered.

Education team members visited Girls Inc. to investigate how its habitat can be more bird-friendly. Newcomers were impressed by the possibilities. The main room has a covered back porch which opens up into a garden area. They have a small amount of feeders, which will immediately be multiplied to encourage more birds to come before the first session Feb. 3.

It's a continuation of work education chairwoman Winny Lin has done with Girls Inc. She planted some irises and daylilies on the



From left: Brenda Little, Judy Adams, Tish Correa-Osborne, Winny Lin, Kenny Lin and Courtney Calhoun.

property, as well as a butterfly bush and blackberry bush. Other habitat upgrades are forthcoming. Members were reluctant to immediately tackle the invasive honeysuckle along the property, noting that it's providing the birds with cover.

That habitat is similar to that of neighborhood school Estes Elementary, the site of several school-based nature programs.

The program will culminate around Mother's Day with a celebration event featuring 10 minutes of bird watching from which the data gathered will be submitted to Cornell's Lab of Ornithology.

Trip postponed; returns to Goose Pond, Peabody possible

Snow scuttled plans to travel Jan. 22 to the Sloughs Wildlife Management Area, but field trips will be discussed at the Feb. 1 meeting.

DCAS members will be asked if they would prefer to reschedule the Sloughs trip or go to Peabody Wildlife Management Area Feb. 12. Both areas will feature waterfowl and other winter birds..

Also being explored is a trip to the Greene County Marsh Madness Festival in Linton, Ind., March 5. The second annual event at Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area celebrates the early spring migration of sandhill cranes. Goose Pond regular Charles Morris said he is hopeful that a whooping crane could be spotted amid the sandhills.

Along with bus and self-guided tours, there will be other educational programs – including one presented by the Hardy Lake Bird Rehab program – and other displays and arts and crafts in the Linton area, about 3 hours north of Owensboro.

Count backyard bounty in Cornell's national event

On these endless drab winter days, is there anything better than a splash of color at the bird feeder? Or the oak tree in the yard?

This year's Great Backyard Bird Count is set for Feb. 18-21. Co-sponsored by the Cornell University School of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, this mid-winter count provides important data for scientists. The vast area of the United States – and its millions of birds – makes it important for citizens to watch their backyards and feeders to monitor bird populations. Some of the questions scientists wonder about include:

-- How will this winter's snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations?

-- Where are winter finches and other species that appear in large numbers during some years but not others?

-- How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years?

-- How are diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?

-- What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural and natural areas?

-- Are any birds undergoing worrisome declines that point to the need for conservation attention?

The project is ideal for those reluctant to brave icy conditions and cold temperatures that have bedeviled the region ... practically since Thanksgiving. Simply count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count. You can count each day or just some of the days and count in different places. Keep a separate list of birds for each day and each location. For each type of bird seen, count the most seen at any one time.

2. Enter results on the Great Backyard Bird Count website,

<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/>.

Planning is under way for GBBC preparation with Girls Inc. as part of the Urban Girls/Urban Birds program and at Tamarack Elementary.

In addition, the Joe Ford Nature Center, behind GRAAD on U.S. 60, will be hosting a Great Backyard Bird Count event from 2 to 4 p.m. Feb. 20.

At the center, families will be counting birds around the Ford Center property and adjacent part of the David C. Adkisson Greenbelt Park, including those which visit the suet, thistle and seed feeders at the center's Bird Sanctuary. It's a great way to learn about winter birds and how we can help them when food supply is rapidly dwindling. Bring your binoculars and join the fun!



A mourning dove feeds at Brushwood Apartments.



Sandhills fly overhead. (Photo by Bill Fogle)

Sandhills highlight day trip

Ken Hurm, Bill Fogle and Charles Morris found a jackpot of cranes during a day trip Jan. 15 to Barren Lake. Stopping for directions at Barren Lake lodge, the trio were told to go down U.S. 31E about 3 to 5 miles and look in cornfields on both sides of the road.

"On the right side of the road, we saw and guesstimate 350 to 500 sandhills," Morris reported.

Other birds on the trip included: American crow, white-breasted nuthatch, northern flicker, eastern bluebird, downy woodpecker, European starling, dark-eyed junco, house finch, northern cardinal, blue jay, red-bellied woodpecker, red-tailed hawk, black vulture, turkey vulture, tufted titmouse, mallard, ring-billed gull, wild turkey, bufflehead, pileated woodpecker, great blue heron, Carolina wren, Canada goose and hairy woodpecker.

Show of sympathy is appreciated

Mike and Sherry Henshaw expressed thanks for support and those who contributed to a Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn meal for the family after the death of Mike's father:

"Thank you much for the thoughts, prayers and for the BBQ. You are a true group of friends."

Check received for light show

The Daviess County Audubon Society was presented a check for \$720 at the Jan. 20 meeting of Daviess Fiscal Court for the chapter's participation at Christmas for Panther Creek. Thanks to all who volunteered!

From the President's Perch

Gender blend brings idea mix to Audubon

By Brenda Little

I often think about the things I like about the Audubon Society: our proud history, the fun that goes with on-going learning, friends who share the desire to make the world a better place all the while mixing recreation with education in face of the challenges involved with being environmentalists, the chance to get to know the best and brightest in environmental research and leadership, and the diversity of our members.

It was when I read about another aspect of the Audubon Society in Bird Watcher's Digest last year that I decided to write about yet "another thing," another very good thing, in our February newsletter. Did you know that in our club, from coast to coast and border to border, the two sexes are about equally represented? That makes us different from many organizations that tend to be heavily populated by one sex or the other.

Having a balanced ratio between men and women makes for a good mix of ideas, approaches to problem solving, traits, talents and group harmony. I often think of how glad I am that I am half of a couple in which both of us enjoy nature, the outdoors, birding, the Audubon Society. But I think it is just as fortunate for our members who are single or whose spouses are not part of our flock that we are made up of both genders. It is just one more facet of diversity that makes us an exciting organization.

And so I chose February, the month when we celebrate affection to think about the affection we share as friends who love to share the fun and excitement that comes from an appreciation of nature with a mixture of feminine and masculine viewpoints.

And being as this will be my last February column as president of DCAS, I must pay tribute to my husband's favorite holiday, and to good ole Punxsutawney Phil, who promises us that spring will surely come, maybe not as soon as we wish, but surely.



David Stratton's latest creation, sponsored by the family of J.D. Bailey, salutes backyard birds on West Parrish Avenue.

Grasses

From Page 2

emphasized the use of Kentucky species, with a mix of short and tall grasses and flowering plants.

Possible grasses include "short" grasses (three feet tall) such as little bluestem, side oats gramma and the fragrant prairie dropseed. Tall grasses (which can reach up to 8 feet tall) reviewed included: Indian grass, big bluestem. Flowering plants include: purple coneflowers, butterfly milkweed, rattlesnake mast, bee balm, slender mountain mist, asters and ashy sunflowers.

But introducing these colorful plants requires a lot of work – and time. Members would need to use pesticide to get rid of existing vegetation for an entire growing season before doing any planting, because these native plants are very poor at competing for survival.

Two options were presented. If the chapter were to seed the area, she recommended drill seeding, ¼ inch deep. The project would not be cost-prohibitive. She estimated it would cost about \$250 for enough seed to plant for a quarter-acre.

But, it does require patience. She sums up the process like this: "The first year it sleeps, the second year it creeps and the third year it leaps." It's not until that third year when the flowering plants take hold, making it attractive.

More enthusiasm was shown for using plant plugs, which would create a fuller area by the second year. Chapter members are mindful of the need to make it palatable to greenbelt neighbors.

This will be labor-intensive, requiring watering, mowing on high setting and weed control, particularly before it's established in its second year. Active management is required to prevent the spread of invasive species – like honeysuckles and lespedeza – or woody species -- from overrunning it.

This is the latest greenbelt art project for Stratton. He recently erected his third "Birds of the Greenbelt" sculpture off West Parrish Avenue, just off the parking lot of the shopping center anchored by Kmart.

The backyard bird salute features blue jay, robin, Carolina wren, eastern bluebird, indigo bunting, cardinal and American goldfinch and Carolina chickadee.



From left: Rose Ann Radzelovage, Carolyn Williams, Henry Connor and Jill Flackskam enjoy soup at Jan Howard's home after a morning of counting birds.

Westward

From Page 2

Morris and Mary Kissel -- had more than 40 species themselves, including red-breasted nuthatch. He was beyond thrilled to scope out a Harlan's hawk, a western subspecies of a red-tailed hawk. But, others had their moments. Laura Morris alerted the car to a large bird of prey, which turned out to be a bald eagle. Mary Kissel was startled by a barred owl staring at her from the side of a bridge near Curdsville.

Horned larks are so elusive, they're always a thrill. Jill Flackskam, Henry Connor and Carolyn Williams saw more than 80, and Madeline Oetinger was delighted to see her first as she and Brenda and Tony Eaden visited Ben Hawes Park and checked out feeders.

Rose Ann Radzelovage tallied feeder birds at the Joe Ford Nature Center but had better luck at Waymond Morris Park, where she saw seven horned larks. On the circle's other end, Fran and Lynn Tichenor saw 20 Eurasian collared doves. Howard and Pat Augenstein also traveled the byways of the county, part of 180.5 miles traveled by the group.

Species recorded included: Canada goose, 203; greater white-fronted goose, 21; gadwall, 12; mallard, 75; wild turkey, 14; turkey vulture, 1; bald eagle, 1; northern harrier, 1; sharp-shinned hawk, 2; American kestrel, 48; red-tailed hawk, 20; Cooper's hawk, 3; rock pigeon, 291; Eurasian collared dove, 91; mourning dove, 216; barred owl, 1; belted kingfisher, 2; flicker, 19; red-bellied woodpecker, 35; downy woodpecker, 19; hairy woodpecker, 2; yellow-rumped warbler, 4; blue jay, 85; American crow, 35; common grackle, 5,029; European starling, 3,393; red-winged blackbird, 10,160; rusty blackbird, 1; yellow bellied sapsucker, 1; golden-crowned kinglet, 5; horned lark, 320; Carolina chickadee, 34; tufted titmouse, 11; white-breasted nuthatch, 5; red-breasted nuthatch, 2; Carolina wren, 9; cardinal, 111; eastern bluebird, 56; American robin, 49; northern mockingbird, 44; tree sparrow, 2; song sparrow, 36; house sparrow, 356; field sparrow, 12; white-throated sparrow, 18; white-crowned sparrow, 2; Eastern towhee, 9; dark-eyed junco, 39; eastern meadowlark, 4; brown-headed cowbird, 4,252; house finch, 63; American goldfinch, 33; swamp sparrow, 4.

Love of watching birds ageless

Much of the DCAS mission revolves around educating young people, but it's also good to be reminded that learning is a lifelong process. The Goldfinch received a letter from Thelma Anderson of an Ohio County assisted living center, where J.D. Bailey, Brenda Little's dad resides. She wanted to express gratitude for Bill and Brenda Little and others who maintain the bird feeders at the center.

“I wish to express my gratitude to the volunteers from the Audubon Society who have tended to the bird feeders outside the assisted living where I moved last May. I have never had a good window for bird watching until I moved here. I will be 97 years old the 5th of February, and I have enjoyed watching the beautiful birds outside my window immensely. It is my only contact with the outdoors.

“My granddaughter took me to Rural King this fall, and I picked out the prettiest red barn-style feeder which now hangs outside my window. I have turned my chair to an angle where I can watch the birds all day. When my family comes to visit, we all take delight in naming the birds even when we have to wait for the blackbirds to leave so the smaller birds can get something to eat. Even my 5-year-old granddaughter knows the bird species.”

“As I thank you for tending to my feeder and the other feeders you fill for others, I want also to thank Kathy Bevil, the owner of the assisted living, for keeping a good supply of bird seed on hand so ‘my birds’ visit the garden outside my window every day. Bless all of you for the beauty and joy you bring into the lives of so many people.

“P.S. But I do have a crick in my neck from straining to see the birds for hours every day.

Collect plastic bottle caps

Have plastic bottle caps lying around? They're being collected at the Joe Ford Nature Center on behalf of Debbie Newman, West Louisville Elementary School teacher. With 250 pounds, the school can turn them into a recycling center, which would use them to create a bench for their new school.