



COMPASS

Navigating the world of birds and nature

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2006

Birding America VII March 18, 2006 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. North Park University, 3225 W. Foster Ave Chicago, IL

Discover great places, great people and great birds at Chicago Audubon Society's Birding America VII. This symposium is your opportunity to get the inside information on some of the most rewarding places to bird locally, nationally and internationally. Local and national experts will help you plan birding trips and vacations around hotspots, highlighting resident birds and well as migrants. Locations to be covered range from the Upper Midwest to Costa Rica. The current schedule as listed is subject to change as we are working on adding more lecturers and topics.

Birding America VII also includes skill-building sessions on flycatcher and duck identification, gardening for birds and butterflies, and an ever-popular digiscoping workshop. Throughout the day, vendors will have booths set up with birding books, field equipment, clothing and other birding related items.

Book early, as space goes fast!

Birding America takes place at North Park University at 3224 W. Foster Ave., from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Registration for Birding America VII is \$40 for Chicago Audubon Society or National Audubon Society members, and \$50 for non-members.

A late registration fee of \$50 applies after March 10th and at the door, subject to space and availability.

The fee includes all sessions. Lunch is available for \$12 but will NOT be available for late registrants.

BIRDING AMERICA VII

Saturday, March 18, 2006 — 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.— North Park University, 3225 West Foster, Chicago IL

Symposium Schedule

8:15 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. – Registration and Refreshments

9:00 a.m.– Keynote Address

TBA

Near Chicago Birding Areas:

10:00 a.m. Hennepin Area

Doug Stotz

11:00 a.m. Wisconsin Birds

TBA

1:00 p.m. Chicago River

Jerry Garden

2:00 p.m. Indiana Dunes

TBA

Skill-Building Workshops:

10:00 a.m. Duck Identification

Walter Marcisz

11:00 a.m. Gardening for Birds and Butterflies

Wild Bird Center

1:00 p.m. Flycatchers of IL and Their Identification

Geoffrey A. Williamson

2:00 p.m. Digiscoping

Eagle Optics

International Birding Trips:

10:00 a.m. Boreal Birds of North America

Jeff Wells

11:00 a.m. Costa Rica

David Johnson

1:00 p.m. Boreal Birds of North America

Jeff Wells

2:00 p.m. Costa Rica

David Johnson

3:00 p.m. Closing Presentation

Owls of Minnesota

Laura Erickson

(door prizes will be given out at this time)

For more information contact the CAS

office at (773) 539-6793

The Conference will be held at North

Park University, 3225 W. Foster,

(Foster and Kedzie). Parking is free in

the University lot on the southeast

corner of Foster and Kedzie.

Directions:

From the north

Take I-94 eastbound (Edens

Expressway) to the Cicero (to Foster)

exit. Take Cicero south to Foster Ave.,

turn east (left) on Foster and continue

to Kedzie, about two miles.

From the south

Take I-94 westbound (Dan Ryan

Expressway) and proceed northwest

on I-90/94 (Kennedy Expressway).

Exit at Kimball Avenue. Travel north

(right) on Kimball about two miles to Foster Avenue and turn east (right). Proceed two blocks, to Kedzie.

From the west

(Or from O'Hare Airport) take I-90/94 eastbound

(Kennedy) to the Austin (to Foster) exit. At the end

of the exit ramp, turn east (left) and follow the curve

to reach Foster. Turn east (left) on Foster and

continue to Kedzie, about three miles.

From the east

Take Lake Shore Drive (from either direction) to the

Foster Avenue exit. Travel west on Foster and

continue to Kedzie, about three miles. □

Registration for BIRDING AMERICA VII

Please complete the form and mail to the address below

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please register _____ attendees at

• \$40 ea. Chicago Audubon Society or National members

• \$50 ea. Non-members

Please specify Audubon Chapter _____

Also _____ lunches at \$12 each

Total _____

Send form with check, made payable to:

Chicago Audubon Society

5801-C N. Pulaski Road

Chicago, IL 60646-6057

Phone (773) 539-6793

Chicago Bird Collision Monitors Get New Director

Annette Prince is the new director of the Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (CBCM), taking over from Robbie Hunsinger who has been director since the founding of the organization in 2003. CBCM volunteers monitor downtown Chicago during bird migration in the fall and spring and recover dead birds and rescue injured birds that have collided with buildings. It is estimated that anywhere from 100,000,000 to 1 billion birds are killed by collisions with buildings during migration in the United States each year.

Prince started volunteering as a bird monitor two years ago after attending a presentation by Hunsinger. During Prince's four migration seasons with CBCM, she has served as a bird monitor, hotline coordinator and rescue team captain. This past fall, she took the role of associate director of operations – organizing and training a network that has grown from a handful of monitors

to almost 80 volunteers who work on planning, monitoring, transporting birds and responding to bird emergencies.

“Coordinating the salvage, rescue and transport of hundreds of birds on busy migration days, like Columbus Day weekend this past fall when more than 400 injured birds were collected and sent to wildlife rehabilitation centers, can be like mobilizing an army,” says Prince.

Prince's interest in birds and involvement in conservation issues developed during a long history of volunteer work with such organizations as the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the Shedd Aquarium and the Brookfield Zoo. She is currently a volunteer clinic assistant (an animal care volunteer) at Willowbrook Wildlife Center in Glen Ellyn, Illinois.

Prince says that the most important work for CBCM in the future is “Advocating and facilitating risk

reduction efforts for migratory birds, improving our monitoring and data collection abilities and promoting the establishment of a bird rehabilitation center within the city of Chicago.”

Prince emphasizes “We are fortunate to have the assistance of Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation in Barrington and Willowbrook Wildlife Center to care for the injured birds rescued by CBCM but we desperately need a rehabilitation center that our volunteers and the public can easily access in the city.”

CBCM is looking forward to the opening of an animal rehabilitation facility on Northerly Island (formerly Meigs Field), plans for which are in the works.

Chicago Audubon Society would like to thank Robbie Hunsinger for her monumental work with CBCM, and wishes the best of luck and success to Annette Prince! □

Information on the Avian Flu

The article below is courtesy of the National Audubon Society and discusses some of the facts about avian flu.

With widespread interest in avian influenza or “bird flu”, Audubon is providing the following information and links as a resource for those who may be concerned about avian influenza, as well as about how birds are involved. Also included are some general precautions for protecting both human and bird health.

Background on Avian Flu

There are over 144 different strains of avian influenza virus. Most strains circulate in low levels within wild bird populations. Though they usually cause only mild illness in wild birds, some strains may cause lethal outbreaks in domestic poultry. A few

continued on page 3

Dear Compass Readers,

I am honored to be following in the footsteps of former Compass editor George Sawyn, whose last issue of The Compass was the November/December issue. George did a fabulous job over the past year, bringing us news and information about birding and conservation in the Chicagoland area. Thank you, George!

I have been birding in Chicago for about three years now, but have had a lifelong interest in birds. In 2003, I met long-time birder and conservationist and vice president of the Chicago Audubon Society, Alan Anderson, who I contacted after reading a post of his on IBET reporting birds he'd seen in River and Ronan Parks in the Albany Park/North Park neighborhood where I live. I had been birding these parks for a few months when I read the post and contacted Alan. He invited me on some birding trips and I was hooked.

In those first few months of birding, my entire relationship with the city changed. Suddenly I was made aware of a hidden universe of wildlife that existed right under my nose that I only needed to open my eyes (and apply binoculars) to see. Suddenly, living in the city wasn't so bad.

I became involved with the Chicago Audubon Society (CAS) and went on some bird walks at the North Park Nature Center and at North Pond, and eventually became a member of the Board of Directors of CAS. Over the few years I've been involved with the organization, CAS has helped me increase my birding skills, become familiar with birding hotspots, and put me in touch with some of the most interesting, knowledgeable and kind people I've had the pleasure of knowing.

Moving forward, I want to ensure that The Compass remains as informative, timely and entertaining as possible, but I can't do that without hearing from you, the readers. Please let me know if you have a story idea, or better yet, an article you've already written, that touches on issues you think The Compass readers need to know about. Updates on conservation projects, trip reports, upcoming events, issues you feel strongly about that haven't been covered, book reviews (or book suggestions for review), ornithological updates and even musings on birding in Chicago are more than welcome! So contact me at sparmet@yahoo.com with your ideas.

I'm especially interested in hearing if there are columns you'd like to see as permanent features in The Compass.

Good birding,
Sharon Parmet
Editor, The Compass

COMPASS

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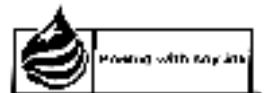
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Report sightings to: (847) 265-2117
Rare bird alert: (847) 265-2118
Activity line: (773) 539-6793, press 1
Web page: www.chicagoaudubon.org
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Chicago Bird Collision Monitors Rescue Injured Surf Scoter at Montrose Harbor Bird does not survive due to lead poisoning

By Annette Prince, Director, Chicago Bird Collision Monitors

The Chicago Bird Collision Monitors (CBCM) were made aware this past November of an injured female surf scoter spotted by CBCM volunteer Chris Williamson. Chris had observed the bird behaving strangely around the harbor docks and noticed that the scoter's wings were drooping and it seemed unable to fly or dive. The bird appeared to be sickly and was making repeated gaping motions with its mouth and kept its bill open. Unfortunately, these are all symptoms typical of lead poisoning, a major cause of death for waterfowl.

Jim Tibensky, CBCM volunteer and

scoter's gizzard was filled with lead pellets from shotgun ammunition that it had ingested while feeding. Dr. Higgs determined that lead poisoning had brought on neurological damage, convulsions, paralysis and eventually the death of this lovely bird.

Efforts to phase out lead shot began in the 1970s, but a nationwide ban on lead shot for all waterfowl hunting in the United States was not implemented until 1991. Canada instituted a complete ban on the use of lead shot in 1999, after restricting its use near bodies of water and in national wildlife areas earlier. Although banned, lead shot remains in the environment where wildlife ingests it while feeding on land or foraging along the bottoms of lakes and ponds.

Surf scoters are diving ducks that spend the summer months in northern Canada and Alaska. Their migration route brings them to the Great Lakes and the Atlantic and Pacific coasts where they spend the winter. It is unknown whether the Montrose Harbor surf scoter ingested the lead shot in the Chicagoland area, or along its migration route.

Many waterfowl eat lead pellets while they are feeding, mistaking them for food like mollusks and clams, or grit – small stones they eat to help grind up food in their gizzards. It can take about three weeks for a bird to die of lead poisoning.

Although many thousands of birds probably die each year from lead poisoning, the actual number of birds poisoned by lead is not known. Poisoned birds often hide themselves and die in out-of-the-way places where they are never found. They are also eaten by predators, like bald eagles, and scavengers, like vultures and foxes, which usually leave little trace of their prey. When an animal with lead poisoning is eaten by another animal, the deadly effects move up the food chain to affect the predator in what is called "secondary lead poisoning."

Ducks, geese, swans and loons are



Jim Tibensky with the rescued surf scoter

the animals most commonly affected by lead ingestion, however, upland game birds including mourning doves, wild turkeys, pheasants, and quail are occasionally affected. Lead poisoning has also been noted in small mammals (raccoon) and raptors, presumably from the ingestion of lead contaminated prey. In ducks, geese and swans, lead poisoning is most commonly seen during migration in the late fall and early spring. In heavily contaminated areas, cases may be seen at any time of year.

In 1997, Canada banned the use of lead fishing sinkers and jigs weighing less than 50 grams in its national wildlife areas and national parks which may have contributed as much as 3,000 tons of lead to the waterways of the U.S. and Canada each year. The U.S. is also considering a ban on lead fishing sinkers.

CBCM regrets that the surf scoter could not be saved but is very glad the team made such a commendable effort to help this bird. We hope the case of this particular surf scoter can help raise awareness of how an environmental pollutant can produce long-term hazards for wildlife. If you are a hunter or enjoy fishing, please consider the use of non-lead-based shot and sinkers. The extra cost is well worth it. □

Chicago Bird Collision Monitors
www.birdmonitors.net



The surf scoter's gizzard with lead shot inside during an autopsy.

expert kayaker, was summoned to see if he could rescue the bird. He put his boat into the harbor and managed to head the scoter off in an open area where it desperately tried to dive but lacked the wing power to get below the surface of the water. Jim was finally able to collect the bird, and with it safely in his kayak, he paddled back to shore where the bird was placed in a waiting carrier.

The scoter was transported to Willowbrook Wildlife Center in Glen Ellyn, Ill., but unfortunately, it died shortly after being admitted. Veterinarian Dr. Karen Higgs performed a necropsy that revealed the

Avian Flu

continued from pg 1

avian influenza strains are more virulent, and can cause high mortality in both wild birds and poultry stocks.

Most avian influenza strains do not normally infect species other than birds, though a few subtypes can be transmitted from birds to humans. Avian influenza viruses become much more dangerous if they mutate to allow easy transmission from one human to another, not just from birds to humans. The most devastating avian influenza epidemic occurred in 1918 when a highly pathogenic strain of avian influenza mutated allowing people to infect other people. An estimated 40 to 50 million people died worldwide as a result.

The Current Strain of Avian Influenza: H5N1

Since 1997, a highly pathogenic strain of H5N1 avian influenza has infected over 100 people and caused at least 65 deaths in East and Southeast Asia. While any human infection is cause for concern and action, this current avian flu outbreak has affected a relatively small number of people, and has very limited ability to be transmitted from person to person. Rather, the virus appears to be transmitted to humans through direct contact with infected poultry or contaminated surfaces. Over 150 million domestic birds have been culled to contain outbreaks. There is no

evidence that the virus has mutated to spread widely from person to person.

Do Wild Birds Transmit H5N1 to People?

In the summer of 2005, the virus spread to Central Asia and China where it was detected in both domestic birds and wild birds. By October 2005, the virus was detected in domestic ducks and poultry in Turkey and Romania, and in a wild mute swan in Croatia. In November it was detected in a flamingo in Kuwait. While there is no evidence of wild birds being able to transmit H5N1 directly to people, laboratory studies indicate that domestic ducks, as well as mallards and perhaps other wild species, may be able to carry and transmit the virus to other birds without showing signs of illness. While there is strong circumstantial evidence that wild birds may be able to spread the disease along their migratory paths, more testing of healthy waterfowl and other birds is needed before we can be certain that migratory birds are the source of the H5N1 virus infections reported in Eastern Europe. Global testing of both domestic waterfowl and wild birds is urgently needed in order to monitor the extent and spread of the virus in domestic flocks and wild bird populations.

Leading experts including the World Health Organization, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, and the World Organization for Animal Health all emphasize that

culling wild bird populations is highly unlikely to stop the spread of the disease, and would only divert resources away from more important disease control measures. Statements by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization can be found here:

<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2004/48287/index.html>.

Has H5N1 Been Found in North America?

The H5N1 avian influenza virus has not been found in wild birds in North America. There is a remote chance that infected wild birds from Asia could bring the virus with them during fall migration to North America. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geological Survey (USGS), Alaska Department of Fish & Game, and other public health agencies are working together to test thousands of waterfowl and shorebirds for the virus in Alaska, and field sampling is being integrated with surveillance programs throughout the United States and Canada.

What You Can Do

- While the possibility of contracting the H5N1 virus from wild birds is very unlikely, people who have close personal contact with wild birds should take measures to protect themselves by practicing animal handling and sanitary practices recommended by the USGS National Wildlife Health Center Wildlife Health Bulletin #05-03: http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/research/WHB/WHB_05_03.html.

- People who feed birds are not at

high risk of contracting avian influenza from birds in their yards or at their feeders. However, since birds can transmit other diseases to humans (e.g. salmonellosis), people who feed birds should routinely clean their feeders and bird baths as recommended by the National Audubon Society (http://www.audubon.org/bird/at_home/SafeFeeding.html) and the USGS National Wildlife Health Center (http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/whats_new/fact_sheet/fact_birdfeeder.html).

- People who come into contact with wild bird excreta should thoroughly clean up with soap and water.

Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>
 United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization: http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/subjects/en/health/diseases-cards/special_avian.html
 USGS National Wildlife Health Center: http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/research/avian_influenza/avian_influenza.html
 BirdLife International Statement on Avian Influenza: www.birdlife.org/action/science/species/avian_flu
 Wetlands International Statement on Avian Influenza: http://www.wetlands.org/IWCA/Avianflu/AI_position.htm □

The "Windy City" May Soon Be Put to the Test Wind turbines to be installed on the roof of the Daley Center

by Sharon Parmet

Chicago is known by many names, including the "Second City", the "city in a garden," and perhaps most popularly, as the "Windy City." Whether you believe that Chicago earned its "windy city" designation because of the blusterings of its politicians or because of the frigid blastings that blow off Lake Michigan, Chicago is poised to live up to this name now more than ever. Mayor Richard Daley, one of the greenest mayors in the nation, wants to put Chicago's world-famous wind to use by installing wind turbines on top of the Loop's Daley Center to generate electricity for local use.

"This would be a demonstration project to keep Chicago at the cutting edge of conservation," says Donnie Dann, president of the Bird Conservation Network (BCN) and immediate past Board Member of the American Bird Conservancy (ABC). "Wind farms aren't coming to downtown, but wind is certainly a great source of renewable energy that has a low impact on birds if done right."

Wind is an attractive alternative source of energy. It is clean, renewable and non-polluting. It is estimated that harnessing wind energy in the U.S. could prevent the burning of 8.4 million tons of coal. Power generated by coal, and the extraction of coal and other fossil fuels has a major negative impact on birds, not to mention its effects on humans and how it contributes to global warming. According to ABC, more than 3,000 birds were killed by collisions during a single night during fall migration at a four-smokestack Florida coal-fired power plant. The Exxon Valdez oil spill killed hundreds of thousands of birds and destroyed thousands of acres of habitat.

"When you compare the effect of wind turbines on birds to using coal, which often requires habitat-destroying strip mining either at prime breeding areas or along migratory routes, wind is a relatively bird friendly choice for generating electricity," Dann says.

But local conservation and birding groups are concerned about the effect of wind turbines.

According to a white paper recently published

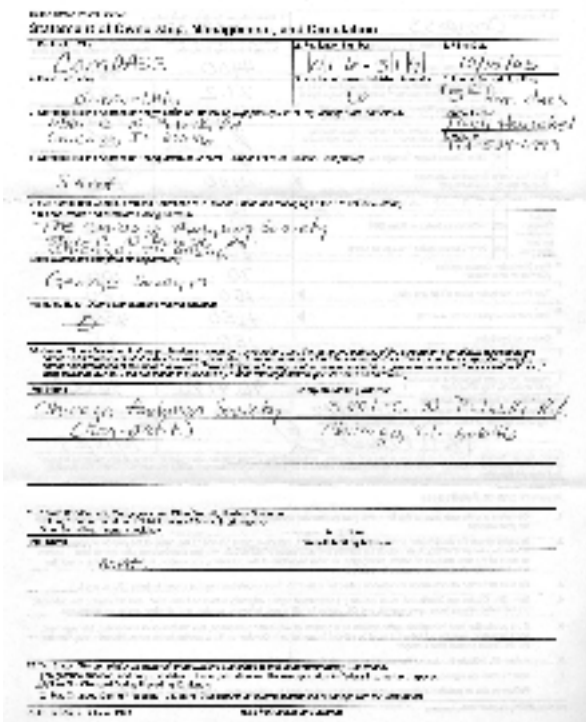
by ABC, "Recent studies indicate that bird mortality at wind turbine projects varies from less than one bird per turbine per year to as high as 7.5 birds per turbine per year."

These studies were all performed on traditional wind turbines composed of a single pole with rotating blades at the top. The wind turbines proposed to sit atop the Daley Center are of a radical new design that has less of an impact on birds compared the traditional wind turbines with rotating blades. The new design, by Chicago design firm, Aerotecture, consists of a rotating helix (think DNA) surrounded by a tubular cage of wire. "This design appears to be less harmful to birds for a variety of reasons, and can probably be placed on a wider variety of sites," says Dann.

To date, the Chicago Audubon Society, Chicago Ornithological Society, and the Fort Dearborn Audubon Society have all given their tentative approval to the helical wind turbines with the provision that monitoring be allowed to take place on the roof of the Daley Center to determine the turbines' effect on birds and to record any bird deaths due to collisions with the turbines. The organizations also have secured a promise from the Chicago Department of the Environment that no wind turbines of any kind be placed on Northerly Island, which sits on Chicago's lakefront and is along a major migratory flyway and serves as an important resting and feeding spot for migrating birds.

ABC advocates for very careful site selection, including making sure that potential sites are not along major migratory pathways, or are particularly attractive sites to birds (feeding or nesting grounds) so as to minimize impact on birds. Lighting of wind turbine towers should be minimal, and if necessary, should be composed of simultaneously-pulsing white strobe lights (which some studies have shown to be less attractive to birds). They also suggest that all cabling and wires associated with wind turbines should be placed underground whenever possible.

The city's Department of the Environment has sent ABC their suggested design for the Daley Center turbines and is awaiting feedback from ABC. □



Date	Location	Number of Birds
10/20/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
10/21/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
10/22/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
10/23/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
10/24/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
10/25/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
10/26/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
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12/30/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000
12/31/05	Chicago Audubon Society	4000

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Stewardship Workdays

Montrose Point and the Magic Hedge

Montrose Point home of the Magic Hedge needs your help. We are conducting monthly workdays the first Saturday of the month from March through November. This is a unique opportunity to garden on the lakefront as we work on establishing native vegetation and removing invasive species like blackthorn and burdock. Our goals are to create an environment that will enhance the health and well-being of birds that use the point during migration and during nesting season, to enhance opportunities for bird watchers, and provide opportunities for the public to learn about natural areas and the importance and beauty of native landscape.

Exciting new developments at Montrose Point include a large area of the meadow that was planted with a fantastic collection of native prairie plants last fall and a collection of 10 different species of shrubs that were planted in the Magic Hedge this past spring.

Directions: Meet at the Magic Hedge located on Montrose Ave., east of Lake Shore Drive. Drive east on Montrose Ave. towards the lake. As the road turns north, take the first right by the bait shop. Continue to the nature area on the left, just before the harbor parking lot as the road starts to curve right around the harbor.

For more information, contact David Painter at Dvdpaint@yahoo.com or (773) 935-1387.

Skokie Lagoons Workdays

Upcoming Skokie Lagoons workdays are Saturday, January 14; Saturday, February 11 and Saturday, March 11 starting at 10:00 a.m.

The Chicago Audubon Society conducts regular monthly workdays at the Skokie Lagoons every second Saturday of every month. Activities include buckthorn cutting, brushpile burning and other management activities. Meet at the Tower Road parking lot, east of the lagoon bridge. For further information, call Jerry Garden at (773) 545-4362 or e-mail him at jerrygarden@sprynet.com.

Weekly Bird Walks

Wooded Isle Walks

These walks will resume on the last Saturday in March (March 25) and will be held every Saturday beginning at 8:00 a.m.

Bring binoculars and field guides and dress for the weather. Meet at Darrow Bridge, just south of the Museum of Science and Industry. If you have any questions, please call Doug Anderson at (773) 493-7058.

Field Trips

2006 Winter Gull Frolic

Come to the Winthrop Harbor Yacht Club for the annual Gull Frolic on

Saturday, February 11. The activities start at 9:00 a.m. and will run to 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. depending on interest and attendance. There will be several scopes set up indoors for you to use, but it is recommended that you bring your own scope and binoculars, especially if you will be venturing outside. Dress for the weather! Four to eight different gull species, along with several species of duck are likely to be present.

There is a \$5 fee that will cover the program and food. Parking is free.

Driving Directions:

Take I-94 to the last exit before Wisconsin. Go east to Sheridan Road and north to Winthrop Harbor. At 7th Avenue, turn right, go to the marina, and follow the road to the north end. For more information contact Denis Bohm at (847) 283-9231 or at denisbm@aol.com.

Pre-Gull Frolic Event

Jim Landing will be holding a "pre-Gull Frolic" event inside the Illinois International Port District at Lake Calumet in southeast Chicago beginning at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, February 4. Previous year's highlights included a California gull, many species of diving ducks, several hawks and a coyote.

There is a limit on the number of cars entering the area, so contact Jim Landing before January 31 to reserve your space and to get driving directions. Spaces will be given on a first come first serve basis.

E-mail Jim at j.landing@sbcglobal.net with the name and phone numbers of the driver and passengers. You must

give five days of notification if you will be canceling so that those placed on the waiting list can be notified that a spot has opened up.

Courses

International Wildlife Rehabilitation Council Basic Wildlife Rehabilitation Course Itasca, IL

February 4 and 5, 2006

During the IWRC basic wildlife rehabilitation course, lecture topics will include an introduction to wildlife rehabilitation, basic anatomy and physiology, calculating drug dosages, handling and physical restraint, thermoregulation, stress, basic shock cycle, initial care, physical examination, wildlife nutrition and associated diseases, standards for housing of wildlife, zoonoses (diseases common to man and animals), raptor neonatal care, euthanasia criteria, rehabilitation techniques for conditioning birds for successful release and release criteria.

Pre-registration is required. Interested parties should contact IWRC by **January 13th** in order to attend this course.

If you have any questions about IWRC's training courses or any other IWRC program, please do not hesitate to contact the IWRC Training Department at (408) 271-2685 or by e-mail at info@iwrc-online.org

Montrose Dunes Designated an Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Site

The Montrose Beach Dunes (this is the official state name) located on the lakefront at Montrose Beach were recently designated an Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) site by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). The INAI is a statewide list of high-quality natural areas. This is the first time a Chicago Park District parcel has been recognized as an INAI site.

The dunes, which cover a 9.25-acre natural area owned by the Chicago Park District in Cook County, are located at the east end of Montrose Beach, Chicago's largest beach. The site has been under restoration for the past six years by the Park District and many dedicated volunteers. The goal of the restoration is to encourage the growth of native grasses, sedges, rushes, and other plant life adapted to beach, dunes and swales in the area. Volunteers monitor several state-listed plant species for the Chicago Botanic Garden's Plants of Concern Program, as well as monitor resident and migratory birds.

The move for INAI designation came about last summer after Debra Nelson, a heritage biologist from the IDNR, was consulted on ways to control several troublesome invasive species at the site. Nelson and a colleague visited the dunes and were immediately impressed by the unique flora and fauna, including uncommon geological features such as a panne (a wet depression in a dune/swale system). Nelson noted that pannes are "globally imperiled with fewer than 200 acres



Public education and outreach are important elements of dune stewardship. Julian Rodriguez, an eighth grader at Waters School in Chicago, pulls a mammoth cottonwood sapling at a Montrose Beach Dunes workday.

worldwide." IDNR subsequently nominated the site for INAI status. The lengthy application and supporting documentation were approved by the Natural Areas Evaluation Committee in Springfield in early October.

The INAI designation opens the door for further protection and enhancement of Montrose Beach Dunes. Several changes will soon go into effect at the site to increase protection of its flora and fauna. The fence around the dune, which has been in place for five years and sustained much wear and tear, will be dismantled so that sand, snow, and ice can move around freely in the unique habitat over the winter. A new fence will be installed in the spring. The Park District will also put up temporary signs demarcating the habitat. There will also be some ongoing thinning of the large cottonwood trees on the big dune, which will reduce the need for volunteers to weed the thousands of cottonwood seedlings that crop up each year (the trees produce millions of fluffy seeds that sprout in damp sand).

If you are interested in volunteering at the Montrose Beach Dunes, please contact Leslie Borns, site steward, at birdperson@juno.com. □

Bald Eagles Make Illinois Site Home For the Third Winter in a Row

For the third winter in a row, a pair of bald eagles has called a nest site by the Little Calumet River home. If the eagles continue to return to the spot and are able to successfully raise young, it will be the first "official" bald eagle nesting site in Illinois since a pair nested in the Indiana Dunes in 1897.

The eagles built their first nest in March 2004, but no chicks were born, which is not unusual for a pair of eagles building their first nest. The pair returned the following January and started building a nest but soon gave up. The eagles were sighted again this year on the nest.

"It certainly seems like these birds have some fidelity to the nest site and hopefully, someday they'll get it right," says Walter Marcisz, a long-time birder in the Calumet area.

If the eagles do reproduce, they are likely to lay their eggs in late February or March, with the chicks fledging sometime in July or August, Marcisz says.

Right now, it's a watching and waiting game. The watching, however, is difficult due to the secluded nature of the nesting site, which is best visible from a boat in the Little Calumet River. "Once the foliage comes in this spring, the nest is going to be virtually invisible," says Marcisz. The birds were first seen in 2004 by members of the Water Reclamation District doing water testing from a boat on the river.

On Wednesday, December 14, the City Council voted unanimously to purchase the 26-acre parcel of wooded land the nesting site is on from the steel company that owns the land. When purchased, the land will be turned over to the Cook County Forest Preserve District. □