

Wooded Island Bird Walk Report for Saturday, February 4, 2012

Hello to All,

This will be a rather different report, for we went farther afield than our usual winter post Island extension trip to the 66th St. Outer Harbor. Ten Wooded Island birders joined a group from the DuPage County Birding Club at The Field Museum for a tour of the bird collection and talk by Dr. Dave Willard and his dedicated volunteer Glen Gabanski, who organized the tour.

WEATHER: Cloudy. Temperature 36 degrees F., Mild WSW winds

WOODED ISLAND

We had to be at The Field by 9:30 a.m. That allowed for an hour of birding on the Island. Jennie, Karin, Jennette and Pat walked Wooded Island around the entire Loop and through the Rose Garden. The beavers continue to eat the trees in the Japanese Garden. A extensive burn was done in parts of the center of the Island and in most of the Rose Garden. The holes in the walking paths have been filled in with gravel.

As for birds, we saw 6 AMERICAN CROWS, 4 NORTHERN CARDINALS (2 MALES & 2 FEMALES) 1 FEMALE DOWNY WOODPECKER, 1 MALE COMMON GOLDENEYE in the company of a pair of CANADA GEESE. A BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE was heard.

When we arrived on Darrow Bridge at 8 a.m. there were over 100 Canada Geese in the East and West Lagoons. The North Lagoon is completely open, and most of the center and north end of the East and West Lagoons are open as well. When we left the Island at 9 a.m. there was only a single Canada Goose in the East Lagoon. Breakfast beckoned the flocks elsewhere to fields of grass.

THE FIELD MUSEUM

Carol, Leo, Peter, Barbara and Joyce from Beverly/Morgan Park neighborhood, and Liz met up with our birding group at the Field. Glen greeted us on the main floor and brought us up to the third floor where the bird collection is housed. In the Zoology Classroom Dr. Willard had selected and arranged a wide selection of skins, and eggs and skeletons. On one table were a dozen skins of Snowy Owls. There was several extinct birds, such as an encased Great Auk, Passenger Pigeon, Caroline Parakeet, Labrador Duck (one of the rarest specimens). Condor,

Wandering Albatross (huge!) Dr. Willard gave a very informative and integrated talk on adaptation, natural selection, and why some species became extinct.

We also saw four of the bird species discovered by The Field Museum scientists. A small South American Cinnamon Owl holds a Latin name in honor of Roger Tory Peterson, who reciprocated the honor by drawing the colored plate of the owl. The Field Museum Ornithology Department staff recently bestowed such a distinction on Dr. Willard by naming a blue eyed Asian bird after him.

Dave then opened the storage cabinets and several drawers to show us some wonderful bird skins: a Bee Hummingbird from Cuba, Motmots, and various cowbirds, and talked about how DNA testing is causing a shifting of birds into different Families.

Then it was on to the specimen preparation area. There are many birds in zip locked coffins, lying in Freezer State, awaiting their turn in the preparation area. Glen pointed out the little washer like bony rings that many birds have around their eyes. We all endured the Beetle Room with its repugnant odor.

Things wrapped up after our tours and we had lunch together in the Corner Bakery, around the corner from "Sue", of Museum fame.

NORTHERLY ISLAND

Peter, Jennie, Karin, Jennette and Pat drove to Northerly Island to try our luck at observing a live Snowy Owl specimen, but it was not to be. We did see an AMERICAN KESTREL which was likely a tip off the the large female Snowy Owl was elsewhere.

A Chicago Police Officer was parked at the south end of the Island. A couple with two Labrador Retrievers were at the north end, and shot off a starter gun several times to train their dogs to run forward at the sound. The Chicago Police Officer drove over to the couple, and waved to us on his way. He said loudly on his megaphone for all to hear: "Hey!! You can't let your dogs run loose. THIS IS A BIRD SANCTUARY!!" Now why can't we get this cop on the Board of the Chicago Park District?

In Burnham Harbor, the birds were scant. There were a few COMMON GOLDENEYES, RED-BREASTED MERGANSERS (some in flight), GREATER SCAUP, MALLARDS, and HERRING GULLS.

The Hyde Parkers started for home, but I still wanted to look for some birds on the south side and will include my stops and sightings below.

WILLIAM POWERS CONSERVATION AREA (WOLF LAKE) – 122nd and Avenue O, Chicago, IL.

A Snowy Owl was reported out here along the Indiana–Illinois State Line. I did not see the Snowy Owl and did drive the long straight road that divides the Lake and the States. I did see over 60 MUTE SWANS and 5 TRUMPETER SWANS. The Trumpeters were together. The three young birds had large yellow neck collars. Their heads, neck and body were dark gray to light gray in appearance. The two adults were pure white. Many COMMON MERGANSERS and COMMON GOLDENEYES were present. They are very close to shore and can be viewed close up from the car.

O'BRIEN LOCK & DAM (134th St. & Calumet River) Chicago, IL

This is near the Whitford Pond that the Chicago Police received an approval from the Water Reclamation District to build an outdoor firing range. Environmentalists, birders and community people fought hard to prevent the firing range from gaining approval. An assistant Director in the IL Department of Natural Resources issued an opinion that the firing range would be "compatible" with wildlife in the surrounding 33 acres. This was the excuse for the Commissioners to vote 5 in favor of the firing range and 4 against the firing range. The vote was taken in early January.

Carolyn Marsh recently reported on IBET that while she was there with a reporter and photographer from WBEZ Public Radio, a pair of AMERICAN BALD EAGLES were observed gathering sticks and building a nest near Whitford Pond! Now what?? Does the City Zoning Board and/or City Council say No to the firing range? These are the last hurdles. The City Mayor and 10th Ward Alderman are in favor of the firing range.

I have been visiting O'Brien Lock & Dam regularly for the past 25 years. Today I had three new sightings. I arrived just before sunset. A pair of Mute Swans were in the pond west of the Lock & Dam. A pair of Red-tailed Hawks were kiting above the landfill. What was new to me was to see my first WHITE-TAILED DEER behind the locked gate at the end of the off limits access road that is 134th St. The second sight that was new to me was a METHANE PIPE ablaze along the north side of the 134th St. access road, and on the lower end of the huge landfill. The third new sighting for me was to see A PAIR OF AMERICAN BALD EAGLES flying together over the landfill. They are surely roosting and nesting in the immediate area. One of the Eagles were a full adult. The other was more dark chocolate brown. Compared to the kiting Red-tail Hawks, which the eagles did not harass, the eagles are huge.

The City has not had a pair of nesting Bald Eagles that has been successful in many a decade if not a century or more. Will the Chicago Police be allowed to have their firing range now that eagles are attempting to procreate on their chosen site? And what will happen when the Police start firing an AK-47 into a landfill loaded with methane gas?

As I thought about today's adventures and discoveries on the drive home, I spotted a RED-TAILED HAWK in the fading light, perched on a center lamppost along I-94 West near 106th St. A touch of wildness in our urban jungle.

I will report the Trumpeter Swans and American Bald Eagles on e-Bird and send a note of thanks to Dr. Dave Willard and Glen Gabanski.

As always, additions, corrections and comments are welcome.

The Wooded Island Bird Walks begin each Saturday morning at 8:00 a.m. and on Wednesday morning at 7:15 a.m. from Darrow Bridge.

All are welcome to join in the adventure.

Best of birding,

Patricia Durkin
Chicago Audubon Representative
Wooded Island Bird Walks.