

FALL 2017

## From the Presidential Bird Feeder

**I**t sure has been an unusual end of summer with temperatures in the 50s at night and 70s during the day. Some early migrants have started appearing, with a forecast of many more to come.

We have a full calendar of trips, and almost every weekend will have a walk somewhere. There will be two distant trips—one to the Mississippi River and one to Glacial Park in McHenry County—and one very distant trip to the East Coast with Paul Mayer. If you are interested in the East Coast adventure, contact Paul ASAP, since his expeditions fill up quickly.

In this newsletter, you will find out about our annual potluck dinner in September. Read that item to learn about who brings what. The September meeting will also feature our popular photo presentations by our members.

Our monthly meetings this fall will have many great speakers. In October, we'll hear about Vera Cruz, Mexico, and its legendary River of Raptors. Kath and I visited there last year to watch the amazing spectacle of 500,000 hawks migrating overhead. We stood in awe. In November, Jim Heckert, executive director of Illinois Audubon Society, will come and talk about IAS and its role in conservation. And in December, Jack Shouba, who has given many talks for us, will return and talk about the Indiana Dunes. Come and enjoy not only informative talks, but take part in our popular raffle and socialize with fellow nature lovers.

The Kane County Forest Preserve District is looking to form a relationship with KCA in hopes that we can help them with restoration efforts at Nelson Lake. This would be a great time for KCA birders to give back for all the great birding spots in Kane County—and help stop the untimely burning and mowing. In this newsletter, Ben Haberthur, director of natural resources for KCFPD, comments on the reasons for burning and mowing, and what we can do about it.

I'm still in awe of the tremendous success of the Spring Gathering in May. I have received many letters from other chapters about how impressed they were with the whole event. I want to once again thank all our members who were involved in hosting the event.

—Bob Andrini

## **Swift Night Out, Sept. 8-10, 2017**

**K**ane County Audubon will again participate in the continentwide Swift Night Out. This is your chance to help Chimney Swifts by locating and reporting roosting spots. We need a community working together to help save our declining Chimney Swift population.

It's simple and fun to participate! Start now and keep your eyes to the skies around sunset and watch for Swifts, follow them in the direction they are flying towards their roost. Sometimes it may take more than one night to find that location. That's OK. It's fun to search and explore! Once you have a roost located, pick a night (Sept. 8, 9 or 10) and count the swifts entering the site.

Let us know where and when you'll be monitoring so we can coordinate efforts to cover as many roosts over the three days. You can count your roost one, two or all three nights. Or you can count a different roost each night. Need help finding a roost? We have some that need to be monitored and will be happy to share them with you.

Monitoring is easy. Start watching your roost site about 20 minutes before sunset up until all birds have gone in (usually 20-30 minutes after sunset.) Count all the Swifts that enter your roost site. It's fun to have a buddy counting with you. Both can count the same roost. Swifts do some tricky moves before they finally enter the chimney, and when they do enter, it often happens extremely fast. So, it's not unusual to over- or undercount at times. Don't be surprised if your number differs from your buddy's. Just report the average of both your counts. If it rains, you might want to reschedule your observation date since Swift behavior is unpredictable during heavy rainfall.

Reporting your observation is so important. You can share your results by emailing [MySwiftHelp@gmail.com](mailto:MySwiftHelp@gmail.com) or calling us at 630-291-2690. Tell us the date, beginning and ending observation times, the number of Swifts that entered the structure, the type of structure (chimney on house, school, factory, a silo, etc.) and the address of the



building. We will be happy to enter your information into the Kyle's Swift Night Out roosting monitoring project data base. Or, if you prefer, you can enter your own data at [www.ChimneySwift.org](http://www.ChimneySwift.org) by clicking "A Swift Night Out!" on the menu and then click "Enter Your Report Here!" If you use eBird, please enter a checklist with your findings. The Kyles are working to streamline the data entry so in the future all that will be needed is an eBird entry.

Any questions, just contact us. Thanks for your help.

—Rich and Marion Miller

## KCA Potluck Dinner

Our Sept. 13 meeting will start with our annual potluck dinner. As we did last year, KCA will provide the main entrée (chicken or barbecued beef), and KCA members will provide the sides. What to bring depends on the first letter of your last name: A-I, bring a salad; J-R bring a vegetable dish; S-Z, bring a dessert.

The dinner begins at 6 p.m. at Hickory Knolls Discovery Center. We will continue to go green at our dinner, so bring your own plate, fork, knife, spoon, napkins and cup. We encourage you to bring items that are not disposable, along with a nondisposable serving dish. Please be sure to bring a serving spoon for your dish. We will provide the drinks.

Members are invited to share their favorite nature and bird photographs with the group after the meal. Please limit your selections to a maximum of 15 images. If you have images to be shown by computer, please get those images to me before the meeting so I can download them to my computer. This way, the program will flow smoothly. Members can also bring prints of their favorite images.

At this meeting, there will be no raffle. But, if you have an item to donate, bring it for future meetings.

If you have any questions, please call Bob Andrini (630-624-8387).

—Bob Andrini

## Coming Soon: A Seashore Near You, May 2018

On our last trip in June 2016, 10 KCA members had a wonderful time in Alaska, where they saw 119 species of birds with 248 cumulative lifers. Now, plans are just about finished for another adventure in 2018.

"A Seashore Near You" will be an 800+ mile coastal birding trip that will start in Cape May, NJ, and end in Raleigh-Durham, NC. The nine-day trip from May 23-31, 2018, will follow the East Coast. Visits will be made to several birding hotspots, including Cape May, Prime Hook State Wildlife Management Area, Chincoteague NWR, Cape Hatteras, Cedar Island NWR, and Croatan National Forest.

The focus will be on shorebirds, coastal passerines, pelagic birds, and rails found in the wetlands, forests, and offshore environs of the mid-Atlantic states. Target species include Red Knot and Piping Plover; Seaside, Nelson's, Bachman's and Saltmarsh Sparrows; Cory's, Great, Manx, and Audubon's Shearwaters; Herald, Bermuda (rare), Fea's (rare) and Black-capped Petrels; White-tailed and Red-billed Tropicbirds; and Clapper Rail. And, don't forget the real rarities that show up from time to time, including Ruff, Little Egret, Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Ringed-Plover and European Storm-Petrel.

One point to note is that it's still too early for some reservations and thus to estimate costs. These, along with the final itinerary and sign up forms will be published sometime in November. Everything right now is high, but prices are expected to go down toward the end of summer and into the fall and winter. For estimating purposes, I'm guessing the cost of the trip will be approximately \$1,500.

The trip will be limited to nine participants, plus the leader. If you're interested in the trip, contact Paul Mayer at (630) 209-6019 or email him at [mayersbirds@comcast.net](mailto:mayersbirds@comcast.net) and let him know, since this will help with planning. The official sign-up will be sometime in November.

—Paul Mayer



**The Red Knot is one of many birds that could be seen during KCA's East Coast birding trip.**

## Kane County Forest Preserve District Responds to KCA Concerns at Nelson Lake

Restoration management isn't perfect. Sometimes, it comes down to choosing the best of poor options.

This summer, I met with KCA's Bob Andrini, Jon Duerr and Tim Balassie. Prior to the meeting, I received a number of complaints from KCA members wondering what the KCFPD was thinking when we sent large mowers into the prairies of Dick Young Forest Preserve at the height of grassland-bird nesting season.

As director of natural resources for the district, I'd like to share our rationale, as well as an idea for a collaboration between our organizations. This idea would benefit Henslow's Sparrows, Bobolinks and, indeed, all of Kane County's grassland birds that prefer to sing on the wing rather than perch.

In late spring, the district mowed 60 acres of the southwestern portion of Dick Young Forest Preserve, just north of the Audubon bridge. The primary purpose was to reduce infestations of white and yellow sweet clover (*Melilotus alba* and *M. officianalis*). While yellow sweet clover tends to flower a few weeks earlier and is less invasive than the white, both of these Mediterranean weeds (originally brought in for livestock feed) have a tendency to completely take over an area. Left unchecked, clover leads to reductions in biodiversity, dramatic changes to grassland structure, and eventually, the exclusion of most native grassland birds.

While none of us relish the idea of causing harm to species that we are working to protect, we also can't afford to stand idly by while we lose a prairie to nonnative species. If we mow, we lose birds. If we don't mow, we lose habitat. I was left to decide which was the more ethical of two poor options. How would you decide?

Imagine yourself as a land manager. You oversee the restoration of a large stand of tallgrass prairie, a biome that is critically threatened globally—only 2 or 3 percent remains in the world. In Illinois, less than 0.1 percent remains.

Ecological restoration, as a science, is still relatively young. While visionaries like Aldo Leopold began experimenting with restoration as early as the 1930s, restoration ecology didn't really hit mainstream in study and practice until the 1970s and 1980s. As such, we as a restoration community don't exactly know how long it takes to truly restore a prairie. The district's oldest restoration, Horlock prairie, requires very little maintenance after more than 30 years of active management, but it still looks quite different than the never-plowed Murray prairie remnant, which it borders at LeRoy Oaks Forest Preserve. Nevertheless, biodiversity begets resiliency. Leaving a diverse prairie that has some ability to rejuvenate itself after disturbance is the ultimate gift we can hope to give to the next generation.

Burning of that field last fall, while clearing underbrush and eliminating some nonnative plants, resulted in the germination of a massive amount of invasive sweet clover. If left unchecked, the clover will seed hundreds of thousands of copies of itself into the prairie's seedbank. This seeding of invasives will result in the priming of another time bomb of weeds, whose wick will be lit by the next regularly scheduled prescribed burn. We could stop that process, though. Clover is a biennial. If we mowed it just before the plant flowers, it will likely not have enough carbohydrates stored to produce another seed head this season. Its DNA has it preprogrammed to die of its own accord this winter. At the same time, we also knew that, among other impacts, mowing would destroy any grassland bird nests present. Which are more important, the birds or their habitat? How would you decide?

There are limited options to deal with sweet clover: You can mow it, you can hand-pull it, or you can treat each plant with herbicide. (There is no selective herbicide that could be sprayed over the entire area without also taking out most of our wildflowers.) Burning isn't an option, as it just doesn't kill this far into the summer. Although land managers elsewhere have had success with late-spring burning, they have also reported a high volume of reptile deaths.

The most sensitive approach possible would be to meticulously and systematically hand-cut each plant with a hand scythe or pruners, and carefully avoid any nests that were encountered. The district has four full-time technicians and three seasonal technicians available to do such work, across 21,000 acres. This approach was simply not possible.



**White Sweet Clover is among the invasive plant species KCFPD hopes to control through mowing.**

Perhaps a better hybrid model would be to first know where birds are nesting within a clover-infested area. Then, we could hand-cut and discard the sweet clover plants within approximately 30 feet of each nest location. Finally, we could mow the remaining areas that have a low likelihood of containing nests. Again, we do not have the staff for that.

In the end, I chose to do a rough, high-cut mowing across the whole infested area, and hope that the parents of any destroyed nests had enough time, energy and suitable habitat to have a successful second nesting. In my opinion, this was the better of the bad options of whether to mow portions (small or large) of a prairie during grassland bird-nesting season, or lose the entire habitat. Large-scale mowing is not my preferred option of dealing with sweet clover where it coincides with grassland bird nesting habitat, even though it is done to a degree every season. I'm trying to simultaneously save our nesting grassland birds and save their habitat. I made what I felt was the best decision for the district.

That was the main topic of our meeting, and I think we came upon a possible solution. I initially dismissed the hybrid-model before deciding to mow, after concluding there weren't enough people available to make such an exacting solution plausible. While we don't have enough staff to make an idea like that work, I do know of one informed and motivated group of bird-lovers who might be willing to put in a little sweat equity to save some grassland birds, and that's where KCA members come in!

I'd like to announce a new partnership between the KCFPD and KCA, under the coordination of Tim Balassie. We'd like to start "Habitat Days," which would partner KCA volunteer labor with KCFPD restoration specialists. We'll target stands of invasive species for hand removal, and thereby reduce the need for large-scale mowing in these sensitive areas. We'll focus these efforts (at least initially) at Dick Young Forest Preserve. We'll start with some callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) removal this fall, followed by a sweet clover bash, next spring.

I'm looking forward to this collaboration, and I encourage all KCA members to volunteer some time toward this effort. Let's work together to both help grassland nesting birds and improve their habitat.

For those who would like to know more about the tricky nature of restoring prairies while managing for grassland birds, see "Restoring Large Prairies in the Chicago Region," an Audubon Chicago Region Publication available online at <http://bit.ly/2xCrEs5>.

KCA's coordinator for this effort is Tim Balassie. Tim may be reached at either 630-513-7345 or [tbalassie@gmail.com](mailto:tbalassie@gmail.com). Much more information will be forthcoming, but we are hoping to field a volunteer crew later this fall.

—Ben Haberthur



**Prescribed burns are not an option for irradiating clover in late spring.**

## Kestrel Nest Box Project Update

This year, we had Kestrels nest at five different sites in Kane County, all of which were forest preserves: Dick Young, Aurora West, Grunwald Farms, Sauer Family Prairie Kame, and Muirhead Springs.

Once again, we banded nestlings (and a few adults). We also collected feather samples from one nestling in each nest box. These samples will be contributed to the American Kestrel Genoscape Project. This project is a collaboration between the American Kestrel Partnership, Boise State University, UCLA, and Hawkwatch International. It aims to identify Kestrel populations across North America based on similarities and differences in their genetic makeup. This will allow researchers to track where Kestrels breed, migrate and over-winter. Hopefully, this will provide insight to the threats these birds face at each stage in their annual cycle. More information on the genoscape project can be found here: <http://tinyurl.com/yddjxyej>.

Another interesting thing happened recently, as well. In August, a female Kestrel that fledged from a nest box at Aurora West in June was caught at O'Hare Airport. This is the first band return we have had from a live bird. (We had a few dead fledglings show up a couple years back.)

I am still overseeing the nest box project and was helped by several volunteer monitors this summer, including a few KCA members.



—Taylor Joray

## CBC for Kids Scheduled for Jan. 3

KCA is once again partnering with the Fox Valley and Saint Charles park districts in holding a Christmas Bird Count for Kids (CBC4Kids). Based on the annual birding census sponsored by the National Audubon Society, the CBC4Kids is designed to introduce young birders to our hobby of observing and recording bird species.

The Fox Valley CBC4Kids will be held Jan. 3, 2018, at Red Oak Nature Center in Batavia. The date and time and time for the St. Charles event have not yet been finalized. Further updates will be published on KCA's website and announced at future KCA meetings.

Anyone interested in volunteering for this event should contact Tim Balassie at 630-513-7345 or [tbalassie@gmail.com](mailto:tbalassie@gmail.com).

—Tim Balassie



## Kirtland's Warbler Seen During KCA Field Trip

A dozen KCA members got great looks at Kirtland's Warbler during a field trip to Northern Michigan June 24-26.

All totaled, the group recorded 79 species for the trip, including Piping Plover, Upland Sandpiper, Raven, Evening Grosbeak and Dicksissel. The field trip made stops at the Muskegon (MI) wastewater treatment plant; Hartwick Pines State Park in Grayling, MI; and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Empire, MI.

—John Sprovieri



## Meetings, Walks and Events

### Saturday, Sept. 2, 7 a.m., Bird Walk

Nelson Lake/Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Theresa LeCompte, 630-896-7087

### Saturday, Sept. 9, 8 a.m., Bird Walk

Burnidge Forest Preserve, Elgin.

Leader: Jane McMillan, 630-373-6704

### Wednesday, Sept. 13, 6 p.m., KCA monthly meeting

Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, St. Charles.

Our annual potluck dinner and members' photo share. We will provide fried chicken and barbecue beef. Members provide salads, veggies and desserts.

### Saturday, Sept. 16, 8 a.m., Bird Walk

Oakhurst Forest Preserve, Aurora

Leader: Wes Sadler, 630-851-1384

### Saturday, Sept. 23, 8 a.m., Bird Walk

Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, St. Charles.

Leader: Lesa Andree

**Saturday, Sept. 30, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Fitchie Creek Forest Preserve, Elgin.

Leader: Bill Koch, 847-931-9123

**Saturday, Oct. 7, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Nelson Lake/Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Theresa LeCompte, 630-896-7087

**Wednesday, Oct. 11, 7 p.m., KCA monthly meeting**

Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, St. Charles.

Talk: "River of Raptors," Pat Ward. Pat will talk about the spectacular "River of Raptors" in Vera Cruz, Mexico, during fall migration.



**Saturday, Oct. 14, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Grunwald Forest Preserve, Elburn.

Leader: John Sprovieri, 630-776-0924

**Saturday, Oct. 21, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Freeman Kame Forest Preserve, Huntley.

Leader: Walter Lutz, 847-468-1709

**Saturday, Oct. 28, 7 a.m., Bird Walk**

Mississippi River.

We will meet at 7 a.m. at Hickory Knolls Discovery Center in St. Charles. We will then carpool to the Mighty Miss in search of migrating waterfowl.

Leader: Jon Duerr, 630-584-5891

**Saturday, Nov. 4, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Nelson Lake/Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Theresa LeCompte, 630-896-7087

**Wednesday, Nov. 8, 7 p.m., KCA monthly meeting**

Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, St. Charles.

Talk: "Illinois Audubon Society," Jim Herkert. IAS executive director Jim Herkert reviews the 120-year history of the organization and its role in conservation.

**Saturday, Nov. 11, a.m., Bird Walk**

Les Arends Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Bill Algren, 630-406-6737

**Saturday, Nov. 18, 7 a.m., Bird Walk**

Glacial Park, Ringwood, IL, McHenry County.

We will meet at 7 a.m. at Hickory Knolls Discovery Center in St. Charles. We will then carpool to Glacial Park.

Leader: Bob Andrini, 630-584-8387

**Saturday, Dec. 2, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Nelson Lake/Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Theresa LeCompte, 630-896-7087

**Saturday, Dec. 9, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Stewart Park, Plano.

Leader: Theresa LeCompte, 630-896-7087

**Wednesday, Dec. 13, 7 p.m., KCA monthly meeting**

Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, St. Charles.

Talk: "Indiana Dunes," Jack Shouba.

**Saturday, Dec. 16, Christmas Bird Count**

Fermi Circle

**Sunday, Dec. 17, Christmas Bird Count**

Big Rock Circle

**Saturday, Dec. 30, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Fabyan Forest Preserve, Geneva.

Leader: Ann Haverstock, 630-232-9398

**Monday, Jan. 1, 9 a.m., Bird Walk**

Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, St. Charles.

First walk of the year. What will be your first bird of 2018?

Leader: Nancy Schnaitman, 630-365-9595

**Wednesday, Jan. 3, Christmas Bird Count for Kids**

Red Oak Nature Center, Batavia.

Introduce a youngster to the joys of birding!

Leader: Tim Balassie, 630-513-7345

Kane County Audubon, A Chapter of Illinois Audubon

Chapter President	Bob Andrini, 630-584-8386
Vice President	John Sprovieri
Secretary	Nancy Schnaitman
Treasurer	Jane McMillan
Program Chair	Chuck Peterson
Field Trips	Jon Duerr
Historian	Jerry Hope
Hospitality	Sue Peterson, Carol Ludemann
Website	Chris Madsen
Publicity	Sue Wagoner
Stamps	Tim Klimowski
Ink Cartridges	Cheryl Hayes
IAS Representative	Bob Andrini and Jerry Hope
KCA website	<b><i>WWW.KANECOUNTYAUDUBON.ORG</i></b>