



COMPASS

Navigating the world of birds and nature

VOLUME 17, ISSUE 10

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2003

The Skokie Lagoons

What Chicago Audubon is Learning from Eight Years of Stewardship

By Gail Goldberger

If you drive along Tower Road in Glencoe by the Skokie Lagoons the second Saturday of months November through March and see smoke rising from the tree line, don't call 911. Instead, be glad, for this means dedicated volunteers are hard at work improving these forest preserves for you and for nature.

The Skokie Lagoons is a birding hotspot—some 210 species have been seen here. While birding the lagoons in the fall of 1995, Carol Nelson saw contractors putting coconut fiber rolls and mats along the banks to stabilize the shoreline, and brought the restoration process to the attention of the Chicago Audubon Society Board. Bud Wyman, then President, volunteered Audubon's help, and Jerry Garden offered to head up the volunteer effort.

Unlike other forest preserves which are remnant or original land, the lagoons are built, and built to hold water. (See History of the Skokie Lagoons) Three low dams and a fourth control dam at Willow Road regulate the water levels in the lagoons. The dams prevent flooding of downstream communities, and the retention basins (lagoons) provide fishing and boating opportunities.

The lagoons have needed considerable management in their relatively short life span. Originally carved out of a peat marsh to provide flood control and recreational opportunities, they have been cleaned, dredged, stocked with fish, and most recently monitored and restored in order to improve water quality and nurture more biodiverse shoreline and woodland communities.

From their inception, the lagoons were intended to satisfy the needs of many parties: surrounding communities; recreationists—canoeists, kayakers, fisherman; as well as the needs of nature. This makes efforts at improvement complicated at best.

It has been eight years since the Chicago Audubon Society began working on shoreline restoration here in cooperation with the Cook County Forest Preserve District. In that time, much has been gleaned about the process and commitment involved in improving nature for biodiversity.

"Restoration is a learning process, not an end product," said Jerry Garden, CAS volunteer coordinator since 1995.



Dan Kielson, long-time volunteer, talks to students about buckthorn. Photo courtesy of Jerry Garden..

"You have to be patient and listen, you need to hear what nature has to tell you, not dictate to it what you want it to be." This is especially true at the lagoons, where volunteers have been working with an area that was not completely natural to begin with. "People need to understand that stewardship is an ongoing process. To really see a big difference, you have to stay with a site over time."

In the eight years CAS has been steward of the lagoons, water inundation has been a very large problem. Unseasonably wet years pose the biggest challenge, but even years with normal rainfall are an issue if there is heavy rain within a short period of time.

The problem with high water is this:

dirt, mud and plants growing along the borders slide into the water and disintegrate, filling the bottom with sediment. The water silts up, degrading the habitat for fish. When the plants disappear, so do insects, dragonflies, butterflies and even small fish, which use the plants to hide from turtles and larger fish. Flooding wipes out habitat for all these critters, along with the food chain for birds and large fish.



New Trier students add to brushpile. Photo courtesy of Jerry Garden.

History of the Skokie Lagoons

By Gail Goldberger

At the turn of the twentieth century, when Lake Michigan was at its highest level, the area where the Skokie Lagoons now lie was a large bay of the lake. As the water level dropped and the lake receded, the bay became a marsh. The east fork of the North Branch of the Chicago River ran through that marsh, originating near Waukegan and flowing south to Chicago. The Potawatomi called the marsh Chewab Skokie—meaning, big wet prairie.

Like other wetlands in our area, this marsh was drained by farmers, but their farms weren't all that successful. Some exceptions were horseradish farms that thrived on the rich, loamy eastern borders of the marsh.

By 1920, the marsh had been so completely drained that the soil turned to dry peat. In wet years, spring rains turned the sink into a lake that flooded the surrounding areas. In dry years, the peat marsh caught fire and smoked, creating an acrid, white cloud stretching from Winnetka to Highland Park.

The Cook County Forest Preserve District (CCFPD) acquired the peat marsh in 1933. That same year, with the largest work crew ever assembled, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) began construction of what we now know as the Skokie Lagoons. With picks, shovels and hand carts, armies of boys aged 17-28 whose families were on the relief rolls moved four million cubic yards of earth, creating seven miles of interconnected waterways.

Jerry Garden, CAS steward for the lagoons, speculates, "Harold Ickes, then head of the Department of Interior, lived six blocks away in Winnetka." Perhaps that is why the largest CCC project in the country (ten companies) came here.

Since their construction, the lagoons were plagued by pollution influx from surrounding watersheds and a high sedimentation rate. In 1979 the North Shore Sanitary District installed pipes, pumps and channels to redirect wastewater, thus preventing sewage from entering the lagoons.

Filled in over the years to depths of only five or six feet, the lagoons suffered from a fish kill problem when winters were harsh. From 1986-1988 the EPA's Clean Lakes Program again rerouted wastewater around the lagoons, dredged 1,000,000 cubic yards of sediment, and deepened the waters to 12 feet, which reduced the winter fish kill.

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The Skokie Lagoons

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controlled, it is best to move upstream to higher grounds, where inundation isn't as severe.

So in 1999, planting moved to shorelines farther upstream, and work began immediately above the lagoon bank to clear invasive species such as garlic mustard and buckthorn, and replace them with native plants and grasses like goldenrod, tall coreopsis, compass plant, cup plant, aster, coneflower, switchgrass, rattlesnake masters, woodland brome and cinquefoil.

As the area becomes less dense with buckthorn, and more pleasing to those who use the lagoons to fish and boat, it also becomes better for the birds and butterflies feeding on insects that are more attracted to the newly established native than the long entrenched alien plants.

With nature slowly increasing its hold, volunteer groups assisting this effort have also grown in number. This year, a dozen teens in a program with the Peggy Notebart Museum helped design a plan to restore a 100-foot section of shoreline and some upland area as well. New Trier High School has had a continuing presence, sending out multiple clubs over the course of two years, including the Social Service Club, the Environmental Club, and various Freshman Clubs. The Hubbard Woods School lends a Mighty Acorns group, and the Winnetka Rotary Club contributes volunteers. Every summer the Lutheran Brotherhood, a financial contributor to the Lagoon's restoration,



CAS Steward, Jerry Garden in cap, explains planting to volunteers. Photo by Gail Goldberger.

gathers volunteers, including parents and children, from several parishes in Chicago.

On a beautiful August day this year, volunteer Mike Milici from St. John's Lutheran Church said, "When you come here year after year, you appreciate what it takes to make the lagoons such a nice place for fishers and canoeists." He said this as he gazed through an open clearing down to the water, an area that used to be tangled with an overgrowth of invasive species.

As adults and children together planted black-eyed susan, wild bergamot and blazing star, Milici continued. "Even more important, doing this work builds relationships with kids. These days there isn't any time to be with your kids. There is too

much separation between parents and children, and that destroys trust. Being here builds trust, and I really like that."

Add to this mix immersion in suburban nature, the fun of working with your hands, meeting new people and pride of accomplishment, and what you get are some of the reasons young and old are drawn to the lagoons, or any restoration project.

Ask first-time planter Rachel Mass-Moser, eight-years old, why she likes it, and her answer is even clearer. "It's fun!"

Can you enjoy the lagoons in the winter?

Absolutely. It's a sure cure for cabin fever, and you will not stay cold for long if you're sawing buckthorn or standing in the heat of a burning brushpile. From November through March, if the winds are blowing in the right direction, huge mounds of pesky buckthorn go up in flame, and you can warm yourself by them when the temperatures are below freezing.

"I never believed I could feel so toasty in the winter, and so connected to the earth!" exclaimed one enthusiastic volunteer.

So come on out the second Saturday of every month. We meet at 10:00 a.m. at the west end of the parking lot on Tower Road, just east of the lagoon bridge. The Audubon steward is Jerry Garden, and you can reach him at jerrygarden@sprynet.com or (773)545-4632.



Dawn Mass-Moser and Rachel planting native species. Photo by Gail Goldberger.

ABOUT THE OCTOBER COMPASS ...

The Chicago Audubon Society Mission Statement is as follows:

Founded in 1973, the Chicago Audubon Society's mission is to promote the understanding and appreciation of nature, and to aid in the conservation and restoration of our natural ecosystems for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biodiversity. Chicago Audubon carries out its mission through a combination of education, stewardship and research programs, supported by fundraising efforts designed to further involve Chicago Audubon Society members in their favorite pastime, observing and studying birds and other wildlife.

We received several calls about the lateness of the October issue, and apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.

History of the Skokie Lagoons

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In the early 1990's, the only fish in the lagoons were carp and bullhead. The Cook County Forest Preserve District began a stocking program with bass, pike and walleye, and now Skokie Lagoons ranks first in the county in largemouth bass and northern pike, as well as carp and bullhead. The lagoons stand third in bluegill and channel catfish, and fourth in black crappie and walleye.

An Excellent Recreational Area

Today, the lagoons meander through Northfield, Winnetka, Glencoe and Northbrook, and are laid out like the links of a chain, separating around an island and coming together again on the other side. They provide some of the best birding opportunities in Chicago, and better wading bird habitat than the rest of the Chicago River. Here, it is possible to see great blue, green and black-crowned night herons, grebes, wood ducks and common loons, and some warblers not seen anywhere else, such as the cerulean and prothonotary.

Since no motor boats are permitted here, the use of canoes, kayaks and sunfish (small sailing crafts allowed on larger lagoons), have made this a boating and fishing haven, with many fishing sites and boat launch ramps dotting the shorelines.

Looped by four miles of the Chicago River Bike Trail, the lagoons are also popular for biking, rollerblading and cross-country skiing.

COMPASS

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Chicago, IL 60646-6057
www.chicagoaudubon.org



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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.

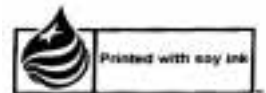
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Illinois Beach State Park
Hawkwatch

By Vic Berardi

Thursday, November 13, 2003 turned out to be another great buteo day! Four-hundred and forty-seven (447) raptors were tallied at the Illinois Beach State Park Hawkwatch including 326 red-tailed hawks. Our new season total reached 14,651 raptors. A 15,000 raptor season is now in sight!

Raptor highlights include: 38 red-shouldered hawks, 3 rough-legged hawks, 3 bald eagles (adult, juvenile & 3rd year) and one dark morph Western red-tailed and one rufous morph Western red-tailed hawk.

Non-raptors of note were: 183 tundra swans and 1,263 sandhill cranes

Here's what our counters recorded today in a total of 8.5 hours:

- Osprey - 1
- Bald Eagle - 3
- Northern Harrier - 34
- Sharp-shinned Hawk - 29
- Cooper's Hawk - 7
- Red-shouldered Hawk - 38
- Red-tailed Hawk - 326
- Rough-legged Hawk - 3
- American Kestrel - 1
- Merlin - 1
- Unidentified Raptor - 4
- Total - 447

(The official count concluded on Sunday, November 30.)

To see more information on the November 13th count and all of this year's and last year's daily accounts and totals, go to www.hmana.org and click on hawkcount.org. Then click on Month Summaries and go to Illinois Beach in the scroll down box

To get to our temporary Hawkwatch site (our original site is under road construction): Take Route 41 or I-94 north to Route 173, go east to Sheridan Road, go north on Sheridan Road to 7th Street, go east towards the lakefront. The road comes to a T, turn right into the first parking lot on your right. We watch from either the parking lot or the grassy area in front.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
FEEDER FORM FOR COUNTING AT YOUR BIRD FEEDER

If you plan on using the feeder form below, PLEASE contact the compiler to make sure your home is actually within the count circle, and to find out where to mail the form. Also, please remember to only tally birds on the particular day for that count. Forms should be mailed to the compiler by early January.

Bird Feeder/Yard Observer Tally Sheet

Name of Observer: _____

Phone Number: _____

Address (where observations were made):

City: _____

Zip: _____

NAME OF CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT: _____

(please contact compiler ahead of time to make sure you live within that count circle)

Date of Count Observation: _____
(data is useful only if on the correct date)

Hours of Observation:
time began _____ end _____

Total time spent observing feeders: _____

Total number of species observed: _____

Birds observed (Total Individuals of each species seen on count day - so as to not double count, it is advisable to take the highest number of individuals seen in your yard at one time during the day)

- Ring-necked Pheasant _____
- Rock Dove _____
- Mourning Dove _____
- Red-headed Woodpecker _____
- Red-bellied Woodpecker _____
- Downy Woodpecker _____
- Hairy Woodpecker _____
- Northern Flicker _____
- Blue Jay _____
- Common Crow _____
- Black-capped Chickadee _____
- Red-breasted Nuthatch _____
- White-breasted Nuthatch _____
- American Robin _____
- Cedar Waxwing _____
- European Starling _____
- Northern Cardinal _____
- Am. Tree Sparrow _____
- White-crowned Sparrow _____
- Dark-eyed Junco _____
- Purple Finch _____
- House Finch _____
- Pine Siskin _____
- American Goldfinch _____
- House Sparrow _____

Other species seen on count day (and number observed) :

Other species seen at your feeders or in your yard anytime between three days before and three days after count day, but not on count day:

**Mail this form to CBC compiler by
January 5, 2004**

Birding America VI: A Preview

March 13, 2004 at North Park University in Chicago

Discover great places, great people and great birds at Chicago Audubon Society's Birding America VI. Whether you're planning a birding trip to the North, East, Southwest, or closer to home, Birding America will give you the inside information for the most rewarding birding experience.

This year's conference will open with a special presentation by Karen Furnweger on the whooping crane project. Her talk, "Bringing Back the Whoopers," will feature up-to-date information on Operation Migration's amazing efforts to establish a second migratory flock in this country.

The rest of the conference will feature experts from around the U.S. who will talk about birding in their areas, and help you plan your trip around highlight birds and seasonal variations. These sessions will give you a chance to preview areas you've always wanted to visit, as well as ones you haven't yet heard about. This year, Birding America reaches even

farther south—to South America.

Birding America VI also includes four skill building workshops to help you become a better birder.

Throughout the day, vendors will have booths offering birding books, field equipment, clothing and other useful birding-related merchandise. (Chicago Audubon will give away door prizes at the end of the program).

Registration for Birding America VI is \$35 for Chicago Audubon and National Audubon members, and \$45 for non-members. The fee includes all sessions.

(A late registration fee of \$45 applies after Feb. 15 and at the door, subject to space availability.) Lunch is available for \$10. (Lunch for late registrants may not be available.)

To register or for more information contact the Chicago Audubon office at (773) 539-6793.

Birding America VI

9:00 a.m. — 4:00 p.m.

PROGRAM

Keynote Address: Bringing Back the Whoopers with Karen Furnweger

Near Chicago Birding Areas:

Du Page County—Jeff Chapman

Great Lakes—To Be Announced

Chataqua National Wildlife Refuge—Keith McMullen

Skill Building Workshops:

Tools for Birding—Jerry Garden/ Ben Lizdas (Eagle Optics)

Making a Birdsong ID—John Feith

Gardening for Birds and Butterflies—To Be Announced

Sparrow ID—Walter Marcisz

Vacation Trips:

Dry Tortugas—Lee Schneider

Belize—Sheri Williamson

Blue Ridge Parkway—Marcus Simpson

South Texas—Sean Smith

Venezuela—Joel Greenberg

Pribilof Islands (Alaska)—Sean Smith

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Stewardship Workdays

*At the Skokie Lagoons:
December 13 and January 10 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, planting, 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

Weekly Bird Walks

*Wooded Island
Every Wednesday in Dec -7:00
a.m.
Every Saturday in Dec - 8:00
a.m.*

Bring binoculars and field guides. Dress for the weather. Meet at the Darrow Bridge, just south of the Museum of Science and Industry. Note: Road repairs are finished! From the north, take the Outer Drive, turn left on the east side at 5800 south, and follow the road into the parking lot. Proceed to where you are just north of the Darrow Bridge. Questions? Call Doug Anderson (773) 493-7058.

*These walks will resume on
Saturday, March 27th, one day after
the birthday of Paul Douglas.*

*New Year's Day Bird Walk—8:00
a.m.*

Thursday, January 1, 2004

Meet at the same location as above. For more information, call Doug Anderson (773) 493-7058.

Other Events

SAVE THE DATE!

*Saturday, March 13, 2004
9 a.m. — 4 p.m.*

*Birding America VI
North Park University
(See page 3 for details)*

*Saturday, April 3, 2004 at 8:00
a.m.*

*Celebrating 30 Years of Wooded
Island Bird Walks, at Wooded
Island.*

Field Trips

*Saturday, February 28, 2004
Lost Mound National Wildlife
Refuge*

6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Co-sponsored by Chicago Audubon and Chicago Botanic Garden via coach bus to Savanna, IL (approximately 3.5 hour trip).

Spend four hours at Lost Mound, where numerous bald eagles winter. We expect to see anywhere from 20 to 200 eagles along the Mississippi River and in the refuge. We should also see early migrants and ducks, horned larks, and wild turkeys. We will also visit Fulton Dam.

Dress for the weather (layered clothes) and bring lunch, spotting scope if you have one.

CAS/CBG members, \$59; non-members, \$79.

Call (847) 835-8364 to register. Leaving from the Botanic Garden in Glencoe. The leader is Alan Anderson. Contact him at casresearch@comcast.net

*Friday, May 21—Sunday, May
23, 2004. Ottawa National
Wildlife Refuge, Crane Creek
and Magee Marsh in NW Ohio.*

For shorebirds, migrant passerines and nesting bald eagles. Sunday we visit the Black Swamp Bird Observatory banding station for up-close views of warblers and other migrants.

This is an exclusive Chicago Audubon trip this year. Drive on your own, or we'll try to arrange car/van pooling. We have special rates at a Port Clinton hotel with a great bird-viewing beach. Estimated cost of \$130 per single, or \$150 for two, includes two nights lodging, complimentary breakfasts, special slide show on Saturday night, birding on Saturday and Sunday, bird-banding demonstration, and small contribution to CAS and BSBO. For more information, contact Alan Anderson at casresearch@comcast.net

Thank You for Bird Seed Savings Day

Chicago Audubon is grateful to the following volunteers who helped out October 25th on Bird Seed Savings Day.

Thanks to the Evanston crew of Dennis Johnston, Steve Isaac, Joan Ogden, Joy Gerstein, Elmer Skore, and George Szweczyk.

The River Forest crew was ably led by Barb Kratochvil with help from Jill Anderson, Pam Koziol, Chas Swanson, Carl Auersch, Les Szweczyk, Pat Szweczyk and Alex Szweczyk.

Heartfelt thanks also to all CAS members and non-members who helped this fundraising effort by buying seed.

—Christine Lee

**Be Sure to visit our
new website:**

www.chicagoaudubon.org



Christmas Bird Counts

Sunday, December 14, 2003 through Saturday, January 3, 2004

The 2003-4 Northeast Illinois/Northwest Indiana Christmas Bird Counts (CBC's) span two weeks. There are plenty of opportunities to participate, and new birders are more than welcome.

For the uninitiated, all the birds in a CBC count area are tallied species by species. The count area is a circle with a radius of 7.5 miles. A number of the CBC's in this area could use more help in covering the various count circles more thoroughly.

You can help in one of two ways:

1) Help count birds "in the field" - a park, forest preserve, cemetery, neighborhood, etc. A fee (\$5) per observer is collected to pay for compiling and publishing of results. (The exceptions to the \$5 fee are the two Indiana counts which are \$2.50.)

2) Count birds seen at your bird feeders (no fee) on a count day. If you live INSIDE a count CIRCLE AREA, use the *feeder form* on page 3.

What you will see listed under each area's count are the location, count compiler and how to contact, points within count circle and/or general CBC boundaries. Questions, concerns? Call the compiler in your area.

Sunday, December 14

Lisle-Morton Arboretum, compiler - Geoff Williamson (773) 935-8439; lislecbc@chicagobirder.org [Brookfield, Western Springs west to eastern Naperville, Lemont north to Highland Hills; Morton Arboretum, western Palos] sponsor: Chicago Ornithological Society

Chicago Urban, compiler - Jeff Sanders (847) 657-6431; yellowstart5@yahoo.com [Chicago: central area - 39th St. to Touhy; eastern area - west of Lake Shore Dr. from Roosevelt to Pratt; west to Norridge, Stone Park, Bellwood, Westchester]

NOTE: CHICAGO BIRD FEEDER REPORTS

NEEDED: mail species and highest number of each seen to Jeff Sanders, 1577 Winnetka Road, Glenview, 60025-1821. Sponsors: Chicago Audubon Society, Evanston-North Shore Bird Club

Monday, December 15

Barrington, Compiler - Duane Heaton (847) 358-5856; dheaton@xnet.com [Hanover Pk. North to Barrington; Rolling Meadows west to Rt. 25/East Dundee; Palatine, Busse Woods, Schaumburg] sponsors: Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, Natural History Society of Barrington, Prairie Woods Audubon

Saturday, December 20,

Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore; compiler - Joy Bower; days (219) 844-3188; teetrsnipe@aol.com [Chesterton, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and State Park, western Michigan City, Port of Indiana, Burdock and Otis, north of Rt. 6 to lake]; sponsors: Dunes-Calumet Audubon, Chicago Audubon Society (Fee is \$2.50)

Fermilab-Batavia, compiler- Denis Kania (630) 961-5364; MelissaLKania@lightfirst.com [Fermi Lab north to Pratts-Wayne Woods, east to Western Naperville] sponsor: DuPage Birding Club

Thursday, December 25

Chicago Lakefront, compiler - Joel Greenberg (630) 725-9416; ckerschmar@earthlink.net [Chicago lakefront east of Lake Shore Drive - 63rd St. to Montrose - no feeders]

Saturday, December 27

Calumet/Sand Ridge, compiler - Carolyn Marsh (219) 659-7904; cmarshbird@prodigy.net [Lansing, S. Holland, Riverdale, Dolton, Munster, Lake Calumet, Wolf Lake, and Lake Michigan shoreline from Calumet Pk, Chicago, IL to Gary, IN. sponsor: Sand Ridge Audubon Society

Evanston-North Shore, compiler - Ralph Herbst; (708) 867-6660 [Evanston north to Lake Forest (Deerpath Rd.); lakefront west to Sioux FF/Palwaukee Airport; Wheeling, Highland Pk., Wilmette] sponsor: Evanston North Shore Bird Club

Sunday, December 28

Thorn Creek/Park Forest, compiler - Jim Kelly (708) 798-3115; jjkelly959@aol.com [Frankfort, Homewood, Park Forest, Plum Creek; center of circle is Governor's State University]

Thursday, January 1

Waukegan, compiler - Joel Greenberg (630) 725-9416; ckerschmar@earthlink.net [SE Lake Forest to SW Libertyville; north to Zion nuclear power plant; N. Chicago, Waukegan] sponsor: Evanston-North Shore Bird Club

Saturday, January 3

South Lake County, Indiana; compiler - Barb Dodge (219) 374-4385 Sponsor: Dunes-Calumet Audubon Society (Fee is \$2.50)

**SEE CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT
FEEDER FORM ON PAGE 3**