

The Goldfinch

December
2010

Davless County Audubon Society, www.davlessaudubon.net

Boosting the bird count

CBCs set; prep work to begin at December party

No Daviess County Audubon Society event exemplifies the best part of the club membership than the annual Christmas Bird Counts. It requires a lot of eyes to be able to tally thousands of birds in a single day – plus it's fun.

Last year, the southern and western counts grabbed 54 and 46 species and 28,290 and 10,291 individuals, respectively.

But can it be better?

Ways to boost count numbers will be explored at the Dec. 7 meeting of the DCAS. It will also be a Christmas party, with extra time to socialize. The fun begins at 7 p.m. at First Christian Church, Seventh Street and J.R. Miller Blvd.

This year's CBCs will be centered Dec. 18 from the home of Mike Henshaw, 11201 Fields Road South, Utica, and Jan. 1 from the home of Jan Howard, 3534 W. Parrish Ave.

Birds recorded during the count period – from Dec. 15 to Jan. 5 – also can be noted separately.

The Henshaw count explores southern and southeastern Daviess County – including Yellow Creek Park, Owensboro Community & Technical College and Girl Scout Camp Pennyroyal and is considered the official count for the chapter. Totals are sent to the National Audubon Society, which uses the figures to help track bird population shifts, increases and decreases, which have become more important with the growing concerns about climate change.



The west count — which has endured for more than 50 years — travels north to the Ohio River and west of Owensboro, including Diamond Lake, Panther Creek Park and English Park. Data from this count are shared with the Kentucky Ornithological Society.

Within a seven-mile circle, that's a lot of ground to cover, which leaves plenty of room for improvement. After speaking with Dan Collins, Indiana's state record holder for bird counting, president Brenda Little hopes to share some of his ideas at the meeting. They include:

How can we improve the count for less-experienced birders? One idea being considered is for experienced birders to take groups of less-experienced birders on trial runs of some of the routes prior to the count day, to get a feel for where birds live

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Splendor of holiday lights will aid DCAS

Come enjoy the splendor of Christmas at Panther Creek 2010.

The annual holiday lights extravaganza continues from 5:15 to 9:30 p.m. through Jan. 2 at Panther Creek Park, off Kentucky 81.

DCAS volunteers will be responsible for the week from Thursday, Dec.

3, through Dec. 9, the second week of the attraction. However, \$3 admission/car collected throughout the holidays will be split among participating organizations, so feel free to stop by any time during the Christmas season.

The chapter will receive its share of contributions in January.

Members have been enthusiastic about volunteering, but if you'd like to work you may call Carolyn Williams, 683-5863.



December 2010 calendar

*Christmas at Panther Creek, 5:15 to 9:30 p.m. through Jan. 2, Panther Creek Park.

*Meeting, 7 p.m. Dec. 7, First Christian Church, Seventh and J.R. Miller Blvd.

*Christmas Bird Count, South Daviess County, Dec. 18. Time and start places TBA.

*Christmas Bird Count, West Daviess County, Jan. 1. Time and start places TBA.

Singing the delta blues

Man's tortured relationship with Gulf of Mexico began long before oil spill, Meiers say

Industry's troubled relationship with the Gulf of Mexico was the subject of the Nov. 2 meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society, which welcomed Western Kentucky University biologists Albert and Ouida Meier to share their insights in the wake of last spring's BP oil spill.

"I was driven insane by the news media's coverage of this, that this was destroying the Gulf of Mexico," Albert Meier said.

It did draw attention to the gulf's plight, but it was by no means the first ecological disaster. The culmination of small spills dumps more than 40 million gallons oil into the waterway every year, he said. The federal government estimates that in a five-year period ending in 2012, it will be inundated by oil by nine large spills and 600 smaller ones.

Many years ago, Meier had worked to sample the environmental impact of shrimp trawlers which drag the bottom of the sensitive swamps and marshes. Scientists shared data on the decline of crabs and bluefin tuna in the boats' wake after they damaged the sea floor.

He also decried the loss of wetlands to oil and gas canals, noting Louisiana is losing 22 to 30 square miles of wetlands to the gulf each year.

The Corps of Engineers cut a swath – the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet – from New Orleans to the Mississippi River, which he said has been virtually unused. Called a "shotgun aimed at the heart of New Orleans," it caused erosion six times wider than it was originally dredged.

When Hurricane Katrina came along, the storm surge increased by 20 percent.

Federal budget cuts led to an ineffective levee system, which broke in 20 places and swamped much of the low-lying city. When the Meiers traveled down there, Ouida, a Louisiana native, said it was like there was a bathtub ring around the city. Albert Meier said concerns about the levee system remain.

The region's inability to learn from its history is a source of great frustration for Albert Meier.

It's still haunted by the 1927 flood, in which 1,000 died. It was noted for techniques which spared New Orleans at the cost of its poor people, even using blacks as human sandbags.

He laments that the river is not allowed to go out its natural course, the Bird's Foot Delta. Instead, the Atchafalaya River Delta redirected silt into the gulf. During the 1973 flood, the resulting pres-



Albert and Ouida Meier shared their reflections on pollution problems in the Gulf of Mexico at the November meeting. (Carolyn Williams photo)

sure at the Morganza floodgate almost led to its demise when it was opened. It carried all of the gunk from the industrial Midwest, crashing oxygen levels in the Gulf, creating a dead zone of about 8,500 square miles.

Despite all of these disasters, "what's left is still magnificent," he said. He's seen a half million ducks, roseate spoonbills, wood ibises, otters, swallow-tailed kites and black bears.



Dr. Richard Kessler speaks to the group about Clay Hill Memorial Forest's role in environmental education. Right: Henry Connor center and Jill Flachskam seek more information about its facilities. (photos by Judy Adams)

Clay Hill Forest education in action

By Judy Adams

Nov. 6, six Audubon members (Brenda and Bill Little, Jill Flachskam, Henry Conner, Mike Henshaw and Judy Adams) set off for Campbellsville with thoughts of studying a natural water filtration project. What they found was much, much more!

Drs. Richie Kessler, Gordon Weddle, Bob Doty and student Spencer Adams met the group with enthusiastic explanations of a variety of research projects under way at "the forest." Clay Hill Memorial Forest was a gift to Campbellsville University from the Sanders family, original owners of the 4,000-acre Civil War era farm. It is the site of numerous research projects as well as an active outdoor classroom for elementary students and teachers. We were inspired by the activities and the potential for sponsoring similar programs back home.

We were impressed with the 250-gallon aquarium fed by water from the office toilets. Yes, the water is filtered through an artificial wetland, demonstrating the use of bioremediation to clean wastewater! We hiked a woodland trail, standing in awe at the site where a nesting pair of pileated woodpeckers were captured by Dr Bob Doty's patient lens this past spring. We learned about salamander cookies and fences (methods for monitoring the variety and



*Pileated woodpecker
(Dr. Bob Doty photo)*



Above: Dr. Richie Kessler looks for salamanders under a log. Left: Use of salamander "cookies" was a technique the group learned on the trip. (Photos by Judy Adams)

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Event focuses on river's resiliency

Lee McClellan, an associate editor for Kentucky Afield magazine, touted the Ohio River as a fisherman's paradise during River Heritage Day Oct. 31 at the Owensboro Area Museum of Science and History.

His grandfather said the river ran blue at Louisville back in the 1910, visible 10 feet deep. A couple times a week, he would buy fresh fish, and the weekend banks were filled with fishermen. He would lose his house in the 1937 flood, but the grandmother escaped to Brown County, Ind., where she gave birth to his father.

Sediment is a big problem in all rivers, thanks to the post-World War II building boom and the growth of the interstate highway system. He credits some of the turnaround to ORSCANO's efforts and the Clean Water Act that targeted point-source pollution and non-point source pollution. They've also educated others "that everything's downstream," particularly farmers, whose clearing contributed to erosion. PCB threats diminish every year.

"It's amazing with Mother Nature. If you quit beating her up, she'll come back for you," he said.

In a state with notable waters around Land Between the Lakes and Lake Cumberland, he notes that the river has yielded twice as many trophy fish as any other body of water in the state, including striped bass, catfish, smallmouth bass and sauger – including a 104-pound blue cat caught 11 years ago in Owensboro.

Fall fishing is good near mouths of tributaries.

Because of the shortage of Beluga caviar, paddlefish's roe is going for about \$20/pounds. It has attracted attention of the Russian mafia, which is poaching it and selling it at a tremendous profit.

However, he is concerned about the rise of Asian carp, which is threatening fish in many U.S. waterways. He is hopeful that it will



From left: Bob Adams, Mike Henshaw, Lisa Leonard, Donna Hanley and Mary Kissel man the DCAS booth at the River Heritage Day Oct. 31 at the Owensboro Area Museum of Science and History (Henry Conner photo)

mirror the path of the zebra mussel, an invasive species which rose, then crashed.

Local environmental agencies had booths at the museum. The Daviess County Audubon Society's booth focused on America's rivers and how the Ohio River connects to them.

It was manned by Bob Adams, Mike Henshaw, Lisa Leonard, Donna Hanley, Kenny Lin and Mary Kissel

Collaborative funds may boost habitat restoration

The club has been awarded \$550 in collaborative funding from the National Audubon Society, which may be used to launch a restoration ecology project.

Director David Stratton discussed the possibility of using funds to establish a plot of native tall grasses and shrubs off the David C. Adkisson Greenbelt Park. As part of the Brescia Art in Service to the Community project, they would be accompanied by sculptures and signage.

A few members have expressed concern about the mowing techniques used by

the city of Owensboro in park property. Steve Hahus noted that bushhogs and mowers have hit every inch at Ben Hawes Park. That park, the site of many Saturday morning nature hikes, is being used to build a gravity sports track for the Soap Box Derby circuit. On the city's southern side, Mary Kissel noted that city mowers mow down everything in its wake along the edges of the Horse Fork Creek trail.

"There's no point in us working to plant stuff if it's just going to be mowed," Judy Adams said.

But Stratton is encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by new city parks manager Amanda Rogers for the project, who is looking for areas that could be used for the plot.

The money received can be used to seek matching grants from the state.

The club also has joined forces with the Kentuckiana Girl Scout Council to seek a grant from the Kentucky Ornithological Society to buy a digital camera, portable printer and other supplies for use in environmental

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From the President's Perch

Kentucky biodiversity book is gift for all of us

By Brenda Little

I've heard for a couple of years that a book was in the works about biodiversity in Kentucky. The United Nations declared 2010 to be the International Year of Biodiversity, and so it is fortuitous that the much-talked-about book has recently been released.

The words of Wendell Berry, from the foreword, are the best in describing this treasure:

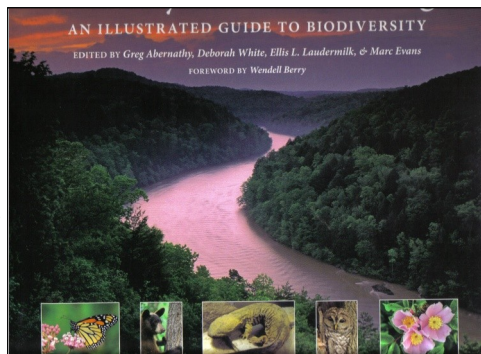
"No other book that I have read has helped me so much to think about the land of Kentucky, of the reciprocity of influence and the sharing of fate between the land and ourselves ... It gives us a competent sense of the state's native health and abundance before European settlement, of what and how much we have lost or wasted or used up, and of what is left — differences heartbreaking to think about."

And from the Louisville Courier Journal's review: "Between its covers, readers will find details of Kentucky's vanished natural areas and a catalogue of the increasingly rare animals, plants and unique habitats that urgently need protection. Wonders still to be seen, such as the bright magenta limestone flame flower (blooms only in the afternoon), the Kentucky lady's slipper orchid (with flowers as large as baseballs), and the flame crayfish (dazzling blue and orange), are among scores of striking plant and animal photographs in this handsome book."

I was in awe as I scanned the book and soaked up the beauty of the photography, studied the graphics that make it so very understandable, and held in my hands for the first time the big picture about this land where my ancestors settled in 1803. It was Page 37 illustrating Presettlement Land Cover that hit me the hardest. The land where Owensboro sits today was a solid wetland, and we wonder why we have flooding every time it rains?!?!?

This book truly is a must-have for all of us, all of us who already appreciate the beauty that remains here, all of us who might take for granted just how wonderful our commonwealth really is, all of us who want to do what we can to protect that treasure, all of us who want to know more about what was, what is, and what can be done for future generations. Knowledge is power, and this book holds between its covers what we need to know.

The book is available from Amazon.com for \$31.96, and this item ships for FREE with Super Saver Shipping. I hope that our members will give themselves and their friends and loved ones a wonderful gift this holiday season by buying and reading this great book cover to cover. Our copy of the book will be displayed at the December meeting.



Count

Continued from Page 1

in the county.

This can also help the chapter plot strategy for count day and could help routes be assigned prior to count day. That helps with the second key point:

Count longer in the day. Many other chapters begin before light with owl counts, then end at dusk. Here, many opt to quit after the noon meal, although many miles have been traveled during the morning.

If routes can be established before count day, groups could begin at 6:30 or 7 a.m. Owl prowls on count days also are being considered.

Let's keep CBC participation high! If you want to participate, call Henshaw at 275-4250, mikesherry@vci.net or Howard at 926-3795, janbbq@aol.com. If you live in the count area and would prefer to submit bird feeder data from the count day, give them a call.

Clay

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frequency of these secretive amphibians). Equally amazing is a project coordinated with a school in Puerto Rico. This involves the geo-tagging of every tree and piece of undergrowth in a designated grid. Whew! Our heads were spinning with ideas as a winter goldfinch zipped by our heads.

Habitat

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education programs.

This bid is inspired by a past program conducted by Dr. Chuck Price of the University of Southern Indiana at Girl Scout Camp Pennyroyal. There, Price had the girls photograph their surroundings, then print out their findings on-site. President Brenda Little noted that photography offered the girls a whole new perspective of viewing nature. It would be used when the chapter works with smaller groups of students.

"What we're trying to develop is an inquisitive eye in children," Little said.

Price has been scouting out cameras to find one that is waterproof and shockproof and sturdy enough to be used by kids. Video capability would allow the club to allow use it as a promotional tool as it seeks to expand its online presence by posting short videos on social networking sites like Facebook.

Price said that the cost of supplies would probably be about \$500.

Audubon monument proposed

From interviews with William C. Freels
of Jackson Purchase Audubon Society

The idea of a proposed Monument Park to be laid out to the side of the front lawn of the Capitol in Frankfort was put before the Kentucky Audubon Council delegates a couple of years ago. Delegates from all the chapters across the state agreed that in that Park there should be a monument honoring John James Audubon. We asked Louisville's Cave Hill Cemetery president to give us suggestions about a size, shape and design that might be appropriate for someone of Audubon's stature in the history of our commonwealth, indeed in the history of the world.

As I looked at the smooth, tall, polished piece of granite with a bronze oval insert that Cave Hill was proposing, indeed it looked elegant and beautiful. It looked like every penny of its wholesale price tag of \$20,000. We were told the stone was quarried in Vermont. It just did not seem to me to be appropriate for ol' J.J. He was a man who wore bear grease on his hair, who dressed in buck skins, an outdoorsman who knew hardship. When I spoke up with my opinion that at the very least the stone should be native Kentucky rock because Audubon is known to have been influenced as an artist more by his time spent living and working in Kentucky than anywhere else, I suddenly found myself and my wife, Mary Ann, delegated the responsibility to go hither and find a rock that might be suitable.

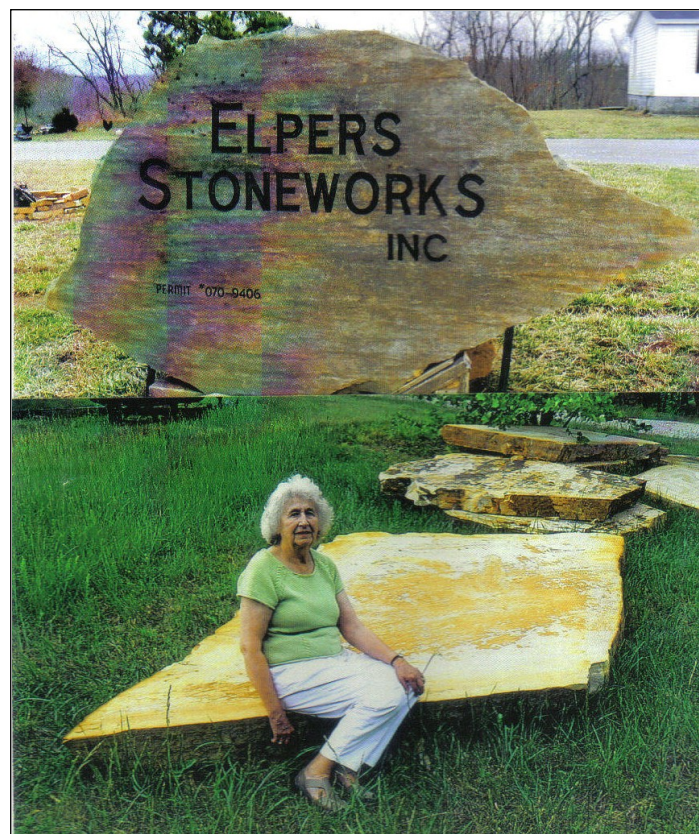
We found just what I thought was the appropriate size, shape and dimensions at Elpers Stoneworks Inc., a quarry in Burna. I've photographed the piece of sandstone with Mary Ann seated on it to illustrate the size of the rock. We are proposing that the stone be set with the angled end pointing toward the sky and the opposite end, which is pretty much a straight edge, set in a foundation of concrete about 2 feet below the turf.

Mary Ann and I further consulted with an esteemed monument designer and dealer who gave us an estimate for lettering the stone, transporting it to Frankfort, and setting it in place in the Monument Park for \$3,500. If the design includes an inset of granite with text and etching, the cost will go up by another \$500 to \$1,000. This estimate has been compared with that of a respected monument dealer in Louisville, and both companies are very close in what we expect the completed cost to be.

Delegates from every chapter in the state traveled to Frankfort the first week of November to meet at the park with the state director of historic places, who is enthusiastic about the Audubon Society's idea and proposed design. The delegates hope that we will be able to incorporate landscaping around the monument that is all native Kentucky plant material and stone for benches, pavers or other design elements that may be approved.

In the coming month, each chapter across the state is going to be presented with a final design and cost for this project.

The delegates from your chapter will be asked how much of the cost your chapter is willing to assume as we make our plans to go forward with signing a contract for the installation. I hope that your people will be as excited about this tribute to our organization's



The Kentucky Audubon Council hopes to turn this piece of sandstone, pictured with Mary Freels, into a monument to salute John James Audubon. (Bill Freels photos)

namesake as Mary Ann and I are. I look forward to finalizing all the facts and figures for your consideration later this month.