

April 2010

www.daviessaudubon.net



DAVIESS COUNTY AUDUBON SOCIETY

THE GOLDFINCH



Alan Gehret, curator of the John James Audubon State Park museum, will appear at the April 6 meeting. (Photo courtesy of Alan Gehret)

Meeting marks Audubon bicentennial

Come celebrate the bicentennial of famed naturalist/artist John James Audubon's arrival in Henderson when Audubon, as portrayed by Alan Gehret, visits the Daviess County Audubon Society meeting April 6. Gehret is curator of the Audubon Museum in John James Audubon State Park in Henderson.

Donning Audubon's travel/bird hunting garb, Gehret will present his life and art through a PowerPoint presentation, exploring Audubon's adventures in Kentucky. Although the time was marked by Audubon's financial difficulties as a mill operator, Kentucky also helped lay the foundation for Audubon's masterpiece, "The Birds of America." The dramatic paintings wowed people all over the world.

Gehret came to Kentucky from the John James Audubon Center at Mill Grove, in Audubon, Pa., Audubon's first home. There, he was a curator of the Audubon art collection. He left Mill Grove after 20 years to oversee the collection of Audubon art and

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Kenny Lin, right, and Brenda Little contemplate the hike. (Tony Eden photo)

Preserve and protect: Trip focuses on WKU's efforts on Green River

The rugged Upper Green River Preserve near Horse Cave provided the perfect backdrop March 27 for learning more about efforts by Western Kentucky University staffers and students to protect this piece of Kentucky's natural paradise.

Dr. Ouida Meier, co-director of the preserve, greeted the group and took them to various locales on the nearly 1,200-acre property.

Evidence of ongoing studies could be found in all directions. Driving in, she pointed out a curious-looking enclosed plot, where they study voles and other ground mammals. Flagged trees were young butternut and disease-resistant American elm plantings.

The mussel-rearing facility was still a few weeks away from being open, but members learned how water from the nearby Green River was used to get the mussels through the dangerous juvenile stage. These mussels play an essential role in filtering out pathogens in waterways.

As members peered into the waters of the Green, Meier noted how poachers have taken the mussels to force production of pearls. The oil company that had owned the land welcomed the harvest, and Meier related

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April Calendar:

* Spring Break at Owensboro Area Museum of Science and History, noon, April 6 (hummingbirds) and April 8 (nests).

* DCAS regular meeting, 7 p.m. April 6, First Christian Church, J.R. Miller and Seventh Street.

* Western Kentucky Botanical Garden birding class for Whitesville Elementary, 9 a.m. April 15.

* Boy Scout birding class, 8 a.m. April 24, OCTC

* Earth Day at First Christian Church, 11 a.m. April 24.

Ohio Valley Birding Festival, begins April 24. DCAS trip to Goose Pond WMA, Linton, Ind., May 1. Carpool from OCTC at 12:30 p.m.

* Work days at Powell Bird Blind, dates to be announced.

Indiana road trip will highlight birding festival

DC members to go to Goose Pond, one of top birding areas in Midwest

The Daviess County Audubon Society will celebrate the Ohio Valley Birding Festival by taking a trip to Goose Pond Fish & Wildlife Management Area, Greene County, Ind., 2 to 9:30 p.m. Saturday, May 1.

The 8,000-acre area is recognized as one of the top birding destinations in the Midwest, known for its rare bird sightings and variety of waterfowl. Last month, its Marsh Madness event spotted 11,000 sandhill cranes. We will meet at 12:30 p.m. at OCTC and carpool to Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve, Evansville, and transportation from there will be provided. At the marshland, the group will be led by Dr. Lee Sterrenburg, considered one of south-central Indiana's top birding experts.

The group will eat supper on the ride home.

The trip is expected to be a sellout, so early preregistration is emphasized. The cost of \$25 is to be sent to "Evansville Audubon Society," c/o Steve Heeger, 15340 Cemetery Road, Evansville, IN, 47725. Signup deadline is April 28.

A complete schedule of festival field trips is available at www.ohiovalleybirdingfestival.org, but some of the highlights include:

Thursday, April 29

Morning hikes and evening owl prowls at Wesselman Woods Nature Preserve.

Birding hike at Eagle Slough, just north of Ellis Park

Birding hike at Bluegrass Fish and Wildlife Area, off Boonville-New Harmony Road

Friday, April 30

Day trip to Goose Pond FWA

Saturday, May 1

Birding Day Trip to Patoka River National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area

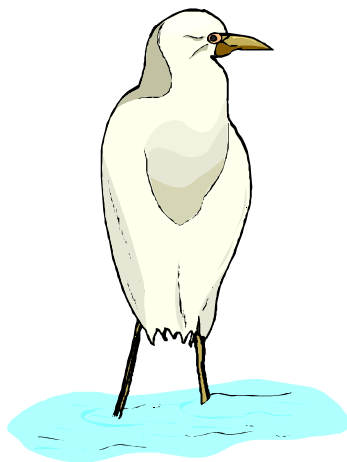
Morning and evening trips to Howell Wetlands in Evansville
Bluebird program featuring Bob and Judy Peak

Sunday, May 2

Trip to Twin Swamps Nature Preserve

Patoka River Canoe Trip

Hikes at Bluegrass Fish and Wildlife Area and Eagle Slough.



DC Audubon dues

Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

I have enclosed \$15 for local membership only

I have enclosed \$20 for national membership

Send to: treasurer Charles Morris, 1400 Woodbridge Trail, Owensboro, KY 42303

Gotchas! of the Month

Pat Augenstein discovered an active great-horned owl nest, with a least one baby on Veach Road, across from Owensboro Recovery.



Larry Stewart of Bremen shared this photo of an albino cardinal with the chapter.

A bald eagle was a surprise visitor to Reid's Orchard.

Meiers true friends of Green River species

Preserve filled with natural treasures

The Mammoth Cave area is one of Kentucky's most natural spectacles. With the help of people power, a segment of this area is being preserved.

Western Kentucky University biology professors Drs. Albert and Ouida Meier discussed their work as co-directors with the Upper Green River Nature Preserve during the March 2 meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society.

It was originally 670 acres and is now 1,155 acres in Hart County. It features nine caves, seven springs (including the McCoy Blue Hole) and two waterfalls.

"The really special thing about it is it protects a big chunk of the Green River," Ouida Meier said. It straddles a very extensive mussel bed, which includes several endangered species. In cooperation with Mammoth Cave National Park and Tennessee Tech University, there is a mussel rearing facility to help keep them alive during the precarious juvenile stage.

The area also includes Saltpeter Cave, which features gray bats and Allegheny wood rats. Like other karst enthusiasts in Kentucky, she is fearful of the white-nose syndrome at the state's doorstep and the potential for decimating Kentucky's bat population. The irritation from the fungus prevents the bats from hibernating. Although visitors are often blamed for transmitting the disease, she notes with dismay that an infected Tennessee cave had been kept isolated from human encroachment.

They also have done studies on a variety of species to establish baselines for their restoration work.



Drs. Albert and Ouida Meier talked to the chapter at the March 2 meeting.

Their work has not come without resistance. Albert Meier noted that the group inherited oil wells on the property, which after legal wranglings and lease purchasing, they were able to shut down. But, their work was hardly done. With the help of student volunteers, they removed 600 cubic yards of trash – 100 tires off one tract

Unfortunately much of the land was planted with fescue and orchard grass. They are trying to return it to its native barren state, featuring tall grasses. Other species include showy lady slippers (which have been gone from the area since the late 1800s) and American chestnut. Although, they are blight-resistant varieties, other problems threaten them.

Seed drillers have helped bring in some species. Control burning and herbicides also are strategies for the conversion.

He noted that such grassland birds as goldfinches, blue grosbeaks, bobwhites, common yellowthroats and yellow-breasted chats have rebounded from their efforts. On the mammal side, student-planted recorders have snapped images of bobcat, coyotes, red fox and skunk.

Their work also has branched into study of water quality and archeology, as they have learned about families who lived in a 200-year-old house on preserve land – the oldest in Hart County. Darlene Applegate's WKU class recently uncovered an old kiln there.

Ouida Meier added that farmers also participate in land conservation programs which plant tall grasses and rebuild forests. They credit the multiagency approach for obtaining multiple sources for financing, including the Kentucky Heritage Conservation Land Fund and support from WKU.

Audubon

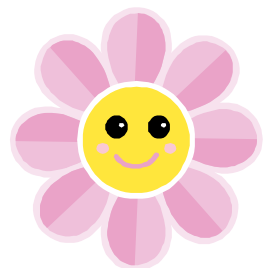
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artifacts in Henderson, a post he has held for five years. From sharing his Audubon expertise on PBS' "American Masters" to interpreting the man throughout the community, Gehret has helped keep Audubon's legacy alive.

The group will meet at 7 p.m. at First Christian Church, Seventh and J.R. Miller Blvd. Dine with Gehret and his wife and their daughter at 5:30 p.m. at Moonlit Bar-B-Q Inn.

Come flex flower power

On Saturday, April 3, Joe and Grace Ford will go to Audubon State Park for Wildflower Extraganza. Activities being offered include: Possible activities include a 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. one-mile flower hikes, an 11 a.m. half-mile lake, and a noon kid scavenger hunt for youngsters 3 to 5. From 1 to 2 p.m., naturalist Julie McDonald will present a program on turning your yard into a National Wildlife Federation backyard habitat, including a stop at the park's designated habitat. Call Grace Ford, 316-1632 for reservations by April 2.



Program explores eagle's lofty status

The renaissance of the bald eagle and its role as an American icon was discussed March 6 by John James Audubon State Park naturalist Julie McDonald.

The older group noted that their sightings were becoming more frequent, thanks to aggressive conservation programs.

"It's the most magnificent thing in the world, isn't it?" McDonald said. Normally, the raptors are tied to water and seek out solitude. In captivity, they can live 40+ years, 15 to 20 years in the wild. Their life span discouraged the park from having a resident eagle on site.

"We realized it was a lifelong commitment," she said.

The American Indians were the first to hold the bird in high esteem, prizing it for its courage and freedom and connection to a higher power and celebrating it in dance and art. Eagle feathers were awarded for battle victories and were worn in various ways, depending on the tribe. Today, they must petition the U.S. government to use feathers for ceremonies.

In 1782, the familiar logo was adopted, with the eagle clutching arrows and olive branches to symbolize war and peace, looking toward peace.

Somehow, the eagle's stature was lost on Benjamin Franklin, who maintained the wild turkey was a better symbol as a native bird.

In a letter he derided the bird as being of "especially poor moral character," since he stole fish from other birds and could be bullied by mobs of smaller birds.

She also explored the biology of the eagle, noting they weigh about 17 pounds, stand about 3 feet tall and boast a wingspan of about 7 feet. They prey on fish and other meat they carry away (they can lift up to 7 pounds).



Julie McDonald demonstrates the flight of the turkey vulture; right, the nest is already being built off Stratman Road. (Judy Adams photo)



They can be found within the continental United States and Alaska and mate for life. The partnership is often sealed by talon-locking "dances" in mid-air. It's forged by the laborious building of nests, which can be the size of a Volkswagen Beetle, about two tons. They lay up to three off-white speckled eggs over several days. The schedule may create a power struggle within the nest in which only the oldest, strongest chick survives. She took the group through the stages of growth. She noted that young birds begin with longer feathers "their version of training wheels," which give them a better ability to hold air in their wings while they learn to fly. Shorter feathers (eagles have 7,000) and experience help them with maneuverability as they get older.

Along with the familiar white head, they must change beak and eye colors before reaching full maturity at age 5.

Part of the eagle's allure comes from its finely tuned senses. The term "eagle eye" is no myth – eagles' eyesight is 4 times better than humans, and



McDonald led the group to the rookery where the eagles were north of the park. Winny Lin is at far left. (Judy Adams photo)

they can see forward and to the sides at the same time. From 1,000 feet above the ground, they can spot food below over about 3 square miles.

Unique eye membranes help wash debris from the eyes and help them see as they dive for food.

Ironically, their call is not a powerful scream, but a squeaky twitter. The familiar shriek on

TV is actually that of a red-tailed hawk

Eagles are like many birds, facing threats from contaminants, loss of habitat and collisions from power lines, but federal intervention has helped them rebound from a death spiral. From about 300,000 in the 18th century, the bird's population had

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Preserve

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how one person ended with a pile of mussels “as big as a living room.” Along with poaching, mussels also had been hampered since a dam was constructed on the river.

Almost as impressive as the landscape was the industrious student power tackling various projects on the preserve. Grad student Danielle Racke, recently saluted as the science college’s top graduate student, discussed her work with wildflower transplants and how they are affected by soil conditions and grazing. She is working with such species as wood poppies, twin leaf, Jacob’s ladder and squirrel corn.

By late morning, the group arrived at the Gardner house, which is being restored. On this day, students were repairing mortar in the 200-year-old Hart County landmark. Graduate assistant James Miller pointed out that the house’s Flemish bond was characteristic of a well-built home, for it featured three rows of bricks, each bonded with the other.

The Tidewater-style home featured popular floors and lime-coated walls. Not far away was a spring, which the group visited. The availability of a fresh water source above the flood plain made it a very desirable location, Meier said.

The growing threat of white-nose syndrome kept the group above ground, but they also stopped at a pit cave before lunching at the Goebel property. The surrounding land was recently burned in an effort as part of land management. Meier was delighted to point out areas which were already green again. Re-establishing the region’s namesake barrens is a major preserve goal.

After lunch, Bill Little and Albert Meier went to part of the preserve that is in the



From left, back row: Winny Lin, Charles Morris, Kenny Lin, Laura Morris, Mary Kissel, Jill Flachskam, Mike Henshaw, Henry Connor, Bill Little, Steve Hahus, Aaron Hulsey and Dr. Ouida Meier; front row: Tony Eden, Brenda Eden and Brenda Little. (Photo courtesy of Winny Lin)

midst of being purchased and looked at sandhill crane decoys that had been fitted with cameras for nature photography.

Brenda Little, Brenda and Tony Eden and Winny and Kenny Lin accompanied co-leaders Ouida Meier and grad student Aaron Hulsey and another student for a hike along a bluff, carefully making their way along the loose soil.

“We were clutching saplings for dear life as we made our way slowly along the bluff for about 300 to 400 feet. I love to hike, but this one was not for sissies,” Brenda Little said.

Their reward? A “spectacular” view of the Green River.

Bird-watching took a back seat on this trip, but the group loved seeing 17 double-breasted cormorants surfing the thermals and

wood ducks flying down the Green. Other species logged included: brown-headed cowbird, turkey vulture, mourning dove, American crow, common grackle, field sparrow, dark-eyed junco, eastern towhee, Carolina chickadee, Eastern meadowlark, brown thrasher, eastern bluebird, American robin, red-tailed hawk, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, cardinal, Canada goose, mallard, northern flicker, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, purple martin, pileated woodpecker, red-shouldered hawk, yellow-rumped warbler and wild turkey.

Attending the trip included: Jill Flachskam, Henry Connor, Bill Little, Brenda Little, Tony Eden, Brenda Eden, Mike Henshaw, Steve Hahus, Kenny Lin, Winny Lin, Charles Morris and Laura Morris and Mary Kissel.



The lows of a pit cave and the highs of the Green River were on display.

(Tony Eden photos)

The state of the chapter is strong

By Brenda Little

Each time the Kentucky Audubon Council meets, we give a "Chapter Report" that is supposed to last 3 to 5 minutes so that other chapters across the state know what is happening, so that there can be a sharing of ideas; sometimes it is like the Quakers' sharing Joys and Sorrows.

I fretted over the DCAS report as I wrote the content. I knew I was sounding like my friends who have grandchildren or maybe I was like Muhammad Ali, finding it impossible to be modest as my mind whirled with thoughts like we are "the greatest"!

Here's how I described us to the others in my captive audience:

Our membership numbers are up with renewals and new members joining.

Attendance at monthly meetings is up between 100% and 250% over last year.

Attendance at field study trips is up 50% over past years' average.



Financial position is good thanks to fundraising with ticket taking at Christmas at Panther Creek and Trash for Cash.

Directors are meeting monthly to conduct the chapter's business, which makes monthly meetings more efficient and fosters creative thinking.

Chapter image in the community is gaining respect and

attention through use of Community Pages and promotional pieces in the local newspaper about upcoming events.

Name recognition is improving as we proudly wear T-shirts and hats with our logo and as we display our new banner with our name and colorful Goldfinch at chapter functions.

Publicity! Publicity! Publicity! is one of our goals for the year, and we are having great success with our local newspaper, a local radio station, and via the school systems' e-mail notices to teachers.

Program topics and field study trips are in experimental stages. We've been trying to follow up some of the presentations with field trips led by the program presenter.

Monthly program topics have been exciting, engaging and appealing to large numbers of people this year.

Our newsletter is something we really feel like crowing about! We are proud of the content and layout that our editor, Mary Kissel, prepares 10 months out of the year.

In a nutshell, our chapter is on fire, and it is because of the efforts of a number of people, not any one person. In the vernacular, we are doin' good and having a lot of fun while we're at it. If pride cometh before a fall, I'm about to stumble all over the place because I am so proud of us.

Birdhouse contest to celebrate Audubon in Henderson

Henderson's Audubon 2010 Committee invites children and adults to build a birdhouse. Birdhouses may be made of any material, including: wood, metal, cardboard, ceramic or glass. Birdhouses must be no higher than 36" in height and no wider than 30" wide. These can not weigh more than 15 lbs.

All birdhouses will be displayed in the University of Kentucky Education & Exposition building from May 10 to May 21, then in downtown Henderson banks through June 14.

There will be four age categories; adults from 18 years and older, 9th grade to 12th grade, 6th grade to 8th grade and 5th grade and under.

The birdhouse contest is being done in conjunction with the 200th Anniversary celebration of John James Audubon's landing in Henderson. Entry fee is \$10 for adult division and \$5 for grades 12 and under.

Birdhouses will be accepted at University of Kentucky Exposition Building, 3341 Ky. 351, Henderson, from 10 a.m. to noon May 6 and 7.



New shirts

The new T-shirts were unveiled at the March meeting. Sporting a goldfinch logo, they are available for \$10.



Mark Earth Day's 40th year

A large Earth Day event for the entire community will be held on Saturday, April 24 from 11 to 2 at First Christian Church on J.R. Miller Blvd.

The Daviess County Audubon Society has been asked to provide an information table during the event, and volunteers to lead a nature/wildflower walk also are being sought.

It also will include exhibits from the Sierra Club, Watershed Watch/Water Sentinels, Western Kentucky Raptor Center, Owensboro Fire Department and City of Owensboro's hybrid car.

There also will be free food, environmental programs, children's activities, giveaways, free trees and music. Last year's event attracted about 300 people.

Another volunteer opportunity that day is working with Charles Morris as he leads a merit badge birding class for First Presbyterian Boy Scouts at 8 a.m. at OCTC. That event lasts until 1.

Sierra Club president Aloma Dew notes another Earth Month event will be an Environment and Faith Film Festival at First Presbyterian Church the evenings of April 26, 27, 28. Films to be shown and discussed are: "No Impact Man" (about a family's year of nonconsumerism and living locally); "Black Diamonds" (about environmental problems in Appalachia), and "King Corn" (about the American food system and its impact) and "Big River" (about the effect of all that corn monoculture on our rivers and the Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone).

Museum to feature bird events

Members are wrapping up preparations for the spring break events at the Owensboro Museum of Science and History.

Mary Kissel will present a program on hummingbirds at noon Tuesday, April 6. The kids will make hummingbird feeders, then learn about the fierce tiny birds. Kissel is appreciative of the huge bottle population donated by Lynn Tichenor from the local Social Security office.

At noon Thursday, nests take the lead, when Brenda Little will present a program on birds' construction ability. Rather than make individual crafts, the kids will take part in team nest-building activities in order to learn about the different kinds of nests.

Birding classes begin again for third-graders

The spring "semester" of birding classes at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden will begin April 15, with Whitesville Elementary students from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. May dates for several other groups are still being finalized. If you'd like to help others learn about basic backyard birds, contact Charles Morris at 926-8803.

New banner

Laura Morris, left, and Brenda Little unveil a new Daviess County Audubon banner at the March meeting. It will be used at community events.

Work days loom at Powell bird blind

Daviess Audubon members hope to plant wildflowers at the Powell Bird Blind during the last week in April, put a final adobe whitewash coating on the blind and repair the roof, which has sprung a leak after being repaired last year.

The group will also be "oiling" the chain sawed frogs, moving the log frog down by the pond and getting it set in place and spring cleaning the interior of the blind in preparation for camping season in June.

Specific dates will be announced, as weather permits.

Eagle

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dwindled to only 412 nesting pairs by the 1950s. Thanks to the Migratory Bird Treaty, hunting of rare birds for sport and clothing was prohibited. In 1940, Congress adopted legislation to protect bald eagle, then golden eagles years later. From 1967 until 2007, the bald eagle was declared an endangered species.

The results have been impressive. There are 400 eagles at Land Between the Lakes alone, she noted, and there five nesting pairs at Henderson's Sloughs Wildlife Management Area. The group (including Daviess County Audubon members Winny Lin, Judy Adams and Mary Kissel) were able to viewing the nesting pair who live in a swamp just north of the park on Stratman Road.

The program was reinforced (and slightly contradicted by nature) the following weekend when Kissel and her mother, Lois, spotted an adult bald eagle on the center line of U.S. 41 in southern Sullivan County, Ind.