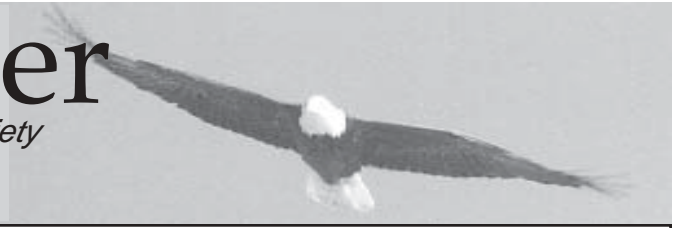


Coulee Birder

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Audubon Society
Website: <http://couleeaudubon.org/>



March-April 2005

Events

**Register now for
birding festival;
materials enclosed**

March 19 — Lansing Loop field trip. Meet at 7 a.m. at the entrance to Goose Island County Park. Leader, Fred Leshner.

Meetings in March and April will be held at 7 p.m. in the community room on the lower level of the La Crosse Public Library at 800 Main Street, La Crosse.

March 16—Craig Thompson will speak on “Birding in the Tropics: Hot Places - Cool Birds” including photos and commentary from birding trips Craig and his wife, Mary, led to Belize, Panama and Ecuador.

April 20 - Birding Opportunities on Mississippi Valley Conservancy projects. Staff from the Mississippi Valley Conservancy, a local land trust serving 7 counties along the Mississippi River will discuss habitat preservation and birding opportunities on MVC-protected lands.

May 13-15 — Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival.

Eagle watching info needed

Watch for eagles.

That’s a request to Coulee Region Audubon members from Audubon members who are planning an eagle watching “trail” for the La Crosse/Onalaska area.

Notes on your eagle sightings should include the location, parking availability, safety considerations, number of eagles often seen, and dates of observations.

Send your information about your favorite eagle watching spot to Bobbie Wilson, Coulee Audubon president at: pbwilson@centurytel.net

President’s notebook

Earth Day 2005: Join Us!

By **BOBBIE WILSON**

Earth Day is coming! A week of activities will culminate in a city-wide celebration in La Crosse’s Riverside Park on Saturday, April 23.

April 22 marks the 35th anniversary of the first Earth Day, a nationwide “teach-in.” An article in a November 1969 The New York Times described the atmosphere of the times:

“Rising concern about the environmental crisis is sweeping the nation’s campuses with an intensity that may be

on its way to eclipsing student discontent over the war in Vietnam...a national day of observance of environmental problems...is being planned for next spring...when a nationwide environmental ‘teach-in’...coordinated from the office of Senator Gaylord Nelson is planned....”

I was on campus back then, and what a celebration it was! It is very heartening to me, after all these years, that planning for Earth Day 2005 began on our

See **NOTEBOOK**, page 2

Birding by rail car to be part of Mississippi Flyway fest

Coulee Region Audubon Society will sponsor a birding by rail trip through the Tiffany Bottoms as part of the Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival May 15.

Festival planners have accepted the excursion as a fund raising event for the society. Coulee Audubon has been instrumental in the organization of the three-day festival May 13-15.

Cost of the tour is \$20 plus registration costs for the festival, which are \$40 for all three days or a \$10 one-day-only registration. The tour leaves at 7 a.m. from the departure point on Highway 25 north of Nelson, Wis. Registration materials are included in this newsletter mail-

ing.

“This tour is simply the most unique way to penetrate the wild areas of

one of the most important floodplain forests in Wisconsin,” said Fred Leshner, former Coulee Audubon president who pioneered the trip in connection with Chippewa Valley Motorcar Railway.

The Tiffany Bottoms cover 12,000 acres of prime breeding and migratory bird habitat.

This is a 5-6 hour ride on standard gauge tracks in miniature-sized railcars. Frequent stops are made, allowing excellent viewing

See **RAILCAR**, page 2

We need your contributions of material for the Audubon newsletter. Please send your suggestions for articles, news of events and other things birders need to know. Deadline for copy is the third Friday of the month preceding publication. The next deadline will be April 15th. Send information to: dskoloda@earthlink.net or by mail to Newsletter, W6396 Riverview Drive, Onalaska, WI 54650.

Song birds battling common enemy

By Leif Marking

I monitor my Eastern Bluebird houses weekly to recognize any problems that may develop and to record the numbers. As I approached house number seven, located in a set-aside (CRP) hayfield, I noticed a few songbirds shrieking as they power dived repeatedly from an overhead electric line to make quick u-turns at the grass line, apparently to assault an intruder. Engaged in this

behavior were a pair of bluebirds that nested in the nearby NABS-style house, a pair of Bobolinks, and a pair of Red-winged Blackbirds that likely had nearby nests on the ground. I was simply amazed to see three different species of songbirds join forces against a common enemy. I suspected a stray cat had entered the territory and was defending itself. This ruckus was entertaining at first, but then I realized how serious these parent birds were in their relentless pursuit of an en-

emy. If they failed, the predator would consume their young.

When I was about 20 feet from the fracas, an American Kestrel (formerly called Sparrow Hawk) arose slowly from the grass into the air with angry pursuers clicking their beaks in futile attack. The kestrel left the scene with empty, dangling talons that frequently hold fast to a field mouse or a prey insect. The tiny hawk was barely larger than the adult bluebirds, but its tail feathers were much longer and rusty colored. As I shouted *get out of here!* the hawk drifted, and soared down into a wooded valley. The songbirds immediately resumed their normal posture of concern by flitting about and scolding me for my approach. I was more interested in finding out what their reaction was all about. I searched the area immediately in front of the bluebird house for the unfinished portion of prey to no avail.

Then I remembered why I was there, simply to check the contents of the bluebird house. Last week there had been five newborn chicks barely able to raise their heads to accept insect morsels from their parents. As I opened the swinging side, I noticed there were only three chicks left in the nest. There was no evidence to explain their disappearance, and the remaining chicks were motionless against the bottom of the nest. Of course, the kestrel had taken the two half grown chicks, and it was gorging on its latest prey as I approached the area. A kestrel is too large to enter the inch-and-three-eighth-wide opening; however, the kestrel apparently inserted its head inside the entrance. The victim youngsters, suspecting their parents delivering food, raised up to meet the predator's hungry beak. Thus, my precious bluebird youngsters provided energy for this bird of prey. Daily inspections revealed no additional successful assaults, so the kestrel apparently became satisfied with other prey.

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community's campuses. UW-La Crosse and Viterbo University students invited local organizations and individuals to join them in forming the La Crosse Earth Day Coalition, "... a group comprised of students, community members, local environmental organizations and businesses. We are united by a common goal to educate and inspire those around us on environmental issues.

"Our Goals are as follows:

1) Educate people of all ages about personal responsibility and sustainability;

2) Organize a collaborative celebration amongst any and all community members in honor of the Earth;

3) Inspire people to take an active role in environmental issues; 4) Have fun!"

Coulee Audubon has been represented in the organizational meetings. Among other things we will have a booth at the park. We could use volunteers to help staff the booth, greet the public and tell them what we do. The more volunteers, the shorter the shifts, and you can then partake in the other sights and activities. Let me know if you're interested!

Mark it on your calendar: Saturday, April 23. There will be lots to see and do and learn—take the kids or grand kids if you have some. After all, this will be their planet some day!

RAILCAR from page 1

opportunities of secretive birds like the Prothonotary, Mourning, Golden-winged & Cerulean Warblers. Possible sightings include: Red-shouldered Hawk, Sandhill Crane, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Veery. Resident nesting Bald Eagles are also on the menu as are herons, egrets and many woodpeckers. Lots of knowledgeable and friendly birding guides from the Coulee Region Audubon Society will be on board to help you spot and identify birds. For your comfort, facilities are provided on the last rail car. (A portable Porta Potty for those on the go!)

The rest of the railcars are not enclosed, so be sure to pack warm clothes in case of cool weather, bring a lunch & beverages. Insect repellent, good walking shoes and a soft sitting pad are highly recommended.

Rail car engineers will stop as the birding requires, allowing birders to do their thing as well as stretch their legs. Socializing and exchanging notes makes this a fine birding-culture experience.

To volunteer to help with this event or any other Coulee Audubon event, contact Bobbie Wilson, president at pbwilson@centurytel.net

Audubon urges cities to help cut bird deaths

Chicago, Ill., January 25, 2005 — Audubon has developed a guide for cities across the country to form partnerships to save birds' lives. A new website provides tools to replicate Chicago's "Lights Out" Program - a cooperative venture between Audubon, the City of Chicago, and the Building Owners and Managers Association of Chicago, in which Chicago's tall buildings all turn off their decorative lights during spring and fall bird migration. The new national effort has the support of the International Building Owners and Managers Association, Audubon, and Partners in Flight, and funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

The how-to website, www.lightsout.audubon.org, provides sample communications and recognition ideas, links to partner organizations, and research findings. "This program is a win-win for buildings, cities, and birds," explained Audubon President John Flicker. "Buildings can keep lights on in

the evenings when the city is bustling, and then can save energy costs as well as birds' lives by turning out the lights after 11 p.m."

In some cities, thousands of birds perish because the lights on tall buildings confuse their navigation systems. These tiny creatures make exhausting all night journeys. Many of them fly hundreds of miles in one night, on their way from Canada to South America. They find their way by a complex set of instincts and signals that can become confused by the lights. When this happens, they may circle the buildings until they weaken and become susceptible to predation or collision.

National Audubon Society, Partners in Flight, Mayor Daley, and the Building Owners and Managers Association of Chicago have recognized downtown building owners and managers for making Chicago the first U.S. city to dim tall building lights to save birds' lives. "In a great display of civic concern and respon-

sibility, all our buildings cooperate with the program by dimming their decorative lights for almost 5 months of the year, making 'Lights Out' a real success," said Stephen Packard, director of Audubon for the Chicago region.

Terry Rich, National Coordinator of Partners in Flight, an international coalition for bird conservation, praises the program. "We applaud the leadership shown by the Chicago building owners. Their actions save birds' lives and help ensure that these wonderful creatures will be here for our children to enjoy. We hope that other cities will take up the Chicago challenge and emulate this fine effort."

Doug Stotz, Field Museum ornithologist, estimates that the "Lights Out" program saves the lives of over ten thousand warblers, tanagers, thrushes, and other migratory birds each year. His studies show that turning out lights reduces bird mortality by 80 percent.

Corps seeks help in black locust control

The La Crescent Natural Resource Project Office of the Army Corps is planning to continue the black locust control project on south Goose Island beginning on Friday March 4 and continuing through Saturday March 12. The project area is just north of Hunter's Point boat landing, south of the campground. If you would like to get involved in a project that is converting a monoculture of black locust to a diverse bottomland forest, please contact Kurt Brownell for details. Volunteer tasks will range from dragging tops to a chipper, sorting and stacking logs that will be sold as fenceposts, and cutting small trees with handsaws. Lunch and drinks will be provided by the Corps. Black locust have spines so workers will be provided with gloves and eye protection if they do not have their own. Work will generally commence at around 8 a.m. and continue until around 5 p.m. Volunteers working for the Corps will be covered for all medical expenses by the Federal Employees Compensation Act in the unlikely event that there is an injury.

Crane count set April 16

*By Jennie Sauer
Crane Count Coordinator*

Spring is almost here (hopefully) and it's time for the annual Sandhill Crane Count. This year will mark the 30th Anniversary of the Annual Midwest Sandhill Crane Count. The Crane Count will be on Saturday, April 16th.

We will be counting cranes from 5:30 to 7:30 a.m. and then gather for breakfast to recount the mornings activities. Every year, in conjunction with the International Crane Foundation, people from all the various counties in the state participate in the count.

In La Crosse County, the Coulee Region Audubon Society oversees the count. The Count is used to monitor the general population trend of sandhill cranes in the Upper Midwest, as well as to promote awareness of cranes and wetland conservation throughout the count area.

Check out the International Crane Foundation website for more information on the count. http://www.savingcranes.org/conservation/our_projects/article.cfm?cid=1&aid=49&pid=17

Everybody is invited to participate. If you have never done the crane count, you can pair up with someone who has. So don't be shy. This is a fun activity you don't want to miss.

Call Jennie Sauer to sign up for the Count at 781-6376 or e:mail jsauer@usgs.gov if you have any questions.



Coulee Region Audubon Society,
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“Living with Nature” offers creative opportunity

Birders interested in creative writing and art can participate in the La Crosse River Marsh Coalition “Living with Nature” program.

Entries may be any media and any

written form: fiction or nonfiction, essay, narrative, anecdote, letter or poem.

Written submissions are due March 15. Deadline for artwork is March 31. For more information contact Karen Acker,

782-5463 or kacker@centurytel.net. Mail submissions to the La Crosse River Marsh Coalition, P.O. Box 2703, La Crosse, WI 54602-2703.

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YES, please enroll me as a member of the Coulee Region Chapter (Z19) of the National Audubon Society at the introductory rate of \$20 for one year or \$35 for two years. Membership benefits include The Coulee Birder and Audubon Magazine.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ St _____ Zip _____

Mail along with your check to:
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