



COMPASS

Navigating the world of birds and nature

VOLUME 17, ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2003

Winter Birding in Chicago and Environs

by David Cohen

The deepening grip of winter is diminishing the hours of sunlight. Frozen winds have driven birds to the south and cut down the insect population they depend on. And cold weather may numb your desire to go birding.

Nevertheless, Auduboners venturing out between now and the beginning of March have plenty of options. Sheltering bodies of water that do not freeze up attract birds, and so do those grassy prairies and coniferous woods that produce seeds year-round.

"During the winter, when the insect population dwindles to almost nothing, these are the food sources left for the bird population," comments Alan Anderson, a member of the Chicago Audubon Board. "Some snowy owls come south to the lakefront from Canada if the winter there is hard enough. It depends on what's happening on the Canadian prairies and tundra and the quality of the food sources there.

"Montrose Harbor is a good place for the snowy owl, along with the area around Navy Pier and Meigs Field. Saw-whet owls and long-eared owls like to hide in the coniferous areas, while the short-eared owls tend to be grassland birds."

Anderson adds that any of the regional nature centers that hang bird-feeders will support a crew of winter species. If the lakefront freezes up, birds flock to the Chicago River, espe-

cially the stretch south of McCormick Boulevard and Howard Street. The sewage treatment plant at the intersection keeps the river warm in the winter, bringing in all sorts of animals. The North Shore Channel of the Chicago River splits off from the North Branch near Carmen, and ends up at Gilson Park in Evanston. "That site," says Anderson, "along with the landfill at Northwestern University a few miles to the south, is an effective place to look if you're in or near the area."

The Morton Arboretum and Fermi Labs in DuPage County are another option, according to Anderson. Fermi has recently been reopened for birding, while the conifers in the Arboretum pull in the crossbills, redpolls, and saw-whet owls. Generally, the place has a variety of shrubs and flowers that remain a natural draw in the cold.

"The premier birding activity in winter is along the Chicago lakefront," claims Greg Houghton, a former member of the Chicago Audubon Board. "That's especially true in the areas that haven't frozen over. You can find the rarer gulls there, such as the Thayer, glaucous and Iceland gulls."

Houghton says the Lake Calumet region generally disappoints in the cold, but he recently spotted a Thayer's gull at the O'Brien Lock and Dam, the area where the Calumet River hits 134th St. If you're up for the drive, he also recommends two sites in Indiana.

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Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Count: Fall 2002

by Vic Berardi
Site Coordinator

Many volunteers and I tallied over 500 hours of counting from August 31 to December 1 for a total of 4,113 raptors. We had an unbelievable year for falcons with 341 merlins and 133 peregrines. Northern harrier numbers were down from last year, and only one golden eagle was seen, but a flight of 229 broad-wings on September 22 was a pleasant surprise. Thanks to everyone that helped this year!

Here are our season's totals:

red-tailed hawk	1511
sharp-shinned hawk	941
broad-winged hawk	424
merlin	341
turkey vulture	227
peregrine falcon	133
osprey	105
Cooper's hawk	97
unidentified raptor	97
northern harrier	90
American kestrel	55
rough-legged hawk	34
red-shouldered hawk	27
bald eagle	18
northern goshawk	12
golden eagle	1

TOTAL RAPTORS 4,113
TOTAL HRS COUNTED 503

Note: All of this data is now available on www.birdsource.org in tables showing comparisons with other participating hawk watches all over North America. Click on the Autumn Hawk Watch button and explore!

You can also see our daily reports on the Hawk Migration Association of North America's website at www.hmana.org in the Hawk Count section. Click on month or day summaries.

If you are interested in helping out with next year's count, please email me directly at vbirdman@aol.com.



YOUR MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS WILL RUN OUT IF YOU DON'T JOIN CHICAGO AUDUBON TODAY!

To sustain the Chicago Audubon Society, you must join the local chapter. Our chapter is a leader in the conservation and restoration of natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity. Established in 1971, CAS operates as a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization with over 4,000 members in the Chicago area.

CAS is a chapter of the National Audubon Society with 600,000 members nationwide.

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- Member meetings (6 per year)
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- Bird Habitat Survey
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- Center for New Birders (2003)
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- Birdathon
- Student Scholarship Awards
- The COMPASS (10 per year)

TO JOIN: Complete the application form below and mail it with your check (payable to "Chicago Audubon Society") to:

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Please enroll me as a member of the Chicago Audubon Society. Enclosed is my check for \$20.

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Winter Birding

continued from page 1

Michigan City has a harbor and a breakwater that, like the Chicago lakefront, attract those less-frequently-seen gulls.

"Lake George in Hammond has seen a gorgeous flock of tundra swans," Houghton notes. "Take the Dan Ryan south to I-94 and scoot over to Hammond. The tundra swan is one of the biggest birds you'll ever see in the Chicago region. It's 52 inches long and has a wingspan of seven feet. It's pure white with a straight neck that's almost three feet long. It's a truly majestic animal."

Ken Klick of the Lake County Forest Preserve has plenty to say about winter birding. "We've got 26,000 acres of public space and a diversity of habitat that draws lots of winter birds," he says. "You can find snow buntings and horned larks in the open fields because they feed on the grass seeds. In the wooded areas you can find barred owls and pileated woodpeckers.

"Some of the more popular birding areas include Ryerson Woods in Deerfield, a heavily wooded area along the Des Plaines River. You can find woodpeckers, chickadees and nuthatches. They're sheltered in the river area where it's not as windy, and many species often linger there. The Carolina wrens and song sparrows that should have left for Kentucky hang there."

Klick notes that there is a four to five degree temperature difference between the river habitat and the open fields. Avoiding the wind is critical for birds, who lose body heat if they're underfed and over-exposed. Area birders can also trek through Lyons Woods in Illinois Beach State Park, just outside of Zion. It features a big pine plantation that brings in a lot of winter finches and owls.

The Cuba Marsh Forest Preserve near Lake Zurich is a combination of fields and wetland, and if you're looking for northern shrikes, northern harriers, the hawks and owls you'd find anywhere in northern Illinois, and even eastern bluebirds (rare), this is where you're likely to find them.

Comment Period Opens on Cerulean Warblers



Drawing of cerulean warbler by David Sibley

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) has opened a 90-day comment period to allow the general public to provide information on listing the cerulean warbler as "threatened" on the Endangered Species List. This is a positive step toward getting this songbird the protections it needs to survive! **The comment period will close on January 21, 2003.**

The cerulean warbler - a small woodland songbird known for its bright blue plumage and distinctive song - was once common in eastern forests. But over the last 30 years, the species has declined more than 70 to 80% in the core of its range! Cerulean warblers range across eastern North America, from the Great Plains, north to Minnesota, east to Massachusetts, and south to Louisiana. It breeds primarily in the Ohio and Mississippi River basins - and spends winter months in the Andes Mountains of South America. Unfortunately, due to habitat destruction in both its breeding and wintering ranges, primarily because of development, logging, road building and, more recently, mountaintop removal mining, the cerulean warbler has become one of the fastest disappearing birds in the United States!

Now the general public has until January 21, 2003 to provide additional information to the USFWS as to why the cerulean warbler should be included as "threatened" on the Endangered Species List. Such listing will provide the species protections under the Endangered Species Act and an earnest effort at recovering the species can begin. If you have information on present or threatened destruction or modification of cerulean warbler habitat, or other information illustrating the need to protect the species, please do not miss this opportunity to share it with the USFWS!

Be sure to submit your comments by the January 21 deadline! Comments and any supporting materials should be directed to: Field Supervisor, Ecological Services Field Office, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 608 East Cherry Street, Room 200, Columbia, MO 65201, or FAX: 314-876-1914. For more information on the process, log onto the USFWS website at: http://midwest.fws.gov/Endangered/birds/cerw_find.html.

— Gail Goldberger

COMPASS

Chicago Audubon Society
North Park Village
5801-C N. Pulaski Road
Chicago, IL 60646-6057



Editor: Gail Goldberger
Layout Artist: Noël Maguigad

The Compass is the official publication of the Chicago Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society. The Chicago Audubon Society, an Illinois non-profit corporation, has been granted tax-exempt status by the federal government. The Compass and the Chicago Audubon Society are not responsible for the accuracy of all information published or for opinions expressed in this publication.

Compass (ISSN 1097-7899) is published monthly, except for the combined issue of July/August and November/December, by the Chicago Audubon Society, 5801-C N. Pulaski, Chicago, IL 60646-6057. Distributed to membership (\$5 allotted from dues). Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL. Postmaster: send address changes to Compass, c/o Chicago Audubon Society, 5801-C N. Pulaski, Chicago, IL 60646-6057.

Audubon info hotline: (847) 299-3505
Report sightings to: (847) 265-2117
Rare bird alert: (847) 265-2118
Activity line: (773) 539-6793, press 1
Web page:
www.homepage.interaccess.com/~stephenc/index.html
Audubon office: Manager, Karen Andersen, (773) 539-6793, fax (773) 539-6830, chicago_audubon@juno.com. Office hours: Monday-Friday 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

OFFICERS
President: Christine Lee, (708) 485-8197, stephenc@interaccess.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS
Hotline: Doris Johanson, (847) 827-5930.
Awards: Alan Anderson (see Research below)

Birdathon: Joe Lill, (773) 631-3154, trptjoe@aol.com
Bird Seed Savings Days: Al Rothenbach, (847) 816-6514, a_rothenbach@yahoo.com

Conservation: Carol Nelson, (773) 583-8616, blue2wings@aol.com
Field Trips: Stephen Lee, (708) 485-8197, stephenc@interaccess.com; and Doris Johanson, (847) 827-5930

Illinois Audubon Council: Al Rothenbach, see above.

Illinois Environmental Council: Gene Small, (773) 434-8328

Land Stewardship: Jerry Garden, (773) 545-4632, jerrygarden@sprynet.com

Nominating: Alan Anderson, (847) 390-7437, casresearch@attbi.com

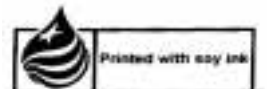
Programs: Debra Fuller, (312) 744-5472, ddustin@ci.chi.il.us

Editorial/Advertising: Gail Goldberger, (773) 743-2457,

gailgoldberger@earthlink.net
Noël Maguigad, (847) 563-3000 xt5259
compass@no-el.com

Publicity: Bill Schwaber, (847) 475-4986, formulae@mcs.net

Research: Alan Anderson, (847) 390-7437, casresearch@attbi.com; Judy Pollock, (847) 864-6393, bobolnk@ix.netcom.com



Statement of Ownership, Management, and Circulation

1. Publication Title: COMPASS

2. Issue Date: 10/16/02

3. Issue Frequency: MONTHLY

4. Issue Number: 10

5. Annual Subscription Price: \$5.00 PER DUPLICATION

6. Owner: CHICAGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, 5801-C N. PULASKI RD., CHICAGO, IL 60646-6057

7. Executive Director: KAREN ANDERSON

8. Business Office: CHICAGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, 5801-C N. PULASKI RD., CHICAGO, IL 60646-6057

9. Home Office: CHICAGO AUDUBON SOCIETY, 5801-C N. PULASKI RD., CHICAGO, IL 60646-6057

10. Circulation: 4855

11. Total Copies (Net Press Run): 5111

12. Total Copies (Gross Press Run): 5111

13. Total Copies (Net Distribution): 5111

14. Total Copies (Gross Distribution): 5111

15. Total Copies (Net Sales): 30

16. Total Copies (Gross Sales): 30

17. Total Copies (Net Other): 180

18. Total Copies (Gross Other): 180

19. Total Copies (Net Total): 5111

20. Total Copies (Gross Total): 5111

21. Total Copies (Net Total): 5111

22. Total Copies (Gross Total): 5111

23. Total Copies (Net Total): 5111

24. Total Copies (Gross Total): 5111

25. Total Copies (Net Total): 5111

26. Total Copies (Gross Total): 5111

27. Total Copies (Net Total): 5111

28. Total Copies (Gross Total): 5111

29. Total Copies (Net Total): 5111

30. Total Copies (Gross Total): 5111

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Second group of "ultra whoopers" completes migration

by Karen Furnweger

This fall, 21 whooping cranes winged their way from Wisconsin's wetlands to Florida's Gulf Coast in a phenomenon as old as the glaciers and as new as this century.

In the second year of a five-year program to reestablish a migratory flock of whoopers, the most endangered crane species, in eastern North America, these birds outnumber the total wild population of their species just 61 years ago.

Sixteen captive-bred whoopers, 5 to 6 months old at takeoff, followed four tiny ultralight aircraft on a 1,225-mile man-made migratory route that approximates the course flown by whoopers before they were killed off in this part of their range more than a century

ago through Wisconsin. Then they fairly breezed on tailwinds through three stops in Illinois. The Oct. 31 departure from Kankakee County for Indiana was one of the journey's most perfect, with 16 birds equally divided in a white V off the chevron-shaped wing of one ultralight while the other three pilots enjoyed the view from chase positions.

Indiana was rechristened "Windiana" by migration leaders as high winds and even tornadoes slowed their progress through the length of the state. The same day they finally reached Kentucky – Nov. 13 – one of the yearling birds, a male identified as No. 6, was spotted with migrating sandhill cranes in McHenry County, Illinois. On Nov. 16, he was sighted by ecstatic birders at Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area in northwestern Indiana, and by Nov. 20, he had caught up to this

break off and head back to their last stopover.

On Nov. 23, twelve of the 16 seemed intent on anything but following the planes. While two pilots continued with four behaved birds to Georgia, the other two took the disruptive dozen back to the previous encampment, where the cranes' portable night pen was still set up, and called it a wash.

The next day, while four birds waited in Georgia, the two pilots still in Tennessee plotted to lure the recalcitrant 12 southward six at a time. The first plane took off with six birds but was soon joined by two more. Since six birds were still on the ground, migration leaders quickly realized that the two extra birds were the yearling pair, Nos. 1 and 2, who had arrived at the Tennessee wildlife refuge the night before.

During the confusion, three of the 2002 migrants turned back to the night pen while the older pair stayed with the aircraft for several miles and appeared to want to pull off the remaining three birds. Nimble maneuvering by the ultralight pilot prevented the kidnapping, and the older birds continued south on their own. (They arrived at Chassahowitzka Nov. 26, as did another 2001 bird, No. 5, which had been spotted over Lombard on Nov. 23.) The three still-airborne youngsters joined their flockmates in Georgia while the remaining nine were transported by van to the new site.

The remainder of the migration was graced with good flying weather – steady tailwinds and cool temperatures – enabling the birds to fly two and even three legs of the route each day. On Nov. 30, the young whoopers descended into a large release pen on a protected island within the Chassahowitzka refuge. Throughout the winter the cranes will be monitored by biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the International Crane Foundation as they hone their survival skills. If all goes well, come spring, the 21 "ultra whoopers" will head back to Wisconsin, smarter, faster and wilder.

The reintroduction is a project of the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, a consortium of U.S. and Canadian nonprofit conservation organizations, state and federal wildlife agencies and private partners. The partnership will coordinate three more ultralight-led migrations. The goal is a migratory flock of 125 whooping cranes, including 25 breeding pairs, in Wisconsin by 2020.

For a full account of the 2002 migration, with breathtaking photos of the young whoopers in flight, visit www.operationmigration.org and click on "In the Field." For updates on the yearling whoopers, visit the International Crane Foundation Web site at www.savingcranes.org and click on "What's New," "Whooping Crane Migration" and "Updates from the Field."



Photographed from an ultralight, the whoopers cross the Hiwassee River in Tennessee in mid-November. Joe Duff/Operation Migration

ago. Moving south in flights of 21 to 107 miles and twice grounded for nearly a week by heavy winds, fog and rain, the young birds and a crew of 12, finally arrived at a secluded national wildlife refuge 49 days after setting out. The crew of 12 included ultralight pilots from the Canada-based nonprofit Operation Migration, biologists from the International Crane Foundation and Patuxent (Md.) Wildlife Research Center, and state and federal wildlife officials.

At the same time, five surviving whooping cranes from last year's ultralight-led reintroduction undertook their first unassisted migration south. Two solo birds and one pair made it without mishap, landing in the protected area where they wintered last year – in six days. Gliding high on thermals, the yearling birds could move faster and more directly than the ultralights leading the young birds. At press time, the final yearling crane was more than halfway to Florida, lingering with sandhill cranes at the Hiwassee National Wildlife Refuge in Tennessee.

Three days of rain delayed the start of the migration, but on Oct. 13, 17 birds left Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in central Wisconsin. Midway through the 21-mile first leg, shifting winds began jostling the birds and the aircraft, and one young male collided with the wing of an ultralight, injuring his leg. The pilot made an emergency landing, and the injured whooper was rushed to the veterinary facilities at the International Crane Foundation, not far away in Baraboo. Despite 12 days of intensive treatment, the young whooper's chances for recovery dwindled, and the migration's health consultants reluctantly decided to euthanize him. (Last year's only migration fatality also occurred during rough weather in Wisconsin.)

High winds, heavy rain and even snow grounded the migration group for 10 of the 14 days it took to strug-

gle through Wisconsin. Then they fairly breezed on tailwinds through three stops in Illinois. The Oct. 31 departure from Kankakee County for Indiana was one of the journey's most perfect, with 16 birds equally divided in a white V off the chevron-shaped wing of one ultralight while the other three pilots enjoyed the view from chase positions.

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On Nov. 23, 42 days into the migration, weather conditions allowed the migration to resume, and all 16 birds began their flight behind one ultralight. It is common for the young cranes to change positions behind the wing during flight, even switching from plane to plane. Sometimes they



The lead ultralight with all 16 whoopers passes over north-central Florida. Heather Ray/Operation Migration

You can support the whoopers and the people dedicated to restoring them with a tax-deductible contribution to *Operation Migration*. This U.S. and Canadian nonprofit organization provides pilots, ultralights and members of the ground crew during the migration, and also helps train the young cranes to follow the aircraft. The organization is responsible for one-quarter of the project's \$1.6 million annual budget, and it must purchase one more ultralight (approximately \$25,000). Contributions can be sent to: *Operation Migration – USA*, P.O. Box 868, Buffalo, NY 14207.

You can become an Operation Migration member by calling 1-800-675-2618, or by visiting www.operationmigration.org and clicking on "Get Involved."

— Gail Goldberger

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Stewardship Workdays

At the Skokie Lagoons: January 11 and February 8 at 10:00 a.m.

Chicago Audubon conducts regular monthly workdays at the Skokie Lagoons on the second Saturday of every month. Activities include buckthorn cutting, animal and plant monitoring, cleanup and debris removal, and other management activities. Meet at the Tower Road parking lot, east of the lagoon bridge. If you arrive late, look for a CAS sign near the parking lot directing you to the work site.

For further information call Jerry Garden at (773)545-4632, or e-mail him at jerrygarden@sprynet.com

Member Programs

NOTICE OF CHANGE

At the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 N. Pulaski, in Chicago. 7-7:30 p.m. Refreshments 7:30 p.m. Program

These programs (open to the public, not just members) will now be held six times a year—April, May & June and September, October & November—at the same time and place, second Friday of the month. Watch future issues for program topics.

Field Trips

Two trips, Saturday—February 15 and March 8. EAGLE VIEWING at Lost Mound Wildlife Area, Savanna IL

Chicago Audubon is co-sponsoring two trips this year to view eagles along the Mississippi River: on Saturday, February 15 with the Chicago Botanic Garden and on Saturday, March 8 with the Field Museum.

During the winter, more bald eagles can be seen along the Mississippi River in Illinois than anywhere south of Alaska. Hundreds of eagles spend the winter feeding around the locks and dams and other open water areas, and roosting in the bluff areas.

Lost Mound Fish and Wildlife Area (formerly the Savanna Army Depot), now co-owned and managed by the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, is one spot where you can spot anywhere from 20-200+ eagles during the winter. In addition to eagles, we expect to see resident birds, including possibly wild turkeys and horned larks, as well as ducks and other species. After spending most of the day at Lost Mound, we will also check for eagles along the Fulton Dam, a bit farther south.

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 just over three hours; we will be traveling by coach bus. Your Audubon leader is Alan Anderson.

Feb. 15 — 6:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. (Feb. 22 inclement weather date). Register by phone for course SPC0031: (847) 835-8261; \$59 CBG and CAS members/\$79 non-members. Bus leaves from Chicago Botanic Garden Gateway Annex, Glencoe at 6:00 a.m.

March 8 — 6 a.m.-6 p.m. Register by phone: (312) 665-7400; \$50 FM and CAS members /\$60 non-members. Bus leaves from Field Museum west gate, Chicago at 6:00 a.m.

Bird Walks

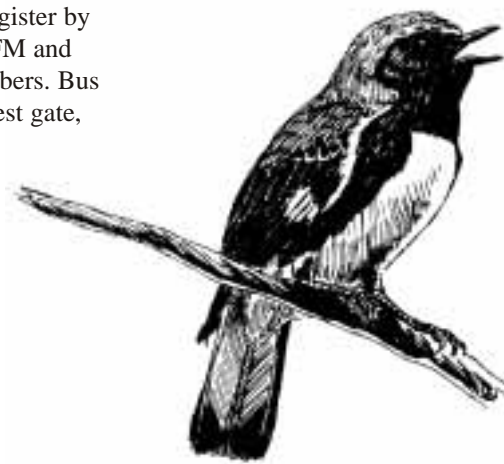
Wooded Island walks will resume on Wednesday, March 26 at 8 a.m.

Meet at the Darrow Bridge, just south of the Museum of Science and Industry. Bring binoculars and field guide. Dress for the weather. Call Doug Anderson at (773) 493-7058.

SUNSET — *Wednesday, March 26 and Saturday, March 29 & Sunday, April 6 and Saturday, April 12.*

WOODCOCK COURTING FLIGHTS.

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 eight years seeing 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.



Other Events

Lake Michigan Gull Frolic Saturday, February 15, 2003 from 9-4 p.m.

Come to the second annual Lake Michigan Gull Frolic to be held at the Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club. Winthrop Harbor is adjacent to the Wisconsin State line on Sheridan Road, and the Yacht Club entrance is off of 7th Street.

The speaker for the day is Tom Schultz, illustrator of bird guides, who will be giving a program on gulls. We will be chumming for gulls on the shores of Lake Michigan. Last year, 400 birders got life gulls on this day. We anticipate great good luck this year too.

For more information call Dave Johnson at (847) 459-3989, or Jim Landing (773) 252-8417.

SAVE THE DATE!

*Eagle Optics Demo Day
North Park Village Nature
Center, April 12, 9 am - 4 pm*

CAS will host a demonstration day with Eagle Optics. You will be able to try out the newest binoculars and scopes. Experts will be on hand to answer questions. Five percent of the proceeds go to CAS and the Center for New Birders. Details to follow.

SAVE THE DATE!

*May 17
Birdathon! 2003*

FEB 14-17—SIXTH ANNUAL GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

Calling All Birdwatchers to Help Protect America's Birds and Habitats

"We need every birder to join us," said Audubon Senior Vice President of Science Frank Gill. "The Great Backyard Bird Count has become a vitally important means of gathering data to help birds, but it can't happen unless people take part. Whether you're a novice or an expert, we need you to take part and help us help birds."

A project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Audubon, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited, the GBBC combines high-tech web tools with an army of citizen-scientist bird observers. 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 sightings at BirdSource, www.birdsource.org/gbbc. The state-of-the-art website was developed by Audubon and the Cornell Lab.

In 2002, more than 47,000 participants counted millions of birds throughout North America. They helped Audubon and Cornell Lab scientists make interesting observations. Evening grosbeaks, plentiful in California in 2001, were nearly absent in 2002. Snowy owls, magnificent hunters found predominantly in the northern part of the continent, were reported in 20 states and provinces during the 2002 count, including sightings from as far south as Oklahoma, Colorado, and Virginia. Last year's

count was again instrumental in helping track winter finches, such as common redpolls, pine grosbeaks, and white-winged crossbills, that periodically shift their winter ranges southward, particularly in the Northeast.

The site invites beginners and experts alike to participate, providing useful information to make participation easy and enjoyable. There is a vocabulary section, bird-watching and bird-feeding tips, bird vocalizations, and more, including information about house finch eye disease. Educators will find the bibliography and geography sections especially handy, as well as suggestions on how to conduct the count with groups of kids. For those tired of winter and ready for spring, there will be tips about planning and

preparing for the spring bird garden.

Instructions for participating can be found at www.birdsource.org. There's no fee or registration. Those who would like to participate but aren't online can try their local library. Many Wild Birds Unlimited locations also accept reports. Libraries, businesses, nature clubs, Scout troops and other community organizations interested in promoting the GBBC or getting involved can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at 800/ 843-2473 (outside the U.S., call 607/254-2473); 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, New York 14850, or the National Audubon Society at 212/979-3083; 700 Broadway, New York, NY 10003.

— Gail Goldberger