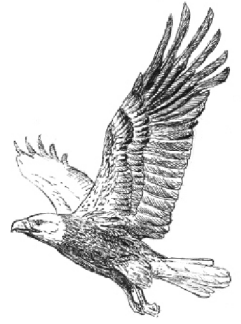




MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 34, No 1

Spring 2023

On the web at www.quadcityaudubon.org, and on Facebook.

Membership Meeting, Thursday March 9, 7:00pm, Butterworth Center, 1105 8th Street, Moline. The membership meeting will be on Zoom. Here is the link. <https://wlu.zoom.us/j/94727531516> Tim Murphy will present a program: "Waterfowl Identification".

Field Trip, Saturday March 11, 2023 8:00 am - Princeton Iowa Wildlife Management Area spring waterfowl walk. Meet at Princeton Wildlife Area south boat ramp end of 266th Street at 8:00am. For questions contact QCAudubon@gmail.com

Field Trip, Saturday April 8, 2023 - Cone Marsh. Meet at the Marquette Street Boat Ramp to carpool at 7:00 am. Cone Marsh, southwest of Muscatine, is great for viewing waterfowl and shorebirds. For questions contact QCAudubon@gmail.com

Membership Meeting, Thursday April 13, 7:00 pm, Butterworth Education Center, 701 12th Avenue, Moline. Program: Brian Fox Ellis, representing Illinois Audubon Society and a renowned character actor portrays "Robert Ridgeway, An Illinois Ornithologist" Ridgeway was a prominent ornithologist and Curator of Ornithology at Smithsonian Museum beginning 1880.

Stroll Thru Springtime, Saturday April 29, 2023. Black Hawk State Historic Site, Rock Island. Stroll Thru Springtime. Bird Walk 7:00-9:00am. Program 9:00 to 10:00am Wildflower Walk 10:00am to Noon.

Illinois Spring Bird Count, Saturday May 6, 2023. See newsletter article. Contact Tim Murphy 309-764-9779 or for further information. <https://spring-bird-count.inhs.illinois.edu/> Coordinated by Illinois Natural History Survey.

Membership Meeting Thursday May 11. 7:00pm. Details To be Announced. Education Center at Butterworth

Field Trip, Saturday May 13, 2023. Dorrance and Illiniwek Parks. Meet at the ball diamond parking lot at Dorrance Park, Port Byron, IL 7:00 am. This field trip has yielded outstanding numbers of migrating and breeding warblers, tanagers, orioles and woodpeckers. For questions contact QCAudubon@gmail.com.

Field Trip, Sunday June 4, 2023. Field Trip Mississippi Palisades State Park and Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge. This is an all day trip that features late waterfowl, breeding warblers, grassland birds. The all day trip includes a stop for lunch. Meet at Shulers Shady Grove Park, Rapids City 6:00am for carpooling. For questions contact QCAudubon@gmail.com.



Audubon

The Quad City Audubon Society is a Chapter of National Audubon Society

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From My Perch

Just when you thought it safe to go back into the water, I return. After 4 years of Jody Millar's leadership, I have returned as President. Of course, Jody took my place so the revolving door continues for at least a while longer. Jody led us through the confusion of the Covid years when in person meetings were no longer held, field trips did not involve carpooling and everyone was scrambling to figure out how they would relate to the world and community.

We still have vestiges of Covid and the first issue is membership meetings. Do we hold in person membership meetings? In the recent past when we tried to hold in person meetings our attendance was horrific, with the exception of December Pie Night. We would schedule a meeting and maybe 6 people would attend and listen to a speaker who could have spent hours working on a presentation.

We held a couple of meetings by Zoom and our attendance was at least in double digits. We are now in a decision making process on how to proceed. Our first Spring meeting, March 9, is to be on Zoom. A link for this will be in our newsletter and on our website.

Our second meeting April 13, will be in person at the Butterworth Center and will feature Brian Fox Ellis, a noted storyteller who will present as Thomas Ridgeway, a prominent early 20th Century Ornithologist.

The third meeting May 11 is undetermined at press time, but will be informed by our response to the first two meetings.

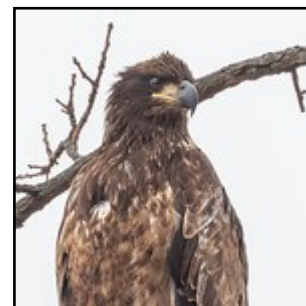
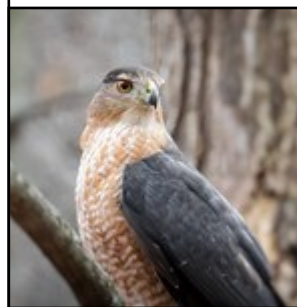
If you have any input let us know.

A total change of thought. At the beginning of the year Quad City Audubon sent out a mailer reminding people they could be a local member of our group regardless of their status as a National Audubon Member. Our dues are \$10.00 annually and since our meetings and field trips are open free to the public and our newsletter is on line, being a member has essentially one benefit. You may vote at the annual meeting for our Board of Directors and Officers, or may run for a position yourself.

The other benefit, is that one supports the local organization and we have been profoundly moved by the financial response of our Membership. Contributions to date have been nearly \$3,000.00. These funds will be spent largely on local community conservation projects that will either enhance bird populations, further research or promote community outreach and education.

Thank you very much.

Tim Murphy,
President QCAS



Above, from top: Cooper's Hawk and Bald Eagle. Below, "Penguin". All three photographed during the Eastern Mercer County Christmas Bird Count. Pictures courtesy of Steve Hager.

**Illinois Spring Bird Count**

Saturday May 6th is the 51st Annual Illinois Spring Bird Count. This is an example of Citizen Science at its best. Each year on the Saturday between May 4 and May 11 birders fan out across the state in an effort to census the population.

The statewide count is organized by the Illinois Natural History Survey. The count is organized by County. Almost all counties in Illinois have a compiler who organizes and tabulates the counts of various field parties and feeder watchers. The result is a great snapshot of how bird populations have changed over the past half century in the State of Illinois.

You do not have to be an expert at bird identification to help. Field parties are led by experienced birders but those less experienced are welcome to participate. It is a great way to gain experience in identification.

In addition, one may count birds at their feeder, neighborhood or park. For further information, and a list of County Compilers, one may go to the Illinois Natural History Survey website: <https://spring-bird-count.inhs.illinois.edu/> or QCAudubon@gmail.com.

Smith Island Field Trip

February 11, 14 people gathered at the parking lot at Lock and Dam 14 near LeClaire, Iowa for the Quad City Audubon February field trip led by Brian Peer. With birds a bit difficult to find, the Lock and Dam can be a good spot. Some years the waters below and above the dam can hold a great many diving ducks. Eagles are nearly always common as it is a spot well known for its eagle photography. Further, Smith's Island itself reliably holds common winter woodland birds. Finally, in many years the weather can be exceptionally frigid and snow at times deep, so a mile or so walk is tolerable.

This year though the weather was near spectacular. We were in the mid teens at 9:00, but by 10:30 well above freezing with lots of sun and little wind.

True to form a smattering of eagles was present including one finishing a fish breakfast viewed from the parking lot. There were no waterfowl in the channel except for Canada geese and a lone pelican.

As we walked toward Smith's Island, gulls were scanned. Our target was a greater black-backed gull reported mid-week. We did not find it among the herring and ring-billed gulls but a lesser black-backed gull was found.

The woods on Smith's Island did not have anything unusual, but we had 14 species seen including red-headed, red-bellied and downy woodpeckers, tree, Eurasian and song sparrows, plus tufted titmouse and brown creeper.

Our last vantage spot was the viewing platform near the Lock and Dam. A kingfisher called at our approach. The spotting scope looking upriver quite a distance revealed common merganser, canvasback and swans.

Pat Carlson and I traveled close to the gathering and added goldeneye, mallard and identified the swans as trumpeters.

For the morning we had 26 species, no frostbite and a taste of Spring in mid-February.

Tim Murphy

Thanks to those who contributed to this issue of *Mississippi Currents*. The next deadline is February 15th, 2023. Submissions are gladly accepted. Send to: Jason Monson, (309) 221-1177, jmonson75@hotmail.com

Visit us online at:
www.quadcityaudubon.org.

Mission Statement

The Quad City Audubon Society is dedicated to the enjoyment of birds; a better understanding of the natural world; stewardship of natural areas and habitats; fellowship; improvement of community awareness of environmental issues; and education of youth for the benefit of future generations.



Above, Sandhill Cranes on the Lee Center Christmas Bird Count. Below, from left to right: Eurasian Tree Sparrows on the Davenport Christmas Bird Count. Northern Harrier, American Robin, Black-Capped Chickadee and Eastern Bluebirds on the Lee Center CBC. All photographs courtesy of Steve Hager.



Area Biologist Completes 10th Consecutive CBC Marathon

Hampton Biologist Kelly McKay has outdone himself. Again. On January 5th, 2023, upon completing a long day in the field on the Cassville Wisconsin Christmas Bird Count, McKay concluded his 10th Consecutive Christmas Bird Count Marathon.

For those of you unfamiliar with the term, one completes a CBC Marathon by participating on a different Christmas Bird Count every day of the count period, from December 14th through January 5th. This amounts to 23 days straight of winter birding.

When I first met Kelly in the early 2000s, he was just breaking into the Marathon game. Over the years since then (most years, really), McKay has scheduled an often grueling itinerary to string together 23 days in a row of CBC birding. Braving foul weather and often long overnight drives to get to the next count the following day, McKay's marathon saga has taken him from Illinois and Iowa, to Wisconsin, Missouri, and Kentucky. If you've ever joined in on his field parties, you know he isn't "phoning it in". I've worked many CBCs with him over the years, and we're often on the road at 2 or 3 in the morning to be in territory to start the day owling. Ordinarily, a day in the field with Kelly is a 12+ hour commitment.

This 2022-2023 CBC season marked his 10th **consecutive** marathon, which works out to him participating in 230 Christmas Bird Counts in the last 10 years. If you figure in the other 4 years he's completed a CBC Marathon since he started the "habit", that's 322 Christmas Bird Counts solely completed during marathons. When he finished up this year's marathon season, Kelly had completed his 591st Christmas Bird Count, maintaining his lead as the all-time most prolific CBC participant ever. For a little perspective, I've been participating in CBCs more or less since the late 90's, completing 8-10 each year for a few years in a row now, and I've "only" completed 113 Christmas Counts!

To say that Kelly is committed to Christmas Counts, based only on his marathon record, would be a disservice to him. In addition to the annual 23 days in a row of non-stop birding and travel, McKay also compiles 10 Christmas Bird Counts in Illinois and Iowa. This amounts to weeks of planning ahead of the count season, returning phone calls and emails, helping organize field parties, and all the other tasks associated with planning a count. Once the marathon is over, the work doesn't stop there. Then it's time to reach out to participants to collect, tabulate and eventually enter data for all of those count circles. I can think of no one more dedicated to the Christmas Bird Count program than him.

From talking to him at the end of this season, it sounds like McKay may take something of a break from "marathoning". With a demanding work schedule, Kelly thinks this could be his last CBC Marathon, at least for now. While he isn't calling it quits on CBCs of course, he's thinking maybe next season he'll take it easy by "only" participating in 15 or 16 counts.



Clockwise from bottom left: Red-tailed Hawk, Downy Woodpecker, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, and Hermit Thrush. All photos courtesy of Steve Hager during the Bald Bluff Christmas Bird Count.

Above: January 5th, 2023, Badger Road, Glen Haven, Wisconsin. Shovels and tow straps make the world go 'round. Kelly McKay and Brett Mandernack continue digging while Ryan Schmitz and Lynette Dornack take a brief break from shoveling. It was all hands on deck for over an hour to get the Subaru out so we could continue our day in the field on the Cassville CBC. Photograph by Jason Monson.

Summary of the 2022-2023 Local Christmas Bird Counts

Jason L. Monson – Kelly J. McKay – Stephen B. Hager – Cathleen D. Monson

The local Christmas Bird Count season began on opening day of the count period, December 14th, 2022. Fourteen observers in 6 field parties and a lone feeder watcher teamed up on the Clinton-Savanna Count. Over 21,000 individual birds across 84 species were counted that day. In spite of some heavy afternoon fog, participants observed noteworthy numbers of Canvasbacks (7,000), Red-headed Woodpeckers (25), Trumpeter Swans (859), and Tundra Swans (856). Other birds of interest included: 1 Mute Swan, 1 Horned Grebe, 1 Northern Saw-whet Owl, 1 Northern Shrike, 1 Common Redpoll, 3 Eastern Towhees, 3 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and 82 Sandhill Cranes.

In spite of high winds and some morning snow, eight observers in 5 field parties were able to count over 7,000 birds and 77 species on the 10th Bald Bluff Christmas Bird Count on December 17th. Species recorded for the first time on this count included 1 Northern Shoveler and 1 Ring-necked Duck. High numbers of Wild Turkey (48) Ring-billed Gull (107), House Sparrow (747), and Brown-headed Cowbird (1,193) were recorded. Several species were notably low for this count, and owl abundance was reduced, with unusually low numbers of Barred Owls (9) and Great-horned Owls (5). The bird of the day was likely a single Red Crossbill, only the second one observed on the count since its inception.

Twenty observers in nine field parties, and 2 feeder watchers birded the Quad Cities on December 18th, during the Davenport CBC. Participants recorded an impressive 93 species. Several birds were observed in high numbers this year: 12,942 Canada Geese, 4,020 Canvasbacks, 29,889 Red-winged Blackbirds, 9,060 Common Grackles, 5,010 Brown-headed Cowbirds, 4,236 House Sparrows, and 637 Eurasian Tree Sparrows helped push this count to 103,031 individual birds. Other birds of note included 4 Mute Swans, 18 Sandhill Cranes, 2 Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 1 Great Black-backed Gull, 8 Fox Sparrows, and 33 Rusty Blackbirds.

The Princeton-Camanche Christmas Bird Count was held on December 21st. Seventy-nine species and over 23,000 birds were observed by fourteen participants in six field parties. Some high numbers of waterfowl were noted, including 12,168 Canada Geese, 1,776 Trumpeter Swans, and 388 Tundra Swans. Noteworthy birds on this count included 2 Sandhill Cranes, 2 Rusty Blackbirds and a single Red-shouldered Hawk.

A powerful winter storm moved into the area on December 22nd, producing high winds and low wind chills throughout the day. Despite these difficult conditions, 5 observers in four field parties participated on the Van Petten CBC. Birders braving the weather were treated to some interesting birds, such as 3 Long-eared Owls, 1 Northern Saw-whet Owl, an Eastern Towhee, and 32 Red Crossbills. Fifty-two species and 3,797 individuals were counted that day. Lapland Longspurs (965) and Snow Buntings (40) were observed in relatively abundant numbers.

Weather the following day was also challenging, with bitter cold temperatures and extremely severe wind chills. Travel was difficult, with drifted roads limiting mobility in some areas. Just the same, 13 observers in 5 field parties, and 8 feeder watchers were able to wring some birding out of the day for the Muscatine Christmas Bird Count on December 23rd. Not surprisingly, open country birds were abundant, with participants reporting 541 Horned Larks, 619 Lapland Longspurs, and 33 Snow Buntings. Impressive finds that day were a single Peregrine Falcon, and one lone Wood Duck on the Mississippi River in Rock Island County. Despite the difficult conditions that day, birders were able to tally 5,494 birds among 60 species.

Cold temperatures and bitter wind chills persisted on the Andalusia-Buffalo CBC on December 24th. Eight observers in four field parties and a feeder watcher did not let the weather stop them from counting over 13,000 birds across 75 species. Several species were seen in great abundance for this count, including 861 Horned Larks, 1,277 Lapland Longspurs, 1,248 American Tree Sparrows, and 3,355 Dark-eyed Juncos. Birders were rewarded for their tenacity with some noteworthy species: Tundra Swans (2), Merlins (2), and singles of Long-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Peregrine Falcon were observed on this year's count.

Three participants in two field parties spent a very cold Christmas Day on the Buchanan County Christmas Bird Count. Fifty-seven species were observed among 7,073 individual birds. Game birds were observed in relatively high numbers for this count, including 84 Ring-necked Pheasants and 247 Wild Turkeys. Other birds of note included 2 Long-eared Owls, 2 Short-eared Owls, 1 Harris's Sparrow, 1 Fox Sparrow, and 3 Northern Shrikes.

On December 26th, ten observers in five field parties observed 69 species and nearly 10,000 birds on the Western Mercer County CBC. This count seems to always produce some good birds, and this year did not disappoint. Participants were treated to some special finds, such as 21 Trumpeter Swans, 12 Northern Bobwhite, 5 Wilson's Snipe, 9 Western Meadowlarks, 26 Eastern Meadowlarks, 7 Rusty Blackbirds, and a Northern Shrike. Rough-legged Hawks were observed in particularly abundant numbers that day (13), as were Lapland Longspurs (587).

Mild temperatures made for pleasant birding on the 12th Eastern Mercer County Christmas Bird Count on January 2nd, 2023. Nine participants in five field parties counted 5,562 birds across 69 species. Owls were abundant on the count this year, with new record high numbers observed of Great-horned, Barred, Long-eared, Short-eared and Northern Saw-whet. Several other species were observed in new high numbers including Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks (4 each) and Rough-legged Hawks (15!). Eurasian-collared Doves, Mourning Doves, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, Blue Jays, American Crows, Tufted Titmice, and Yellow-rumped Warblers also posted new high numbers for this count.

The Northwest Clayton County CBC was held on January 3rd, with eight observers in four field parties and 1 feeder watcher participating. Observers counted 3,029 birds among 57 species. Some notable birds included: 9 Trumpeter Swans, 2 Killdeer, 1 Great Blue Heron, 3 Short-eared Owls, 1 Merlin, and 8 Evening Grosbeaks.

On January 4th, six observers in four field parties tallied 5,372 birds from 69 species on the Southeast Clayton County Christmas Bird Count. Some species were observed in relatively abundant numbers, such as Rough-legged Hawk (14), Eastern Bluebird (61) and an impressive 31 American Kestrels. Birds of note included one American Black Duck, 3 Northern Bobwhite, 2 Killdeer, 2 Red-shouldered Hawks, 1 Eastern Phoebe and 1 Merlin.

The compilers would like to thank all of the individuals who participated in this season's Christmas Bird Counts. We welcome those of you who might have been new to us this year, and our returning "veterans". We need both kinds of birders to keep the program going – we just can't do it without you. You're all greatly appreciated, and we look forward to seeing you next season!