THE GOLDFINCH



Daviess County Audubon Society

www.daviessaudubon.org

December 2008

Classrooms on the water

ORSANCO floating lab brings kids close to river's residents

The Ohio River served as a classroom for more than 300 students during the week of Nov. 8 who boarded the P.A. Denny River Education Center for a memorable adventure in environmental learning.

Members of the Daviess
County Audubon Society manned
one of four education stations for
the Ohio River Valley Water
Sanitation Commission's four-hour
education cruises. Carolyn
Williams, Jill Flachskam, Charles
and Laura Morris, Judy Adams and
Mary Kissel put kids from fourth
grade to high school through the
paces of the first-ever waterbird
edition of "Who Am I?" where kids
used fold-out Kentucky bird



Daviess County High School students look for birds on the Ohio River.

identification guides to figure out which green duck was which and other puzzlers.

In addition, color photographs of each bird were shared to reinforce identification. This gave educators a chance to share their own expertise about each bird, ranging from Williams' tales of seeing hundreds of cormorants at Lake Between the Lakes to Adams telling how they are pressed into service as fisherbirds in China. Kissel finally got a chance to use a long-forgotten LeMaster identification guide to show kids how a northern shoveler's bill was much larger than most other ducks.

Ah, but the best teacher is Mother Nature herself. When weather permitted, students were able to go out on deck to participate in a bingo game to find items along the river, ranging from red buoys to the Mitch McConnell Plaza. Some were lucky enough to witness great blue herons in flight.

With 45-minute sessions for the Daviess County High School's AP biology students, more time was spent in observation. Flachskam and Kissel were delighted to spot a juvenile bald eagle fighting off smaller birds near the William H. Natcher bridge at Maceo. The kids were more fascinated by a buck swimming across the river as rain began to fall ... they practically had to be dragged away under an awning. A common loom -- in full winter plumage -- swam to within a few feet of the boat, one of a few spotted during the week.

Other water birds on the cruise list included: double-crested cormorants, American coots, ring-billed gulls and buffleheads, whose white heads were distinctive in the gloomy November weather.

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Party, CBC counts, highlight December

Come join us to celebrate the holidays at the December meeting, 7 p.m. Dec. 8 at First Christian Church. Refreshments will be provided. We will finalize arrangements for the upcoming National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Counts and enjoy each other's company.

This year's CBCs will be at 8 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 20, at Tony and Brenda Eaden's home, 7701 Saur Road, Owensboro; 8 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 27, at the home of Mike Henshaw, 11201 Fields Road South, Utica, and 8 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 1, at the home of Jan Howard, 3534 W. Parrish Ave. Birding teams will scour eastern Daviess County, southern Daviess County and western Daviess County and Owensboro, respectively, in search of winter residents and the odd holdover that makes this event so exciting. The data compiled from

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Unlocking the martin mysteries

The secrets behind one of America's most-desired birds – the purple martin -- were revealed during the Nov. 10 meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society.

It's been a passion of Gary Funk since he and his father built a martin house at his 21st Street homestead as a boy. It continues today in the Stonegate subdivision, where he and wife Sandy have welcomed 886 fledglings since 2001.

But it's a passion they don't keep to themselves. They serve as educators about the species through their involvement in the Purple Martin Conservation Association.

Part of the allure of the martins is their unique relationship with man. The eastern subspecies, the one at Kentucky homes, is completely dependent on humans for housing. His western and Pacific coast cousins make good use of the natural cavities in the western United States.

Through the PMCA, members track the birds as they make their journey from in Brazil into Canada, entering the United States in January and arriving in western Kentucky in March.

This timing is crucial for two reasons. One, members can keep their housing closed up for as long as possible to prevent predators from entering. Secondly, birds need to time their arrival with the birth of the insect population.

If they beat the bugs, some people will provide such supplemental food as crickets, mealworms, even scrambled eggs, tossing them in the air for grateful birds.

These insectivores love dragonflies and most other flying insects.

"You'll see the male and female making trips to the nest once every minute, day in and day out, while they're feeding their young," he said.

They do not however, eat mosquitoes. That myth was perpetuated by a martin house manufacturer during the 1960s, who claimed the birds at 2,000 a day.

Gary Funk displays his camera box gourd, which has enhanced his family's love for purple martins. It's captured amazing images such as this nest full of babies.



"If you think about it, martins hunt during the day. They hunt very high, not low on the ground. Mosquitoes basically are nighttime feeders in dark, damp places, so they don't frequent the paths of martins very often," he said.

In a seven-year PMCA study that involved 500 diet samples, they found no mosquitoes.

Pairs bond for the entire summer, sharing equally the workload of building housing, mostly out of twigs, straw and pine needles and green leaves. Their brood is about seven or eight eggs, which are incubated for about 15 days. It's about a month before they fledge, and they spend another two weeks being taking care of by their parents.

Proper site selection is essential. Martins enter the homes on the fly, so they need lots of open spaces. He suggested keeping a house 40-60 feet away from trees to keep the birds safe from predators, 10 to 20 feet off the ground.

Yet, homes should be close to your home.

"They like to be near people," he said.

The Funks plan to switch to supergourds, with 8- by 10-inch nesting areas, because they have had the most success with them. New openings – such as excluder and crescent -- are designed to keep starlings out, because they have no way to crouch to enter the hole. House sparrows, alas, can't be defeated by opening designs. Wires outside of the hole have served as a deterrent for owls and hawks, and pole guards (chicken wire is good) can help keep snakes out of the house. Alternative housing should be provided for other cavity nesters on the property, such as chickadees and bluebirds.

Martins like simple white gourds, which keep the temperature cool for the youngsters.

On the Web Purple Martin Conservation Association: www.purplemartin.org



Brownies scramble to see who's in the feeder at the Powell Bird Blind.



Carolyn Williams shows girls how to use binoculars.

Brownies enjoy nature Adventure at Camp Pennyroyal

About a dozen Brownies from Daviess County, Ohio County and the Madisonville area enjoyed an Adventure Day Nov. 2 at Camp Pennyroyal Girl Scout camp. Part of the nature-filled afternoon was spent at the Powell Bird Blind, where they got up-close looks at a variety of feeder birds. There's nothing like being inches away from a feeding bird, so the girls could see what the types of food they preferred and note how they used both bill and feet to manipulate seed. Visitors included both downy and hairy woodpeckers and a "shy" juvenile goldfinch that preferred to feed on the main hanging feeder just out of eyesight of the girls. The first junco of the year also was noted.

In addition, a frog hopped on the edge of the frog pond.

They also had a chance to identify "fake" birds, which helped cement the live images they saw.

Participants from the Daviess County chapter were: Brenda Little, Carolyn Williams, Jill Flachskam and Mary Kissel.

Memorial tree to honor Powell

A yellowwood tree will be planted on the grounds of Boardwalk Pipeline in memory of DCAS co-founder Bert Powell.

Members had suggested planting the tree at Camp Pennyroyal, where Powell was an advocate, but the immaculately kept landscape at Boardwalk inspired Charles Morris to think that would be a place where the tree would have the best chance for long-term survival. Brenda Little contacted Bonnie Terrizzi, Bert's daughter, who was delighted with the idea. Powell was a 30-year employee at Boardwalk's predecessor, Texas Gas, and played a key role in designing the landscape for the grounds. Boardwalk officials are enthusiastic about the idea. A ground-level plaque will be placed at the tree, which will be purchased at Integrity

Members amended their earlier request to approve the plan.

Bird blind eyed for botanical garden

Since its creation in 2001, the Powell Bird Blind has been one of the premier education tools for the Daviess County Audubon Society. However, security concerns have made it inaccessible to the public at large.

However, the DCAS has been invited to help convert a kids' playhouse at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden to a multitasking role as a bird blind too.

"I think probably the thing we could end up doing would be as simple as replacing the 12-pane windows with one-way glass," said Charles Morris, who is also a board member at the WKBG. DCAS members would help recommend what types of bird feeders and plantings would be made in the kids' garden.

The suggestion is an outgrowth of the successful education sessions the DCAS has participated in recent years at the garden.

In addition, the garden is considering sharing the cost of replacing the DCAS' battered set of binoculars, Charles Morris reported. He estimates that up to 20% of the 40 binoculars are broken. Because of heavy use for WKBG programs, a proposal has been made to split the replacement cost 75% to 25%. Although the chapter would have primary control over the binoculars, the garden would be able to use them for their own functions as well.

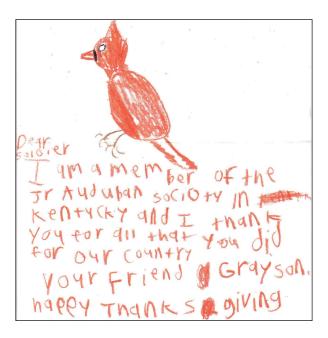
Morris suggested the chapter adopt the same formula used by Wayland Alexander's Junior Audubon Society: to buy 30 new binoculars through Eagle Optics, which gives schools and nonprofit organizations two binoculars for every two they buy.

"They're a good size for children's hands," JAS co-sponsor Brenda Little said. Morris said the quality was probably two to three times better.

The chapter approved the plan, but it also must be OK'd by the WKBG.

The Goldfinch/December 2008 c/o Mary Kissel 3440 New Hartford Road, Apt. 1 Owensboro, KY 42303

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED



JAS students express thanks for soldiers

The gift of freedom is worthy of heart-filled thanks, so students with Wayland Alexander's Junior Audubon Society grabbed the chance to make holiday cards for American soldiers recovering from war wounds at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C.

For the Thanksgiving outreach program, co-sponsor Brenda Little said the children chose birds as their ornamentation on cards they designed and worded themselves. Kids were asked to think about things they are thankful for during this holiday and expressed their gratitude to the soldiers.

River

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Kids also participated in sessions where they tested water for such things as E. coli, turbidity and temperature, learned about fish and invertebrates. Tony Kramer mesmerized the kids with interesting facts about river critters, such as crayfish who urinate through their eyeballs and dragonfly larvae whose movements are powered by flatulence. Koi that had been dumped into the river at English Park turned into a teachable moment, as he talked about the perils of invasive species.

Participants were from Cravens Elementary, Southern Oaks Elementary, Heritage and Majesty Christian schools, Muhlenberg South Elementary and Daviess County High School. Their findings found that the river at Owensboro was relatively healthy, although E coli levels deteriorated with rains throughout the week.

Joe Ford books available for purchase

Want to put a Ford under someone's tree? Most of the books penned by Joe Ford are available for purchase at the Joe Ford Nature Library at Brescia College.

In the Very Beginning (Haunts to Hookers) and a compilation of columns in the Messenger-Inquirer are available for \$12, and "In the Beginning," "In the Beginning" Vol. II and Vol. III, "Heroes to Homicide" and an interactive kids' coloring book, "Little Freddie" are available for \$7.

The library will be open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dec. 9 and 10, or contact Grace Ford at 316-1632 to schedule a time to buy a book.

CBC

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the south count has helped Audubon researchers monitor population counts and determine which birds are in peril. The east and west counts are part of a network for the Kentucky Ornithological Society.

Last year, 53 species and 6,516 birds were spotted in south Daviess County, 50 species and 6,000 birds in the west and 33 species and 281 birds in the east.

Last year, according to the National Audubon Society, more than 2,100 counts totaled 57.7 million species in their respective 15-mile circles.

Lunch is provided, but please bring side dishes and desserts. Call the hosts at: Eadens, 686-3944; Henshaws, 275-4250; and Howard at 926-3795.

Help needed at Panther Creek light show Dec. 17

Volunteers are still needed to man the booth Dec. 17 at the Trail of Lights at Panther Creek Park. The Daviess County Audubon Society is one of five groups who will split half of the gate for the holiday season. DCAS members are participating from 5:15 to 9:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 12, through Thursday, Dec. 18. To volunteer, please contact president Mike Henshaw, 275-4250.

Gary Funk photo by Carolyn Williams