



MISSISSIPPI CURRENTS

Newsletter of the Quad City Audubon Society



UPCOMING EVENTS *All activities open to the public.*

Vol. 37, No 1

Spring 2026

Thursday, March 5, 6 pm. **Night Owl Walk.** Hollowview Park Parking lot, 1700 Sun Valley Drive, Bettendorf, Iowa. Public is welcome. We will walk along the Bettendorf Bike Path to look and listen for owls. We may take some off the path trails which could affect footwear if it's wet/muddy.

Sunday, March 22, 8:55 am. Field trip to **Corriell Nature Preserve.** Meet-Up/Caravan & Carpool-Veterans Memorial Park, Parking lot at Marquette Boat Ramp, 1101 Marquette St., Davenport, Iowa. We will leave at 9:00 AM SHARP. Access to the preserve is limited to private tours. The preserve includes mixed habitat with nearly 200 acres of combined wetland, timber, oak savanna and sand prairie. Participants will have the opportunity to observe a number of resident and migrating species.

Saturday April 18, 10-2. **Willow bird feeder workshop.** Black Hawk State Historic Site, Outdoor shelter adjacent to Singing Bird Lodge. 1510 46th Ave, Rock Island, IL 61201. All materials provided (free). RSVP by emailing: quadcityaudubon@gmail.com

Saturday, April 25, 7:00 a.m.-12 p.m. **Stroll Through Springtime**, Black Hawk State Historic Site. Sponsored by Citizens to Preserve Blackhawk Park. Bird Walk 7-9 a.m. Program 9:00-10:00am. Wildflower Walk 10:00-Noon.

Saturday, **May 9th, 2026.** Illinois Spring Bird Count. Contact Bill Bertrand at billandila@frontiernet.net to participate in Mercer County. Contact Walt Zuurdeeg at waltzuurdeeg@mediacombb.net to participate in Rock Island County.

The following field trips are still being planned so please consider them tentative. Gathering times and locations have not been determined. Please check the website or your email when we get closer to the dates.

Sunday, May 17- Field Trip to Dorrance Park and Illiniwek Forest Preserve.

Saturday, June 6- Field Trip to Mississippi Palisades State Park and Lost Mound Wildlife Refuge with stops along the way.

Visit us on the web at
www.quadcityaudubon.org.



Audubon

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

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Direct all general emails**to:****qcaudubon@gmail.com****Spring Bird Counts Revisited**

(Editor's note: We asked Tim Murphy to reflect on 40 years of compiling the Illinois Spring Bird Count for Rock Island County.)

The first year I compiled the Illinois Spring Bird Count for Rock Island County was 1986. Last year, 2025, was my final year compiling this Count. I am still in pretty good shape but getting kind of long in the tooth and I felt it best that this task be passed on to someone younger. Walt Zuurdeeg has volunteered to be that person, and I suspect that with his attention to detail that the Count is in very good hands.

The Illinois Spring Bird Count began in 1972 and was a joint project between Illinois Audubon Society and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The administration has since been transferred to the Illinois Natural History Survey which is an agency that does a lot of work cataloging and tracking the state of the environment in Illinois. Currently, Tara Beveroth is the Count coordinator.

This is Citizen Science at its best. Each spring on a Saturday between May 4 and May 10—whichever is closest to May 7—volunteers identify and count the number of birds in each county in Illinois. To avoid duplicate counting volunteers are assigned portions of each county. Volunteers can also count birds on their private properties or their feeders as these are unlikely to be covered by anyone else.

The Spring Count provides significant about bird populations trends over the decades. Unfortunately, the first noteworthy trend is the overall decline in bird populations. For example, common grackles for the first 25 years of count data that I have, averaged around 600 individuals per year. In the last 15 years the numbers have been under 200. Grassland birds such as meadowlark, dickcissel and pheasant have also declined since their habitat has been degraded by more row crops and housing.

Quad City Audubon used to have a field trip called the May Dawn Bird Concert. We would gather on Credit Island pre-dawn and listen and observe the increasing crescendo of bird call as the sun gathered strength. That too was a hallmark of the Spring Count as my ear was greatly challenged to identify individual species in the cacophony. Now the concert seems to be more of a whisper. In Springs past, birds, particularly warblers were everywhere. Now most often they appear to be absent. There are times when I feel we are documenting Silent Spring. National statistics give credence to this observation. A 2019 study revealed a decline of 3 billion birds over the proceeding 50 years, a decline that has continued.

However, there are species, such as eastern bluebirds, that have shown an increase (likely due to the increased number of nest boxes made available). Birds such as blue grosbeak or summer tanager have shown up in increasing numbers as their breeding range has advanced north, likely due to climate change. Species such as double-breasted cormorant, bald eagle, Canada goose and American white pelican have increased greatly over the past 29 years. Cormorants and eagles benefitting from the absence of DDT, Canada goose due to increasing number of permanent residents and pelicans to an increase in numbers nationwide plus shifts in migratory patterns. Other birds such as shorebirds are dependent on random local factors during the Count. In Rock Island County, there is almost no shorebird habitat without flooding during the count period. Flooding can either be due to overflowing rivers or heavy rains that flood fields. During flood years shorebirds are common while other years we have next to none.

The weather can certainly be variable during the first weeks of May. Most often the overnight low is probably in the 40's and the high temperature more and more often in the mid-80's. However, I recall one spring count on May 5th during which it was cold and windy enough that snow was driven horizontally across the corn fields. It didn't stick and it didn't last long but it was real, not imagined. There have



Image credit: Summer Red Bird (currently known as the Summer tanager) by John James Audubon from the Library of Congress.

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also been thunderstorms. Early in my count experience, when I barely knew my warblers, a huge thunderstorm persisted for a couple of hours predawn. I almost went home as observations of any kind were impossible. However, once the storm lifted and the sun came out, birds were everywhere. I walked into Black Hawk State Historic Site and warblers seemed to be dripping from the trees. Every year I keep hoping that this will be the year that brings a similar fallout but that has been elusive.

For me the Spring Bird Count has been a gratifying experience. It is a long day, beginning predawn and ending around dusk. It has been a good way for me to sharpen my identification skills. It has been fun to follow the tiny gravel and dirt roads to the most out of the way places. Finally, for me as a compiler it has always be out-of-the-way hear about the birds the other groups in the county have indentified. We have a good bunch of counters who know their territories and are skilled. However, they too are getting older. We can use more help and we can certainly use younger people to gain identification skills. When I started, I knew next to nothing about bird ID. I have tons more to learn but I have come a long way.

In closing I would like to thank Pete Petersen, Kelly McKay, Anne Barker, Tim Brush, Steve Freed, Walt Zuurdeeg and a host of others for the mentoring. Walt, I will never forget you spotting the nighthawk on the horizontal branch well into the forest nor for the American pipit walking in the middle of a plowed field. Experiences like this make the Spring Count special and every year there is at least one unforgettable moment.

-Tim Murphy



Breeding adult American White Pelican. Photo credit: Gerrit Vyn / McCaulay Library

All skill levels encouraged
VISIT US @ QUADCITYAUDUBON.ORG

WILLOW BIRD FEEDER WORKSHOP

Led By: Krista Kefauver

APRIL 18TH
10 AM - 2 PM

Outdoor Shelter
Adjacent To Singing
Bird Lodge

Black Hawk State
Historic Site
1510 46th Ave, Rock
Island, IL 61201

HANDS-ON WEAVING EXPERIENCE

CREATE YOUR UNIQUE BIRD FEEDER WITH US!

MATERIALS PROVIDED | FREE EVENT DONATIONS WELCOME
RSVP TO THIS EVENT BY EMAILING QUADCITYAUDUBON@GMAIL.COM

PLUS: A MINI LESSON ON SEEDS, FRUITS, AND BIRD-FRIENDLY FEED - FOLLOWED BY A GUIDED BIRD HIKE.

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

Thank you to those who contributed to this issue of *Mississippi Currents*.

The next deadline for submissions is May 26. Submissions are gladly accepted.

Submit newsletter items to: Patrick Carlson, at p.carlson@mchsi.com

Visit us online at:

Membership Application

I would like to join/renew as a member of the National Audubon Society and my local chapter. Please send me Audubon magazine and Mississippi Currents newsletter. Enclosed is my check for \$35 payable to National Audubon Society (include Chapter H63 on your check).

Or

I would like to join/renew only as a member of Quad City Audubon Society rather than the National Audubon Society. Please send me Mississippi Currents. Enclosed is my check for \$10 payable to Quad City Audubon Society.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Optional

I would like to make an additional donation to QCAS. Enclosed is my additional donation of \$ _____ made payable to Quad City Audubon Society.

Print this form and send to:
Quad City Audubon Society
P.O. Box 81
Bettendorf, IA 52722

Field Trip To Corriell Nature Preserve Spring Migration Tour
Sunday, March 22, 9 AM - 12 PM

Highlights: Good chance to spot Sandhill Cranes, oak savanna, wetland ecology, early spring bird migration, and excellent examples of habitat restoration.

Meet-Up/ Caravan & Carpool: 8:55 AM – Veterans Memorial Park Parking Lot at Marquette Boat Ramp 1101 Marquette St, Davenport IA
Departure Time: 9:00 AM (SHARP)

Optional Stop: Muscatine Hy-Vee (restrooms, snacks, gas). Located directly on route. (10-15 minutes)

Park at Gate 1 – The second entrance as you head west on 155th St. Park on the mowed grass on the right as you pull in. Bur Oak staff will be on-site 10-15 minutes early to help direct parking. Corriell Nature Preserve 2060 155th St, Atalissa, IA

No restrooms or drinking water on-site. Please plan accordingly.

Hosted by Quad City Audubon Society
 Guided by Bur Oak Land Trust

Visit QuadCityAudubon.org For More Info, NEWS & Events!