

THE GOLDFINCH



Daviess County Audubon Society

www.daviessaudubon.org

February 2009



Ken Hurm took these eagle pictures on the Ballard trip.

Ballard visitors put eagle eyes to very good use

It was an eagle lovers' paradise for those who traveled to Ballard Wildlife Management Area outside of Paducah Jan. 24.

The group saw more than 35 bald eagles and an uncommon look at a golden eagle.

Charles Morris noted that most of the snow geese – the co-stars of the annual winter pilgrimage – had left early that morning, so the group only saw the remaining 80,000 at a distance.

However, the trip offered plenty of good looks at other waterfowl, which had been nearly nonexistent during the recent Daviess County Christmas Bird Counts. Morris reported seeing 10,000-plus mallards, and the group had good views of canvasbacks and white fronted geese. Sadly, the group also found a dead juvenile bald eagle that was to be sent off for further study,

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Next meeting set for Feb. 9

The next meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society will be at 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 9, at First Christian Church, J.R. Miller and Seventh Street.

Joe Ford will present the program.

Go yard ... count the birds for Cornell!

Backyard Bird Count During the course of a calendar year, there are many activities that require travel and the ability to hike over rough terrain to see birds.

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Bill Lynch marvels at vultures' intelligence

One of birddoms' most intelligent species was featured at the January meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society. Bill Lynch, Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife privatelands biologist, discussed his research of black and turkey vultures at the Jan. 12 meeting.

Much of this work, separate from his job, has occurred in the Madison County (Richmond-Berea) area of Kentucky. People have been gracious enough to let him use abandoned homes to set up low-tech blinds to view

vultures and their nesting habits.

He was surprised how easy it was to gain a good view of the nest. Although vultures in the wild can live about 20 years, nesting location – sometimes on the ground -- can expose the young birds to threats.

"Basically, if I could get to it, so could any possum, raccoon or any other predator," he said, noting that owls, skunks, foxes and wood rats are a few of the threats to the young vultures. The nest also has more than one entrance.

"There's a certain rhythm to how they arrive," he said. They hit each individual perch site to become acclimated. But good nesting sites are prized. Some of his research sites are used by generations of vultures for up to 70 years.

The eggs could be blotchy, white or two colors, sometimes hatched a few days apart. Black and turkey vulture eggs are virtually identical. Young grow quickly, achieving their full size within nine weeks, but he noted that aggressive juveniles have a better chance of survival. Young birds feed from regurgitated food from parents. He likened it to spoiled roast beef.

"Nothing can prepare you for that smell – nothing," he said.

The birds' size and behavior makes tagging for study challenging.

"With vultures, you only get one chance," he said. Although they are portrayed as scavengers, they don't like to eat dog meat. If that type of road kill is used to trap birds, it has to be mutilated to an unrecognizable form before they will try it.

They can't be banded, because of the possibility of leg infection. They are tagged with a botanical tag. Black vultures are more aggressive when approached; turkey vultures can pass out because of the stress.

He discussed various experiences with blinds, amazed as he watched birds' exploring behavior, picking up items and moving them around. At one Warren County site, his wife saw an 8-to-9-week old bird kicking paint cans. He's also done pioneering work on recording arrival calls. Young birds can recognize the call without seeing the parent.

He said vultures are highly intelligent. "They remember forever," he said.

He also discussed the circling nature of vultures. Is that really a sign of death? Sometimes.

"You have to look at how they're circling. If it's a nice, lazy circle, down and up in the same area, it's probably a food source," he said. At one point, oil companies put a "scent of death" in their pipes, and circling vultures could mean there was a leak in one of those pipelines. However, if the flight pattern resembles a witch's cauldron, and their main behavior is merely ascending, they are look for a thermal to catch.



Bill Lynch discussed vultures at the January meeting.

Ballard

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Morris said.

Birds weren't the only attraction. Carolyn Williams said the group was delighted to see eight white-tailed deer swimming across the lake right through the waterfowl.

Traveling to Ballard were: Tony Eaden, Charles Morris, Dale Guyer, Mike Henshaw, Jill Flachskam, Henry Connor and Carolyn Williams.

Species spotted included: red-tailed hawk, great blue heron, American kestrel, European starling, mallard, red-headed woodpecker, American crow, Canada goose, hooded merganser, greater white-fronted goose, bald eagle, golden eagle, northern flicker, ring-billed gull, gadwall, American widgeon, canvasback, double-crested cormorant, ring-necked duck, American black duck, northern shoveler, bufflehead, snow goose (blue and white phases), killdeer, northern cardinal and pileated woodpecker.



Ken Hurm was one of the Daviess County Audubon Society members who helped Santa greet visitors to Panther Creek Park.

Christmas comes late to DCAS members

Despite a week marred by bad weather, the Daviess County Audubon Society made \$559 for its participation in the Panther Creek Park Trail of Lights, Dec. 12-18.

These funds will help the club further their mission of spreading the word about the environment.

Thanks again to all who participated!

Winnie Lin inspired by late autumn ecological festival trip to Wuxi, China

Photo and story courtesy of Sierra Club

Winnie Lin, membership chairman of the Daviess County Audubon Society, organized a five-woman delegation of community representatives who traveled from Owensboro to China in early November as guests of honor at the Wuxi Ecological Tourism Festival in the city of Wuxi. She was accompanied by Aloma Dew, Carol Mark, Anne Padgett and Susan Vance.

Over 10 days, the group met with environmental and government officials, citizen activists and students in Wuxi, Shanghai and Beijing. "Wuxi prides itself on being a clean, green city," Dew said. "There are recycling bins every other block, and they're planting trees everywhere."

Wuxi contains the third-largest freshwater lake in China -- a major tourist draw. A bad algae bloom several years ago caused by sewage and factory farm runoff hurt tourism badly. "They made the connection and moved most of the factory farms away from the area," says Dew.

Among the environmental leaders meeting with the Kentucky delegation in Beijing were Wen Bo, co-director of Pacific Environment's China program, and Kaori Ohsawa, Mekong Watch. Bo started the China Green Student Forum, the country's first network of student environmental organizations.

Lin said she hoped that the connections she made on the trip would pave the way to one day take DCAS members on a birding trip to China.



Aloma Dew, Susan Vance, Winnie Lin, Anne Padgett and Carol Mark traveled to China.

Yard

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And then there's an activity that anyone of any age can enjoy.

Cornell University's 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count will be held from Feb. 13 through Feb. 16. It's a midwinter celebration of the birds that enhance our daily lives by coming to our feeders and backyards. It's also another opportunity to contribute important data that help scientists track long-term trends in bird population.

Participants count birds in their yards, neighborhoods or parks for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at www.birdcount.org.

Last year, 133,414 birds were counted in Kentucky -- 114 species, led by starlings, common grackles, American goldfinch, red-winged blackbirds, northern cardinals, brown-headed cowbirds, mourning doves, American crows, Canada geese and Carolina chickadees. Nationally, more than 85,000 checklists were submitted, 20 from Daviess and Ohio counties.

The event is a joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Wild Bird Unlimited as a sponsor.

"The Great Backyard Bird Count benefits both birds and people. It's a great example of citizen science: Anyone who can identify even a few species can contribute to the body of knowledge that is used to inform conservation efforts to protect birds and biodiversity," said Audubon Education VP, Judy Braus in a news release. "Families, teachers, children and all those who take part in GBBC get a chance to improve their observation skills, enjoy nature, and have a great time counting for fun, counting for the future."

In recent years, the count's online presence has expanded. The Web site contains various bird identification tips and educator resources. Participants are also invited to submit their digital images for a photo gallery or upload their bird videos to YouTube.

Each year, in addition to entering their tallies, participants submit thousands of digital images for the GBBC photo contest. Many are featured in the popular online gallery. Participants in the 2009 count are also invited to upload their bird videos to YouTube; some will also be featured on the GBBC web site. Visit www.birdcount.org to learn more.

Daviess County Audubon Society members hope to have some type of classroom presence connected to the event, but plans were not formalized at press time.

State park gears up for GBBC weekend

John James Audubon State Park in Henderson will celebrate the Great Backyard Bird Count. During the count weekend, you may pick up instructions and a reporting checklist at the museum and count the number of each species you see at their feeder stations between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Feb. 13-16.

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Local dues are \$15 a year. Please keep your local chapter dues current by mailing this page with your check to: Charles Morris, treasurer, 1400 Woodbridge Trail, Owensboro, KY 42303.

If you have a news item or Goldfinch question, contact editor Mary Kissel at 926-3321, or mjkisselchirp45@bellsouth.net.

Bill Lynch photo by Carolyn Williams.