

# Kane County Audubon Newsletter

## Fall 2023



### If You Build It, They Will Come

Although Illinois still is known as the “Prairie State,” less than 0.01 percent of Illinois’ original 21 million acres of prairie remains. What once was a vast sea of rich prairie now survives only as tiny, isolated patches. Many species of prairie plants and animals have either disappeared or are in rapid decline due to loss of habitat.

Fortunately, there’s good news: It is possible to restore farmland back to the original prairies and wetlands from whence it came—and relatively quickly, at that.

Nowhere is that more evident than at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve, a 757-acre preserve located between Bahr and Plato Roads just east of Illinois Route 47 in Plato Township. What was once rolling prairie and wetlands 200 years ago became agricultural fields and then, amazingly, prairie and wetlands again.

It all started in 2003, when Kane County Forest Preserve District (KCFPD) purchased 562 acres of land from the Muirhead family. Over the next several years, KCFPD acquired adjoining parcels of land and began implementing a plan to re-create the original prairie.

The plan worked, to an extent, but the magic didn’t really start to happen until last year, when KCFPD began restoring the area’s wetlands. Some of you were quite unhappy when the tractors showed up and began tearing up the prairie—again. I received some angry emails from KCAers who wanted to know what the devil was going on at Muirhead.

Thankfully, the addition of water turned out to be just the right thing. The transformation at Muirhead has been astonishing. To borrow a line from the baseball movie, *Field of Dreams*: “If you build it, they will come.” And come they have.

The following spring, the waterfowl arrived in earnest: American Coot, American Wigeon, Blue-winged Teal, Bufflehead, Canvasback, Common Merganser, Greater White-fronted Goose, Green-winged Teal, Hooded Merganser, Lesser Scaup, Mallard, Northern Pintail, Pied-billed Grebe, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Trumpeter Swan and Wood Duck.

Shortly thereafter, shorebirds, wading birds and other water birds arrived: American Bittern, Black-necked Stilt, Caspian Tern, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Bittern, Least Sandpiper, Osprey, Pectoral Sandpiper, Semipalmated Plover, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Short-billed and Long-Billed Dowitcher, Solitary Sandpiper, Sora, Stilt Sandpiper and Wilson’s Phalarope.

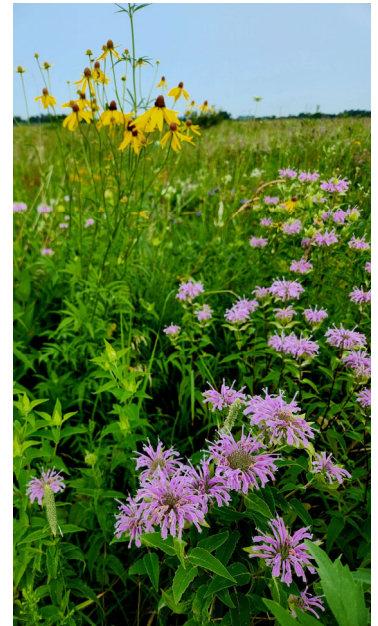
In the past year, Muirhead has attracted an incredible number of rarities, including American Avocet, Bonaparte’s Gull, Lark Sparrow, Marbled Godwit, Red-necked Phalarope, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Say’s Phoebe and Smith’s Longspur. On Aug. 17, an astonishing 53 Black Terns stunned lucky birders who visited in the morning after a storm front blew through.

Want some dramatic before and after numbers? Consider these: On March 29, 2016, a birder visited Muirhead and observed 16 species. On March 28, 2023, that same birder recorded 36 species there. Similarly, on May 3, 2015, a birder tallied just 18 species at Muirhead. On May 6, 2023, a different birder reported an absurd total of 73 species! On Aug. 20, 2017, a birder observed 14 species at Muirhead. On Aug. 19, 2023, a different birder saw 42 species, including Peregrine Falcon.

I confess: Until this year, Muirhead Springs had never been one of my favorite preserves. Perhaps that’s because I mostly visited the place in early January for the Rutland Circle Christmas Bird Count. The assignment requires slogging through snow drifts in bitter cold to document a handful of Black-Capped Chickadees, American Goldfinches and American Tree Sparrows. It’s not the most fun you can have while birding. But, that’s all changed since the wetland has been restored. Regina and I have visited Muirhead a dozen times already this year, and we can’t wait to see what shows up next!

We thank the KCFPD for restoring Muirhead—and the Kane County government for funding the project. We hope the KCFPD will take an active role in managing the preserve moving forward to ensure that it remains the haven it has become. And, we hope other counties here in Illinois, and, indeed nationwide, will restore their own wild lands for the good of everyone.

—John Sprovieri



### Help KCA Count Chimney Swifts

KCA will again host our annual Swift Night Out and Chimney Swift Sit.

Occurring Sept. 8-10, the Swift Night Out is a continentwide effort to raise awareness about Chimney Swifts. This is done by locating and monitoring Chimney Swift roosting sites.

We need many volunteers to help. It’s fun and easy. It’s your chance to help Swifts by locating, reporting and counting roosting spots. Start now by looking to the skies around sunset and watching for Swifts. Follow them in the direction they are flying. Sometimes it takes more than one night to find the exact location they go to roost. That’s OK. It’s fun to search and explore!

Once you have a roost located, let us know and then pick a night (Sept. 8-10) and watch from 20 minutes before sunset until all

birds have gone in, usually 20 to 30 minutes after sunset. You can help out one, two or three nights. You can count the same structure each night, or find different ones each night. Every count is important. It's OK if more than one person counts the same roost on the same night. We take the average number. Anyone who has watched Swifts go to roost knows they can fool you by flying very close to the top of the chimney and not enter but go behind the chimney, out of sight, and away from you. Many eyes help keep our counting numbers accurate.

If it's raining, the Swift's behavior is less predictable. They may go to roost well before sunset. Adjust your observation time accordingly or reschedule for another night.

Please help, because it does take a community to help conserve our Chimney Swifts. Do you want to help, but can't find a roost? No problem!

We have some for you to count. Just call Rich or Marion Miller at 630-291-2690 or email us at [MySwiftHelp@gmail.com](mailto:MySwiftHelp@gmail.com).

Also, remember to report your roosting numbers, date counted, and the address of the roosting spot to us. We will enter them into a national data base.

The Chimney Swift Sit is a sunset party at a designated roosting site. This year, we will hold two sits: one on Tuesday, Sept. 12, and another on Saturday, Sept. 16. Both sits will start at 6:30 p.m. Locations to be determined from data gathered during the Swift Night Out. One or two Chimney Swift roosting sites will be identified, and the public invited to enjoy the amazing aerial show as the Swifts head to their roost in the evening. Bring a lawn chair and sit back and enjoy this amazing sight.

It's exhilarating to watch hundreds or even thousands of these cigar-shaped birds fly in changing patterns with stealth and speed around a chimney opening and ending with an impressive finale of a bird-filled funnel pouring into the chimney.

—Marion Miller



## Fall Global Big Day Set for Oct. 14

Mark your calendars for the fall edition of Global Big Day on Saturday, Oct. 14. By taking part in October Big Day, you're also joining Global Bird Weekend and celebrating World Migratory Bird Day. Be a part of the global team and help set a new record for birding!

You can bird anywhere for as long as you like from midnight to 11:59 p.m. The idea is to create a snapshot of bird populations around the world on a particular day. Last year on October Big Day, 34,670 people went birding; 80,035 checklists were submitted; 7,453 species were reported (184 more species than last year); and 45,356 photos and 1,563 recordings were submitted to the Macaulay Library.

Participation is easy. Watch birds on Oct. 14. Enter your sightings on eBird. Watch the sightings roll in in real-time on the eBird October Big Day page: <https://ebird.org/octoberbigday>.

If you don't know how to use eBird, contact John Sprovieri or Regina McNulty, and they will help you set up an account. It's free. It's fun. What are you waiting for?

—Regina McNulty

## KCA Programs Begin in September

Our 2023-24 programming schedule will begin in September.

I have bad news and good news. First, the bad news. Hickory Knolls Discovery Center in St. Charles will be undergoing renovation through January, and we will be unable to meet there. The good news is that we will instead meet at the Baker Community Center (101 S. Second St. in St. Charles) for our September, October, November and January meetings. (We're still working on a venue for our December meeting.) The Collins Auditorium inside the center is a beautiful space. Parking is available Walnut and Second; Illinois and Second; the city garage on Illinois; and in the lot at the old Blue Goose market. Street parking is also available.



*Wednesday, Sept. 13, 6 p.m., Annual Photo Sharing Night and Potluck Dinner*  
Baker Community Center, St. Charles

One of our most popular meetings returns! Once a year, KCA members share their best images and stories with the group. KCA is blessed with some truly gifted photographers, so you won't want to miss this meeting!

If you'd like to participate, send your photos to Jackie Bowman via e-mail ([jaculinb4@gmail.com](mailto:jaculinb4@gmail.com)) or a free file-sharing service, such as We Transfer (<https://wetransfer.com>) or Google Drive.

Photos don't have to be of birds. Any nature subject is fine. Mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, flowers, landscapes—the world is your oyster. To expedite the presentation, we will put all the images into a PowerPoint presentation before the meeting. However, you're also welcome to put your images on a thumb drive and bring it to the meeting. Either way, we'll get you in!

More good news: After a three-year hiatus due to COVID, our potluck dinner is returning! As we have done in the past, KCA will provide the main entrée (chicken or beef), and members will provide the sides. What you bring depends on the first letter of your last name: A-I, bring a dessert; J-R, bring a salad; S-Z, bring a vegetable dish. The dinner begins at 6 p.m. We will 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. Alcoholic beverages are not allowed.

*Wednesday, Oct. 11, 7 p.m., Should Shawnee National Forest Become a National Park?, Karen Frailey and John Wallace, Shawnee Forest Defense*

Baker Community Center, St. Charles

The 290,000-acre Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois is the largest single expanse of mature forest in Illinois. Mature forests provide one of the best means on Earth for capturing and storing carbon dioxide. Now, there's a growing movement to make this unique public land part of the U.S. National Park system. This presentation will explain how and why to make this wilderness a national park. It will also highlight the beauty and recreational opportunities found in one of the state's most biologically diverse regions.

As an added bonus, KCA's program chairman Mike Piwoni will give us a refresher course on waterfowl identification.

*Wednesday, Nov. 8, 7 p.m., TBA*

Baker Community Center, St. Charles

*Wednesday, Dec. 13, 7 p.m., TBA*

TBA

*Wednesday, Jan. 10, 7 p.m., The Chicago Nighthawk Project, Edward Warden*

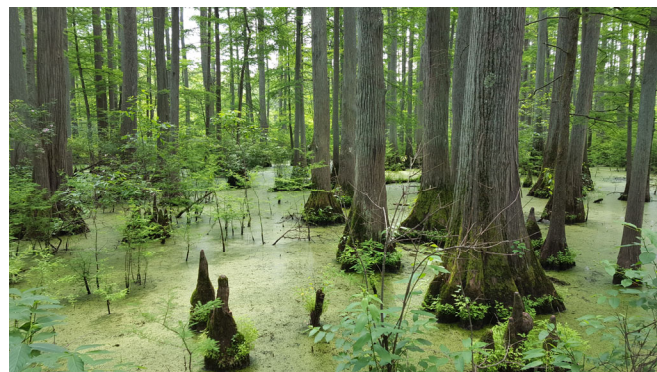
Baker Community Center, St. Charles

On warm summer evenings, Common Nighthawks roam the skies over treetops, grasslands, and cities. Their sharp, electric *peent* call is often the first clue they're overhead. In the dim half-light, these long-winged birds fly in graceful loops, flashing white patches out past the bend of each wing as they chase insects. Unfortunately, these fairly common birds are declining. The Chicago Nighthawk Project was begun last year to learn why. Find out what we've learned!

*Wednesday, Feb. 14, 7 p.m., A Lifer a Day! Birding Above the Arctic Circle, Jackie Bowman*

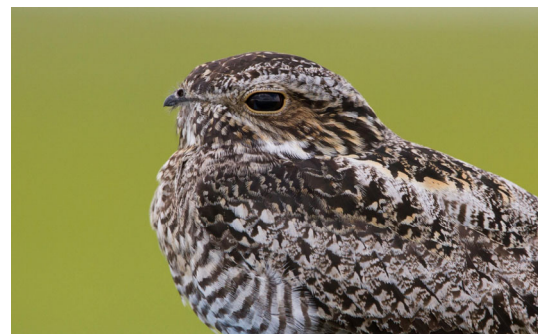
Hickory Knolls Discovery Center, St. Charles

Earlier this year, KCA's own Jackie Bowman and Nancy Schnaitman birded remote Alaska. Now, we get to share their adventures! Come to see Jackie's amazing photos of rare birds—and learn what whale blubber tastes like!



**Places like Herron Pond would be included in the proposed Shawnee Forest National Park.**

*Photo by John Sprovieri*



**Our October speaker will discuss the Chicago Nighthawk Project.**

*Photo courtesy National Audubon Society*

## Notice of Elections

This is an election year for KCA. If you would like to run for one of our elected offices (president, vice president, treasurer and secretary), please submit your name to election committee chairperson Marion Miller ([tlcbyrnme@sbcglobal.net](mailto:tlcbyrnme@sbcglobal.net)) by Wednesday, Oct. 4. The election will be held at our November meeting.

In addition, KCA recently revised its bylaws, and you, the members, will vote to approve or disapprove them at our November meeting. A copy of the bylaws will be posted to KCA's website soon.

—John Sprovieri

## KCA Bird Walks and Outings

Through Aug. 24, KCA's walks and rambles have tallied 319 species for the year! Our walks are led by fellow members and are intended to share an appreciation of the natural world around us. Please join us and share your knowledge and excitement about the birds of our world. Registration is not required.

### **Saturday, Sept. 2, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Nelson Lake / Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Tim Klimowski, 630-802-1153

### **Saturday, Sept. 9, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve, Hampshire.

Leader: Walt Lutz, 847-468-1709

### **Saturday, Sept. 16, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve, St. Charles.

Leader: John Sprovieri, 630-776-0924

### **Saturday, Sept. 23, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Burnidge Forest Preserve, Elgin.

Leader: TBA

### **Saturday, Sept. 30, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Bliss Woods Forest Preserve, Sugar Gove.

Leader: Mary Ochsenchlager, 630-643-4922

### **Saturday, Oct. 7, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Nelson Lake / Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Tim Klimowski, 630-802-1153

### **Saturday, Oct. 14, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Hickory Knolls Natural Area, St. Charles.

Leader: Bob Andrini, 630-624-8387

### **Saturday, Oct. 21, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Oakhurst Forest Preserve, Aurora.

Leader: Sue Schneider, 630-204-9477

### **Saturday, Oct. 28, 7:30 a.m., Bird Walk**

Fabyan Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: TBA

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

Nelson Lake / Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Tim Klimowski, 630-802-1153

### **Saturday, Nov. 11, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Virgil Gilman Nature Trail, Aurora.

Leader: Mike Piwoni, 707-520-4627

### **Saturday, Nov. 18, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Les Arends Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Shelly Windett, 630-292-8036

### **Saturday, Nov. 25, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Norris Woods Natural Area, St. Charles.

Leader: TBA

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

Nelson Lake / Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Tim Klimowski, 630-802-1153

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

Glenwood Park Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Nancy Schnaitman 630-822-5452

### **Saturday, Dec. 16, Christmas Bird Count—Fermi Circle**

Various locations.

Coordinator: John Sprovieri, 630-776-0924

### **Sunday, Dec. 17, Christmas Bird Count—Big Rock Circle**

Various locations.

Coordinator: Tim Balassie, 630-460-6910

### **Saturday, Dec. 23, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

SEBA Park, South Elgin.

Leader: Jon Duerr, 630-485-1005

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

Les Arends Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Our annual New Year's Day walk. What will be your first bird of 2023?

Leader: TBA

### **Saturday, Jan. 6, 8 a.m., Bird Walk**

Nelson Lake / Dick Young Forest Preserve, Batavia.

Leader: Tim Klimowski, 630-802-1153