



# COMPASS

*Navigating the world of birds and nature*

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JANUARY 2001

## A Rookery Rebounds

*By Gail Goldberger*



Photo by: Robert Sliwinski

The great blue herons started landing in late February, swooping into the highest levels of the almost-completed rookery. As pairs passed twigs back and forth in an elaborate mating ritual, workers fervidly erected the final structures designed for this year's throng of migrating wading birds. Throughout February and early March they labored in shifts, men by day, birds by dusk.

On a raw, cold March morning, volunteers lined up to help staff from Landscape Resources finish construction. Armed with evergreens and logs for ground cover, and bracket mountings for carved-out Christmas trees, they completed the project. And what a project it is!

If you stopped at the gravel driveway on the north end of Baker's Lake in Barrington during the months of April through July, you would have seen an incongruous configuration rising out of the lake, a towering manmade aerie of nests, poles, beams, wings, beaks and fuzzy heads. You would have been looking at the most comprehensive heronry reconstruction in Cook County to date.

The restored rookery held 315 nesting pairs of birds, up from 200 last year; this count included eight black-crowned night heron pairs. At its peak, with an average of two juveniles per nest, there were 1,300 birds on the island. By anyone's count, a success story. By no means, an overnight success story.

More than 20 years of care went into Baker's Lake, and the list of those responsible is as jam-packed as the rookery. Success is a testament to what happens when supportive citizens and natural resource agencies work together for wildlife, and the economy cooperates.

The story of Baker's Lake began in the early 1970's, when the Cook County

Forest Preserve District bought the lake, island, and buffer zone. Many agencies conducted surveys of the birds nesting on the island: The Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board (IESPB) and the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation. In 1984, the lake and surrounding area were dedicated as a state nature preserve because the island supported a nesting population of the state endangered black-crowned night heron.



Black-crowned night heron at base of rookery  
Photo by: Robert Sliwinski

Since 1986, artificial nesting structures have been used on this island to support the night herons. From 1986-1990, the black-crowned night herons occupied the highest, best nests, and their numbers routinely exceeded 200 pairs. As larger birds discovered the island (great egrets, great blue herons, double crested cormorants), they took over the higher spots, forcing the smaller night heron to lower, less desirable nests. In just four years, the nest count for the black-crowned's plummeted from 220 to 11. Last year, counters weren't even sure there was one night heron nest left on the island.

The artificial structures built over the years to support these birds proved successful. Year after year, blue herons, egrets, night herons and cormorants left the Gulf of Mexico and Florida, and returned to Baker's Lake. Like many colonial birds, they like returning to the same rookery, despite the changing nature of the vegetation and structures. Their attachment to this island demonstrates their resiliency to changing conditions. And the attachment goes both ways - Barrington residents and area naturalists also love and value these birds.

Over time, bird guano killed the trees that all the birds needed for their nests.

Where nesting habitat is plentiful, birds move to other suitable locations. In Barrington, however, the only spot protected from predators was this island, 150 feet long and 50 feet wide.

As the island eroded to a sliver and the last tree blew over, a local conservation group — Citizens for Conservation (CFC) — played an important role, advocating for restoration. CFC's prime mover and shaker, Patsy Mortimer, helped gather the relevant parties and kept them focused on the birds. "There has never been an engineered solution to a habitat problem as extensive as this one," said Dave Kircher of the Cook County Forest Preserve District. He ought to know. The District paid \$250,000 to restore the rookery. They hired Christopher B. Burke Engineering Ltd. (CBEL) to design a nesting structure and Landscape Resources to install them.

"We looked at what worked in the past," said Robert Sliwinski, Senior Environmental Resource Specialist at



Young great egrets  
Photo by: Robert Sliwinski

CBEL and project manager for the heronry reconstruction. "A lot of science went into this."

They designed 25-foot tall nesting structures with longer, more angular arms — "watchtowers" — to more closely resemble the crooks of trees. They put a 10-foot fly zone between nests for the great blue's wing span, and widened their nests to five feet. They shortened the arms on lower-level structures for smaller birds.

The final blueprint contained four levels of nests, with enough space in

### Audubon 2001 Awards Dinner March 9

The Chicago Audubon Society is proud to announce this year's environmental award winners:

Protector of the Environment/  
Vocation-Laurene von Klan,  
Executive Director, Friends of the  
Chicago River

Protector of the Environment/  
Avocation-Charlotte Newfeld, Chair,  
Lakeview Citizens Council

Service to Chicago Area  
Birders/Avocation-Geoff Williamson,  
President, Chicago Ornithological  
Society

Excellence in Environmental  
Reporting-Debra Shore, Editor,  
Chicago Wilderness

Help us honor these individuals on  
Friday, March 9 from 6-10 p.m. The  
awards dinner will be held at the  
Homestead Restaurant in Melrose  
Park. For reservations call the awards  
committee chairs, Mary or Tony  
Mullen, at 708-456-5300.

between to reduce the stress of congestion. Evergreens with carved out nest bases were mounted on poles, as well as stockpiled on the ground to provide shelter for black-crowned night herons.

The new rookery comprises six different structures: two modified from those used by Will County's Lake Renwick heronry, and four used by Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources. Pole mounts to hold the nests were set in cement for stability. Commonwealth Edison donated 40 paired telephone poles, and Barrington's Citizens for Conservation donated 300 Christmas trees and the lumber and labor for nest structure building.

"I held my breath until they started to land," said Sliwinski.

"From the District's standpoint, we poured a lot of money into something untried. We hoped we wouldn't see a drop in numbers," said Kircher. "We weren't even sure the birds would recognize the island, and thought the construction workers would scare them away."

Apprehensions notwithstanding, the birds returned, accommodated the workers as they finished, and survived a strenuous spring that included baseball-sized hail and 60 mph windstorms. (The great blues stretched out flat across the tops of their nests.)

With 1,300 birds and babies, life was zestful there. The noisy compacted throng attracted many onlookers, who themselves swarmed to gaze at the crosshatching that supported 315 nesting pairs.

Even this extensively researched project is a work in progress. Birds didn't go where anticipated. Egrets preferred lower-level structures and carved-out

## A Rookery Rebounds continued from page 1

evergreens. Cormorants nested anywhere they could, cramming the cross-braces and junctures with twigs and grasses.

Black-crowned's went to the brush cover. Robert Sliwinski confirmed eight nests with eight nesting pairs. "Two (sets of) nests had three juveniles," and he saw two more juveniles. "There might be more black-crowned nests I couldn't see, buried inside the brush cover."

"Next year," said Steve Byers of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, "we'll pack in more evergreens to attract more black-crowned's. They prefer nesting in tight places that provide protection."

In late June, at the height of breeding season, CFC's Patsy Mortimer orga-

nized a celebration for all involved in the restoration. As the western horizon turned a dusty orange, a tree on the east bank of the lake began to fill with black-crowned night herons. When the sun disappeared, they flew out across the

lake to fish. While partygoers looked out from a deck with a view, the night herons flew overhead, sealing the night with a benediction of sorts, the bond between avians and humans secured.

### Second Rookery Restoration Now Underway

The Lake Renwick Heron Rookery restoration in Plainfield, Illinois is taking place right now. It is designed to re-establish the nesting hierarchies of the original rookery habitat, and increase the nesting populations of the black-crowned night heron.

The Will County Audubon Society has played a strong role in advocating for continued protection of these birds and the rookery. Watch upcoming issues of The COMPASS for more details.

The Editor

## ILLINOIS BEACH STATE PARK HAWK COUNT 2000

By Vic Berardi

The hawk count at Illinois Beach State Park this fall was an overwhelming success due to the enthusiastic support and cooperation of a small band of volunteers who helped with the count. Eighteen people contributed to the count and submitted data. All data will be submitted to the Illinois Ornithological Society and The Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA). HMANA publishes a journal that details all the hawk counts in the country for both spring and fall.

The count was conducted from the Sailing Beach parking lot in the North Unit of the state park, and both the east and west pavilion were utilized depending on time of year. In September, the count was conducted solely from the east pavilion, which is closest to the lakefront. From this spot, peregrine falcons were better observed cruising down the shoreline in search of an easy meal. Later, the west pavilion was used more

often to better observe buteos and accipiters which had a tendency to migrate a bit more inland.

Highlights of the fall included a number of western type dark morph Red-tailed hawks including a Krider's. From September 29th to October 3rd, a total of 62 peregrine falcons were counted with October 2nd having a single day high of 33. The single largest count day was November 3rd when 425 raptors were counted, including a total of 14 species. Also, a total of 7 golden eagles were counted migrating, but by far the best sighting was a ferruginous hawk seen on November 10th.

This count was the largest since 1982, when Dave Johnson and Joel Greenberg conducted the count. We surpassed their totals in hours and raptors counted (see chart at right).

If you would like to participate in the count next fall, please contact Vic Berardi at (847) 680-5281 or email at VBirdman@aol.com.

<b>Days Counted</b> .....	.68
<b>Hours</b> .....	311.75
Turkey Vulture (TV) .....	.230
Osprey (OS) .....	.31
Bald Eagle (BE) .....	.10
Northern Harrier (NH) .....	.143
Sharp-shinned Hawk (SS) ..	.472
Cooper's Hawk (CH) .....	.53
Northern Goshawk (NG) .....	.15
Red-shouldered Hawk (RS) ..	.49
Broad-winged Hawk (BW) ..	.39
Red-tailed Hawk (RT) ...	1,407
Rough-legged Hawk (RL) ..	.48
Ferruginous Hawk (FH) .....	.1
Golden Eagle (GE) .....	.7
American Kestrel (AK) .....	.52
Merlin (ML) .....	.83
Peregrine Falcon (PG) .....	.89
Unidentified Accipiter (UA) ..	.19
Unidentified Buteo (UB) .....	.64
Unidentified Falcon (UF) .....	.7
Unidentified Raptor (UR) .....	.23
<b>Total Illinois Beach</b> .....	<b>2,841</b>

## Get Ready for the 4th Great Backyard Bird Count

It's time to start preparing for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) to be held from **February 16-19, 2001**. A project of the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology, with funding provided in part by Wild Birds Unlimited and Ford Motor Company, the GBBC combines citizen-science observations of birds with high-tech web tools. The GBBC asks families, individuals, classrooms and community groups to count the numbers and kinds of birds that visit their feeders, local parks, schoolyards and other areas during any or all of the four count days. Participants enter their observations at BirdSource, [www.birdsource.org](http://www.birdsource.org), a user-friendly, state-of-the-art web site developed by National

Audubon Society and Cornell Lab.

Begun in 1998, the GBBC has engaged more than 100,000 people of all ages and skill levels in the effort to keep track of changes in bird distribution and abundance over time. It is well known that many bird species are showing population declines due to habitat loss or habitat disturbance. Tracking population changes can signal a species that may be in trouble.

This year, we are asked to pay special attention to several species of woodpecker, including the red-headed woodpecker and northern flicker, and quail (including northern bobwhite), which are showing signs of decline. The web site will include special features relating to these species.

Instructions for participating can be found at the web site by clicking on Great Backyard Bird Count. There is no fee or registration. Those without home access to the internet can try their school or library. Many Wild Birds Unlimited locations also accept reports.

Results are updated hourly in the form of animated maps and colorful graphs for all to view. You will be able to see almost immediately how your observations fit into the continent-wide perspective. Counts from previous years are also available.

Scout troupes, nature groups, schools and community organizations that want to get involved or need more information can call 800-843-2473.

— Gail Goldberger

## ENJOY TROPICAL COSTA RICA:

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This trip is popular so book early to ensure a spot!

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[www.CostaRicaAdventure.com](http://www.CostaRicaAdventure.com)

## COMPASS

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**Rare bird alert:** (847) 265-2118  
**Activity line:** (773) 539-6793, press 1  
**Web page:** [www.audubon.org/chapter/il/chicago/](http://www.audubon.org/chapter/il/chicago/)  
**Audubon office:** Manager, Karen Andersen, (773) 539-6793, fax (773) 539-6830. Office hours: Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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Printed with soy ink

# Young Sandhill Cranes Blaze Trail for Whoopers

By Gail Goldberger

In a brave experiment to establish a migratory flock of whooping cranes, pilots costumed as birds led 13 sandhill cranes on a flight from the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin to St. Martins Marsh Aquatic Preserve in Crystal River, Florida. Flying 1,250 miles over seven states, the young cranes were pioneers in a plan to restore their near-extinct relative, the whooping crane. Researchers hope to replicate the trip from Wisconsin to Florida five more times using whooping cranes, with the goal of establishing a flock of 100 at Chassahowitzka National Wildlife Refuge in Citrus County, 65 miles north of Tampa.

Pilots and cranes left Wisconsin on October 3 and arrived in Florida November 11, 8 days later than anticipated. Unseasonably warm weather, strong headwinds and fog slowed their course, one crane died and one deserted the flock in Wisconsin, but 11 healthy cranes landed on a cool autumn morning, setting down in Florida as if attached to the wings of the aircraft and pilots that guided them.

By making this test run, the more plentiful sandhill cranes will teach wildlife experts about the rigors of flying in this part of the country, and will stake out the best landing spots for next year's travelers.

Sandhill cranes were chosen because they have characteristics similar to whooping cranes.

The whooping crane was nearly wiped out by hunters and collectors; by 1941, only 21 cranes were left in this country. A distinctive long-necked bird with a white body, black wing tips

and a red crown, it stands about 4.5 feet tall and has a 6.5 foot wingspan. It is the tallest North American bird.

Through captive breeding and the Endangered Species Act, their numbers have increased to over 400. Nearly 270 of these birds live in the wild, but only one migratory flock exists, moving between the Northwest Territories of Canada and the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas. Experts say another migratory flock is needed to ensure the crane's survival in the wild.

"Saving the whooping crane is like going into a burning museum and saving one of the last great artifacts," said Bill Lishman of Operation Migration, a Canadian organization that provided the pilots for the trip.

Born in isolation, the trailblazing cranes underwent months of training in which pilots and bird experts taught them to follow an ultralight plane. An ultralight was chosen because it flies at low altitudes and travels slowly enough so that the birds can follow. The cranes never saw a human form or heard a human voice; only people in gray costumes using hand-puppets that looked like adult cranes. Cranes, like other large waterbirds such

as geese and ducks, lack the so-called homing instinct so prevalent in migratory songbirds. They must learn to migrate from their parents; in this case, surrogate human parents imprinted these young birds to follow the ultralight planes.

Costumed as cranes, Canadians Bill Lishman and Joe Duff, cofounders of Operation Migration, piloted the birds to Florida. Using the information gathered from this trip, Lishman and Duff hope to show the same safe migratory route to the first reintroduced flock of migratory whooping cranes in 2001.



Young sandhill cranes acclimate to ultralight and costumed pilot  
Photo credits: Operation Migration



Costumed aviculturist uses crane puppet to teach whooping crane to feed  
Photo credits: Operation Migration

## Jump Onboard!

### Spring 2001 CHICAGO WILDERNESS Calling Frog Survey

Have you been thinking about learning to identify our local flora and fauna only to be befuddled by the bounty of birds, petrified by the plethora of plants, or bamboozled by the bevy of butterflies? Then this spring join us in the Calling Frog Survey and learn to identify the twelve (that's right, just 12) species of frogs and toads found in our area.

Last year's program exceeded expectations, but there are still hundreds of lakes, streams, and other wetlands not yet monitored. Monitoring will require three evenings of your time this spring. If you attend one of the workshops, you will hear the calls on tape, see slides of the different species, learn the monitoring procedure, and be offered a site to monitor if you don't already have one in mind.

Monitoring is important work, easy, and according to last year's volunteers, lots of fun. For a preview of the frogs and monitoring procedures, visit the Survey's website at [www.habitatproject.org](http://www.habitatproject.org).

#### Workshop dates:

**DuPage County — February 8th, 7 to 9pm** The Grounds and Resources Complex at Blackwell Forest Preserve, 29 W. 220 Mack Road in West Chicago

Please pre-register with Cindy Hedges at (630) 876-5929 by January 31.

**Lake County — February 17th, 9am to noon** Lake County Forest Preserve District Headquarters 2000 N. Milwaukee Ave., Libertyville  
Contact Russ Hendricks: (847) 782-5922

**Kane County — March 3rd, 9am to noon** Pottawatomie Community Center, St. Charles  
To register or for directions call Mary Ochenschlager at (630) 513-3338

**McHenry County — February 3rd, 9am to noon** Prairie View Education Center 2112 Behan Road, Crystal Lake  
Contact Sarah Denham (815) 728-8307



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# JANUARY CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## MONTHLY WORKDAYS

**Saturdays, January 13 and February 10** — Shoreline planting for erosion control. Meet at the Tower Road parking lot (east of the bridge). If you arrive late, look for a CAS sign near the parking lot directing you to the work site. For more information, call Jerry Garden at (773) 545-4632.

## FIELD TRIPS/BIRD COUNTS/EVENTS

**Sunday, Jan. 28, 7:00 a.m., Eagles on the Mississippi** This will be an all day adventure to visit several sites along the Mississippi River to see the spectacular congregation of bald eagles as well as gulls, waterfowl and other raptors. We will stop for lunch along the way. On our return we will make a few stops in Lee and DeKalb Counties to look for Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, game birds and raptors. We will meet at 7 a.m. in front of the upper level entrance to Montgomery Wards (Pace bus stop) at Yorktown Mall, Highland Ave. and Butterfield Rds. Just north of I-88 in the west suburbs. This is an all day trip. Pack and dress accordingly. Plan on car pooling & bring your walkie-talkies and scopes. This trip is co-sponsored by Chicago Audubon, DuPage Bird Club, and Chicago Ornithological Society. Please register in advance for this trip, attendance will be limited to 20 participants. To register call Urs Geiser at (630)515-1712.

**Friday — Sunday, March 2-4, The 13th Annual Cook County Owl Count.** Join us once again in surveying the owls of our metropolitan area. All that's needed is a tape recording of our local screech and great horned owls and a sense of adventure. If you have an area you'd like to cover, let us

know. If you want to participate but don't know how we will match you with a potential area or with a group that is already covering an area. We will provide Forest Preserve permits to each group. This will allow each group to be on Forest Preserve property during the late evening, night, and early morning hours. Participants from previous years will receive a mailing with details. New owlers can sign up by calling Stephen or Christine Lee at (708)485-8197. Our e-mail address is stephenc@interaccess.com

**Saturday, March 10— 6a.m. to 6 p.m. Field Trip to Savanna Army Depot** — Offered by CAS and the Field Museum. In early spring more bald eagles can be seen along the Mississippi River in Illinois than anywhere south of Alaska. The vast acreage and diverse habitats of this area provide good opportunities for seeing other species. We expect to see winter visitors, resident birds (possibly Turkey and Horned Lark) as well as early spring migrants, including a number of duck species.

Dress for the weather (layered clothes are best for the warmer bus or colder outdoor temperatures) and bring a lunch, beverage, snacks, binoculars, field guide and spotting scope, if you have one. The bus trip to Savanna is approximately 3 hours.

Cost: \$50 members (Field Museum and CAS), \$60 non-members. Call the Field Museum to register at (312) 665-7518.

**Woodcock Courting Flights— Sunset: Wednesday, March 21 and Saturday, March 24 — Sunday, April 1, and Saturday, April 7.** — You don't have to go far to see the high-flying courtship of this unusual looking bird. Join us at sunset (6:30 -

7:30 depending on the date) at Wolf Road Prairie(31st St. and Wolf Rd. in Westchester). We have had very good luck in the past 7 years seeing the woodcock flights on the prairie. This year these trips will be co-sponsored by Save the Prairie Society. For exact times call Stephen or Christine Lee at (708) 485-8197 a day or two before the trips. E-mail: stephenc@interaccess.com.

## 2001 Flower and Garden Show

Chicago Audubon will again be sponsoring a booth at the Chicago Flower and Garden Show at Navy Pier from March 10-18. We need volunteers to help out at the booth, especially on the weekend and in the evenings. If you can help out, you will receive **free admission** to the show (parking is not covered). Hours are from 10-8 every day except Sundays when the hours are 10-6.

The following time slots have been set up for volunteering: 10-1:30; 1:30-5:00; and 5-8. If you would like to help, please call the office at 773/539-6793 with your first choice of day and time slot, and a second choice if possible. You can also email your first and second choices to [chicago\\_audubon@juno.com](mailto:chicago_audubon@juno.com).

## Awards Dinner

○ ○ ○

March 9, 2001

Reserve a space now! Help us honor four environmental leaders. Join us at the Homestead Restaurant, 8305 W. North Avenue in Melrose Park from 6-9 p.m. Dinner choices include: Vegetarian, Fish, Combination filet mignon and chicken breast in wine sauce. All full dinners — \$25. For reservations call the Mullens at (708) 456-5300. **To hold a space, call by Friday, March 2.**

○ ○ ○

## Migratory Bird Tree Preference Study

"Ask not what warblers, vireos, and flycatchers can do for you, ask what you can do to help them."

—John F. Chickadee

This spring volunteers will fan out across parks and forest preserves in northeastern Illinois as part of a study to determine the foraging preferences of migrant songbirds. The goal of the study is to ascertain which trees these birds prefer for feeding. This is more than an academic inquiry, as we hope the results will yield practical information that city planners, landscape architects, and others can use to plant those trees that attract the greatest variety of migrant songbirds.

Participants will be working in pairs along predetermined routes, one person locating and identifying birds, the other person recording the trees the birds are using. The timeframe of the study will be from April 15 to the end of May, and participants will be asked to census their areas at least 3 times. The National Audubon Society is organizing the study in partnership with the Chicago Department of the Environment, the

Field Museum, TreeKeepers, and Bird Conservation Network.

Training sessions are available for those interested in helping. For information call the National Audubon Society monitoring hotline in Skokie at 847-965-9239. The success of this study is dependent on volunteers. If you can identify the birds or the trees of our area, and would enjoy an in-depth look at local ecology, please join us.

### Dormant Tree ID (Tree Keepers)

Horner Park — Feb 3, 9:30-12:30  
2741 W Montrose, Chicago

Washington Park — Feb 24, 9:30-12:30  
5531 S. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Chicago

Sessions by George Ware and Suzanne Malec. Call for more information 312-427-4265 x232

### Migratory Bird Study Meeting

National Audubon Office - March 7th, 7:30-8:30 pm  
5225 Old Orchard Road, Skokie, IL  
Contact Judy Pollock - 847-965-1150 x15

Jacamar Birding Tours & Madison Audubon present:

## Texas Spring Migration Extravaganza April 10-17, 2001

Join us for the excitement of the annual spring bird migration in Texas! We'll visit legendary birding hotspots from High Island to the Rio Grande Valley during this seven-day tour.

Springtime along the Texas coast represents North American birding at its very best. Woodlands teem with neotropical migrants as the birds rest and refuel after their nonstop flight across the gulf. The Rio Grande Valley offers tropical specialties, which occur nowhere else in the United States.

Jim Marrari, owner of Jacamar Birding Tours, and P.D. Hulce, longtime Texas birder, are co-leading this tour.

Also in 2001...

Door County Birds and Wildflowers  
Duluth Raptor Migration

Jacamar Birding Tours

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