



MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 34, No 4

Winter 2023

Thursday, December 14, 2023. Public Meeting 7:00 pm – Pie Night, Butterworth Center, 1105 8th Street, Moline. Dr. Brian Peer of Western Illinois University will present a bird quiz. Bring a pie to share or just join in on the fun. Meeting will also be available on zoom <https://wiu.zoom.us/j/94478127233>

Christmas Bird Counts

- Thursday, December 14, 2023. Louisa Y Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Jason Monson at jmonson75@hotmail.com or 309-221-1177 to participate.
- Saturday, December 16th, 2023. Bald Bluff Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Jason Monson at jmonson75@hotmail.com or 309-221-1177 to participate.
- Sunday, December 17th, 2023. Davenport Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Monday, December 18th, 2023. Andalusia Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Tuesday, December 19th, 2023. Clinton/Savanna Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Thursday, December 21st, 2023. Princeton/Camanche Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Friday, December 22nd, 2023. Western Mercer County Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Saturday, December 23rd, 2023. Muscatine Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Monday, January 1st, 2024. Eastern Mercer County CBC.** Contact Jason Monson at jmonson75@hotmail.com or 309-221-1177 to participate
- Tuesday, January 2nd, 2024. Buchanan County Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Wednesday, January 3rd, 2024. Northwest Clayton County Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Thursday, January 4th, 2024. Southeast Clayton County Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.
- Friday, January 5th, 2024. Van Petten, Christmas Bird Count.** Contact Kelly McKay at 309-235-4661 to participate.

Friday-Sunday, January 5th-7th, 2024, Bald Eagle Days at the QCCA Expo Center, Rock Island, Illinois. QCAS is looking for volunteers to help participants observe Bald Eagles. If you're interested, contact us at qcaudubon@gmail.com.

Sunday, February 11 8:00-10:00am Winter Field Trip to Smiths Island for overwintering woodland birds and waterfowl and gulls. Meet at Lock and Dam 14 parking lot, just downriver from Le Claire. For questions contact qcaudubon@gmail.com

Saturday, March 16 Field Trip to Princeton Marsh for migrating waterfowl and early spring migrants. Meet at Lock and Dam 14, Le Claire Iowa at 8:00am. We will look for diving ducks en route to Princeton Marsh. For questions contact qcaudubon@gmail.com

Sunday April 14 Field Trip Cone Marsh. Meet at the Marquette Street Boat Ramp, Davenport at 7:00am. Cone Marsh southwest of Muscatine is great for viewing waterfowl and shorebirds. For questions contact qcaudubon@gmail.com

Saturday April 27 Stroll Thru Springtime, Black Hawk State Historic Site, Rock Island. Citizens to Preserve Black Hawk Park. Bird Walk 7:00-9:00am Program 9:00-10:00am Wildflower Walk 10:00-Noon

Saturday May 4, Illinois Spring Bird Count. Contact Tim Murphy 309-764-9779 or for further information. <https://spring-bird-count.inhs.illinois.edu/> Coordinated by Illinois Natural History Survey.



Audubon

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

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Tim Murphy - 2025

Vice President

Jody Millar - 2025

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Bernadene Bowles-2025

Secretary

Brian Peer - 2025

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Forrest Stonedahl-2023

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Field Trips

Board Members

Membership

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Newsletter

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Publicity

Vacant

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From My Perch

Recently I took up pickleball. The other day I found myself lunging for a ball mostly out of reach and to my surprise I not only struck it but it crossed the net, landed barely inbounds and was totally unreturnable. My partner observed, "Good things CAN happen if the ball hits your paddle."

I started thinking there are a lot of things like that and birding to me is one of those. I have been leading and have been on some field trips that could have been good to view a variety of birds but have just been disappointing in that I would have expected to have more birds present and the birds observed were not providing us with very easy "looks".

More recently, I took a couple of sisters on a daybreak walk along the Rock River in Moline. Blackbirds filled many of the trees, the calls kind of squeaky. It would have been easy to discount them as red-winged blackbirds, maybe cow-birds, or starlings. They were rusty blackbirds, a species that is somewhat unfamiliar to me as it breeds mostly in Canada and this is the northern portion of its winter range.

On the same walk my sister remarked she had never seen a pileated woodpecker. Well that changed quickly as one flew over the marsh and landed on a tree about 30 yards away.

Recently we took a QCAS field trip upriver to find waterfowl. For most of the day waterfowl was scarce and most were distant. However we kept swinging our paddles and were rewarded with an elegant group of Bonaparte's gulls flying toward us, dipping gracefully into the water and then discovered the backwater nearly filled with dabbling ducks.

This past spring three of us decided to search out some birds after everyone else had decided to quit the field. We were elated to find a loggerhead shrike in its predicted spot. We then proceeded to walk for over a mile to find a chat, which was not to be found. Swinging the paddle does not always work.

For me I bird largely to become more adept at identification. It has been a long journey and there is so much more I can learn. Some of this learning happens at home, the backyard, the feeders the merlin app. But the best experiences occur in the field.

- Tim Murphy

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.

Thanks to those who contributed to this issue of *Mississippi Currents*. The next deadline is February 15th, 2024. Submissions are gladly accepted. Send to: Jason Monson, (309) 221-1177, jmonson75@hotmail.com

Visit us online at:
www.quadcityaudubon.org.

The officers for Quad City Audubon Society Tim Murphy, President; Jody Millar, Vice-President, Bernadene Bowles, Treasurer, Brian Peer, Secretary have terms that extend to 2025 as do Board members, Adrianna McBride, Rob Porter and Cathy White.

Two others, Susa Stonedahl and Kristi Kefauver have been nominated to serve two year terms to 2026.

However, we would accept nominations for the Board from our membership. If one would like to nominate someone please contact Tim Murphy at qcaudubon.com prior to the December membership meeting.

Bald Eagle Days - January 5-7

For well over 50 years Quad City Audubon Society has participated in a form of Bald Eagle viewing. Before there was Bald Eagle Days we would organize an Eagle Caravan that would travel along the Mississippi River to view overwintering Eagles and we would have a program dedicated to Eagle populations.

When Bald Eagle Days began at Modern Woodmen, QCAS staffed spotting scopes at various points along the river so that visitors would be able to view distant birds. That could be a relatively cold, in fact it could be absolutely frigid two hour shift depending on the daytime temperatures and wind.

As Bald Eagle Days migrated from Modern Woodmen to the Expo Center QCAS added a booth to augment the spotting scopes.

However, recently it has become much more difficult for our organization to staff a booth as volunteers became much more difficult to recruit. The past couple of years we have had a "Passive Booth" that we essentially staffed to help organize buses that transported people from Bald Eagle Days to our spotting scopes.

As of the writing of this article, Bald Eagle Days has not committed to providing transportation to the spotting scopes. It is very possible that we will return to our original task of staffing spotting scopes. Volunteers would take two hour shifts on Saturday and Sunday 10:00am to 4:00pm to oversee spotting scopes. Recently we have been setting up near the blockhouse at the south end of the Rock Island Arsenal Swing Bridge. Eagles are very reliable here and can be pretty close.

Obviously we can use volunteers. One needs to have the skill to set up a spotting scope and to focus it on a sitting bird. This does not take much training and the skill set can be mastered in a few minutes. It is very gratifying to see how excited people get at being able to see our National Symbol through the scope. Don't be afraid to give us a hand.

One may contact QCAS through email at: qcaudubon@gmail.com or Tim Murphy 309-764-9779.

Wildcat Den Field Trip September 10, 2023

On September 10, 25 people showed up for the Field Trip to Wildcat Den. The day was spectacular, warm, sunny and Wildcat Den is pretty scenic. I had high hopes for birds. September 10 is pretty close to peak fall warbler migration. Alas it was not to be. The warm early fall temperatures and lack of northerly winds possibly gave the birds little incentive to migrate.

Still we did find birds. Our first stop was Credit Island where we had a mallard, pied-billed grebe, ring-billed gulls and Caspian terns, great-blue heron, great egret, pelicans and cormorants.

From here we traveled to Wildcat Den and stopped at the Grist Mill. We crossed the creek and walked a bit along a service road but with only seeing one warbler, an ovenbird.

We then walked the trails along the base of the bluff. Again birds were scarce. We had red-bellied and red-headed woodpeckers, flicker and kingfisher but very few passerines. The southern part of this trail goes past a considerable stand of red and yellow jewelweed flowers and here at least we could view several ruby-throated hummingbirds feeding.

We took the Punch Bowl Trail to the top of the bluff and finally began seeing warblers. However they were very active, the trees leafed out and one needed to be a very quick study to identify what we were seeing. We identified the expected vireos, warbling, red-eyed and yellow-throated. Nearly everyone saw black and white warblers as they were numerous but the Tennessee, redstart, magnolia were much more difficult. I also suspect we had a female black-throated blue warbler but it refused to cooperate for absolute confirmation.

Overall for the morning we had 50 species. While the day was not nearly as birdy as hoped the company and walk in the woods was very enjoyable.

Tim Murphy

Waterfowl Field Trip 11-12-23

Annually QCAS has taken an autumn waterfowl field trip up the Mississippi River. The focus of the field trip generally has been lock and dam 13 near Thomson, Illinois. In addition we usually spend a bit of time on a couple of wetland areas along the way and include the overlook at the Ingersoll Nature Center and Spring Lake. This is billed as an all day field trip.

The morning was chilly and breezy though the expected high was 69 degrees, absolutely balmy for mid-November. We met in Rapids City at 8:00 am, found pied-billed grebe and headed north. We picked up wild turkey and Eastern bluebird near the Cordova power plant, nothing at Meredosia Slough but to our surprise on Holly Road and Route 84 are some wetlands and we immediately spotted large shorebirds in non-breeding plumage standing belly deep in water. Susa thought greater yellowlegs but I thought they seemed too bulky and was ready to declare willets, when they flew. No white and black wing patches of a willet and when they landed in shallow water their yellow legs were easily observed. Give Susa the win, plus she was able to discern one was smaller and thus we had both greater and lesser yellowlegs plus a dunlin.

We headed expectantly to Lock and Dam 13. The access road to the lock is adjacent to a large marshy area and often it is filled with dabbling ducks but today it was nearly empty. A couple of trumpeter swans, mallards and green-winged teal and a Northern harrier were all that was offered.

We proceeded to the overlook upstream of the lock and dam and waterfowl were here but not in the usual numbers and a bit far away. Still we picked out ruddy duck, lesser scaup, a lone canvasback, hooded merganser, bufflehead and Walt found a common loon. However other ducks were around as just upriver the sky became nearly clouded with a huge mass of ducks. They settled in the channel upstream of us, thousands of what appeared to be lesser scaup, though the distance was daunting for easy identification.

From here we went to Thomson Causeway Campgrounds and again the pickings were slim. We did see sandhill cranes and bufflehead, redhead and golden-eye. Then four gull-like birds that behaved more like terns came foraging over the water as they came toward us. I despaired of ID until one set down and then I became certain we had Bonaparte's gull in winter plumage and without their black caps.

As we turned to leave we then observed more shorebirds nearby. A dozen or so dunlins and a lone Wilson's snipe were spotted.

We headed for home but missed our turn off the causeway and found ourselves along a piece of wetland that we had not yet covered. It was filled with over a thousand dabbling ducks. We were in great light and out of the wind. The wetland was thick with mallards, Northern shovelers, green-winged teal and gadwalls. In much smaller numbers were found wood duck, blue-winged teal, widgeon and pintails. In the woods near us were rusty blackbirds and red-headed woodpeckers.

Ralph and I were the only ones left and we observed for a half hour or so. Finally at 2:30 we decided it was time to head home and we skipped the northern most part of the trip as scheduled.

For the day we had 59 species, 21 of which were waterfowl, our biggest miss in that category being ring-necked duck. Overall a quite successful day, with clear skies, and very tolerable temperatures in spite of a very brisk southerly breeze.

Tim Murphy

Crow Creek Park Field Trip October 14, 2023

What a difference a month makes. The temperature for our October Field trip was very close to 32 at 8:00am. Three hardy birders showed up, Cathy White, Ralph Beckley and myself. While in the past Crow Creek Park has been pretty good in October, this year was not one of these.

We started at the park entrance by the quarry. In past years this trail has been great for cedar waxwings and thrushes but except for a single Swainson's thrush, this year they were absent. We did pick up white-throated and song sparrow close to the creek. Farther along the trail we found ruby-crowned and golden-crowned kinglets but little else.

We walked east to the park border and found a group of wild turkey a couple of hundred yards away. We though, were not the only ones, as four coyotes came out of the woods in hope of a turkey breakfast. The birds were much too wary and took flight long before they were in any immediate danger.

The coyotes seemed to have very little fear of humans though as we spotted them again crossing the trail in front of us and we were far from the only people walking the path.

On the way back to the car, the spot we had observed the kinglets was still active and we saw chickadees, nuthatch, downy and hairy woodpeckers, and our lone yellow-rumped warbler. For a two hour walk we had 26 species.

Tim Murphy