

# THE GOLDFINCH



Daviess County Audubon Society

www.daviessaudubon.org

March 2009

## Ice storm story of destruction, resiliency

### *Homes, trees, Powell bird blind take a wicked hit*

The impact of the Jan. 26-27 ice storm is likely to be felt long after the last weatherhead is connected. Members of the Daviess County Audubon family suffered habitat losses, and the Powell Bird Blind took a hit on its left side – although the damage could have been far worse.



“We took a hit on one corner, the first corner of the overhang,” Brenda Little reported. “It appears that the roof’s integrity, watertight, condition is not compromised. None of the windows appears to be damaged.”

“The camp as we knew it will never be the same,” ranger Lisa Leonard told her. The damage through the Girl Scout Camp Pennyrile is so extensive, it will be a big effort to get it ready for the summer camping season.

Little said the number of “hangers” in the forest canopy – broken limbs dangling above sites the girls use for activities will force the closure of some trails, because the danger is too great. This makes the blind even more essential to the camping experience.

“I’ll be tapping everyone, every able body, in our club for help,” she said. To tackle the environs around the blind, Little surmised that it would



*Above and left: A corner of the Powell Bird Blind was damaged in the ice storm, and downed trees clog the surrounding property. (Brenda Little photos)*

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## Learn how to create a ‘hummingbird haven’ at March meeting

With spring just weeks away, it’s time to get hummin’!

Hummingbird enthusiast Jann Kiesel of Fort Branch, Ind., will offer advice about creating the perfect hummer habitat at the March 9 meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society.

Kiesel said her interest in hummingbirds began after she attended several of Sharon Sorenson’s “Hooked on Hummers” programs in Evansville. Taking what she learned from Sharon’s lectures, and doing her own research on hummingbirds, she decided to create her own little “Hummingbird Haven” in her backyard. For the past two years, she has planned her garden solely with hummers in mind. Taking into consideration the hummingbird’s habitat in Costa Rica and other Central America locations, Kiesel designed her garden with a tropical theme.

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# Ice

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take one to four chain saw operators, three to five people to drag and stack limbs and probably professional help to clear hangers that threaten the path to the blind. She said that Bert and Millie Powell memorial donation funds could be used to pay for the professional work. Work day parties will be scheduled.

Leonard also has offered the club wood chips for the paths around the blind.

## On The Web

Stunning photos of the ice storm may be found on Mount St. Joseph's Web site:  
<http://www.msj-center.org/>

Up at Hoover Hill, the Littles are still wondering where to start in tackling the destruction in their forest.

"It's the biggest mess I've ever seen," she stated.

Reports of

destruction came from members in all corners of the county.

Out in Maceo, Tony Eaden said "the devastation was dramatic. Mature trees and ornamental were severely damaged. My driveway is still lined with tree limbs. I will have a huge carbon footprint because I plan to burn this mess."

Owner of several rental properties, he took a commercial hit, too. He's had to replace four of the seven roofs and undertaken the physical exertion of cleanup himself.

The storm closed Mount St. Joseph Conference Center for a week. "We had terrible damage to all of our trees," reported Sr. Amelia Stenger, with many maples on the property destroyed. The center's Web site showed how other magnolias were damaged but survived, and they were impressed by the resilience of some trees which sprang back after the crippling weight of ice.

Unfortunately, the greenhouse where patio tropical plants are kept during the winter and seeds are planted for the spring garden had broken windows. The chilling temperatures killed all of their plants.

Mary Kissel lost the tree buffer between her apartment and Quality Quik, and she returned to the Horse Fork Creek segment of the Greenbelt to find several newly cut stumps along the front pond and trees downed and broken within a rapidly thinning stand ... trees close to the trail which have provided many happy looks at orioles, vireos and warblers during the past springs. Even the centerpiece swamp oak had several broken branches. A month after the storm, it was still impossible to walk on the sidewalks along the south side of West Byers Avenue between Brushwood Apartments and the bridge.

The pecan tree which shaded Rose Ann Radzelovage's home? It's a victim. Three weeks later, she could tell the difference as she counted a dwindling population in her backyard during the Great Backyard Bird Count. Happily, her interior bird population was spared when her pastor at Sts. Joseph & Paul Catholic Church agreed to let her parakeets share space with his dog until her power was restored. "I stayed in more homes than George Washington," she laughed. Ova Hookey lost one-third of her backyard trees and is missing her purple finches. A neighbor's beehive also was decimated.

Some looked at their glass half full. "The thing I have noticed the most is the various sparrows and Carolina wrens are continually working the brushpiles for food. Good place to spot some unusual sparrows." Charles Morris wrote.

Steve Hahus passed along pictures of a ruby-crowned kinglet and fox sparrow who visited his yard during the storm.



*The ice storm broke many trees on the Horse Fork Creek trail on the Greenbelt, but it also piqued the curiosity of species such as this ruby-crowned kinglet Steve Hahus photographed.*



*Left: Mary Kissel, Charles Morris and session photographer Winny Lin (not pictured) led Heritage Christian fifth-graders in the morning. Right: The school's third-graders look to beat that mark.*

# Schoolyards perfect for backyard counts

Backyards became classrooms for local observations during the Great Backyard Bird Count, held during Presidents Day weekend.

Third- and fifth-graders at Heritage Christian School joined the midwinter activity Feb. 16 for the first time. Daviess County Audubon members Winny Lin, Charles Morris and Mary Kissel worked with about 40 students during two sessions. During her morning stint, Lin got the kids quickly engaged and focused by exploring what characteristics were needed in physical identification. Morris may never have had a more rapt audience for binocular study ... they were fascinated by his equipment and asked many questions about how it worked.

Off Thruston-Dermont Road, the school grounds and neighboring yards still had big brushpiles from the ice storm, which provided a good way for the kids to look for darting birds.

Having two separate classes lent itself to an air of competition, and it was a split decision. The fifth-graders saw 25 birds and nine species: morning dove (3), blue jay (1) American robin (6), northern mockingbird (2), European starling (4), field sparrow (2), song sparrow (1), northern cardinal (3) and house sparrow (3). Confronted with wind in the afternoon, the third-graders saw six species and 29 species: blue jay (1), Carolina chickadee (4), Carolina wren (2), American robin (14), northern mockingbird (3) and European starling (5).

Members agreed it was a successful follow-up to the outing on the P.A. Denney floating lab, which they shared with Donna-Rei Sellers' fifth-grade class. The third-graders re-entered the classroom and asked presenters what a cowbird was, scrambling to get large reference materials to look it up. It was a little sad to have to explain to them what a scourge on the birding world that species is.

During their count, the efforts of their Hartford colleagues were used for inspiration.

Down at Wayland Alexander Elementary, the excitement came before the actual count. Junior Audubon co-sponsor Brenda Little reported the kids were practicing with common birds when soaring and circling above was ... an adult bald eagle. Little said the sighting scored them a P.A announcement by the principal.

Their count days were marked by huge flocks of goldfinches at their feeders and the surprising lack of eastern bluebirds, Little said. They tallied 13 species: 14 mourning doves, two red-bellied woodpeckers, three downy woodpeckers, two blue jays, a crow, two Carolina chickadees, seven tufted titmice, a white-breasted nuthatch, two dark-eyed juncos, six cardinals, eight purple finches, two house finches and 50 American goldfinches.

"We used the meeting time the week after the GBBC to go through the species sighted using field guides. The students are getting better with their binocular skills as well as with their comfort level in thumbing through field guides," she said.

Within Owensboro, 31 species and 691 were tallied on the nine submitted checklists: Canada goose (157), Cooper's hawk (1), killdeer (4), mourning dove (18), great horned owl (1), red-bellied woodpecker (5), downy woodpecker (8), hairy woodpecker (1), blue jay (7), American crow (1), Carolina chickadee (21), tufted titmouse (16), white-breasted nuthatch (2), brown creeper (7), Carolina wren (18), eastern bluebird (2), American robin (111), northern mockingbird (11), European starling (101), eastern

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*Joe Ford shows off a chicken snake at the February meeting.*

## Spider, snakes shine at February meeting

Joe Ford shared his love of “creepy crawlies” during the February meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society.

Ironically, people fear harmless chicken snakes more than tiny spiders ... many of which pack quite a punch.

“Tonight, some of you are going to go home, and when you turn on the light in your bedroom, on the wall is going to be a moderate sized spider. It will be a brown recluse or fiddler. If a brown recluse bites you, the bite is every bit as serious as that of a copperhead snake bite. The main difference is, the bite of a little spider barely penetrates the epidermis, whereas the snake fangs plunge on into the muscle,” he said. The amount of venom also is key. The little sweat bee’s venom is more powerful than a rattlesnake’s, yet the quantity could fit on the head of a pin.

One man lost enough flesh on his back from a spider bite to cover his hand. Another woman brought in a spider in a jar – after it had crawled across her face in the middle of the night.

He recommended using sticky tape along openings to trap the spiders.

He displayed a pink hair tarantula. He is adept at handling the spider so it won’t bite and noted the Joe Ford Nature Library is always looking for insects to feed it.

Spiders are plentiful. In the fall, you might see ballooning spiders, carried along by the wind.

He also brought along some snakes. He noted his early love for snakes didn’t have the best intentions.

“Anything that terrified my mother was so interesting, it didn’t take long before I had to learn more about them,” he said.

His prettiest snake – and most misunderstood – is a corn snake, which is often mistaken for a copperhead. He showed off his snake handling skills with constricting snakes. He’s been bit hundreds of times, but was only scarred by bites from a turtle (which became turtle soup) and an alligator. One reason for the lack of infection is because a snake’s mouth is cleaner than a human’s.

To eat, they enjoy anything warm-blooded. During the winter, one substantial food item will last a month.

## Schoolyards

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towhee (2), field sparrow (3), song sparrow (24), white-throated sparrow (10), dark-eyed junco (8), northern cardinal (44), red-winged blackbird (1), common grackle (43), brown-headed cowbird (2), house finch (14), American goldfinch (25), and house sparrow (23).

In Philpot, spotted were 32 birds: Canada goose (2), great blue heron (1), red-tailed hawk (1), American robin (22), European starling (2), common grackle (4).

Including the Wayland count, Hartford counters had 15 species and: turkey vulture (1), red-tailed hawk (1), mourning dove (18), red-bellied woodpecker (3), blue jay (2), downy woodpecker (3), blue jay (4), American crow (1), Carolina chickadee (4), tufted titmouse (11), dark-eyed junco (6), northern cardinal (14), purple finch (8), house finch (2) and American goldfinch (70).

The state count had some eye-opening species: a whooping crane in Lucas; 700 white pelicans in Hardin, Cadiz and Murray, 3,767 sandhill cranes, 12 cackling geese in Lexington, 15 white-winged crossbills in Lexington and a golden eagle in the Daniel Boone National Forest.

## Meetings

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She loves to share her experiences and ideas with other hummingbird enthusiasts. Jann enjoyed giving several hummingbird presentations in 2008 at various libraries and garden club meetings and plans to continue the programs in 2009.

Following a presentation at the Fort Branch Public Library last year, DCAS member Mary Kissel viewed a DVD of photos from Kiesel’s yard and was impressed by the spectacle of the sheer numbers of hummers attacking these plants with gusto.

Kiesel is a graduate of Princeton High School and the University of Evansville, where she received a bachelor of arts in secondary education, earning a major in biology and a minor in chemistry.

The club will meet at 7 p.m. at First Christian Church. If you would like to join Kiesel and husband Charlie at Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn, please join them at 5:45 p.m.

# DCAS urging officials not to approve bike trails at Ben Hawes

The county and state are being pressed not to develop major mountain bike trails at Ben Hawes State Park.

Carolyn Williams, a member of the Daviess County Parks Board, noted that biking enthusiast Richard Dixon is attempting to get a \$25,000 state recreational trail grant to develop 6 ½ miles of mountain bike trails in the state park.

The grants are being made available as part of an initiative by Lt. Gov. Daniel Mongiardo to increase recreational opportunities in state parks, such as for off-terrain vehicles and horseback riding.

Dixon asked the board to sponsor this effort. Williams urged the Daviess Fiscal Court not to do so, and it was removed from the agenda.

Vice President Steve Hahus noted some smaller trails have been cut over the years and have coexisted with walking trails enjoyed by hikers and bird watchers alike.

"I hardly see anyone out there; they don't make a lot of noise, they didn't tear anything up. This guy wants to hire a contractor to go in there and make bike trails." He said. "When they go in there and start doing it, they'll tear the heck out of it."

Such activity would chase away a lot of the compelling wildlife at the park: coyotes, deer, wild turkey.

"Now that area's protected because there's no hunting or anything back there," Hahus said.

He added that erosion would likely fill in wet areas on the Overstreet Road side.

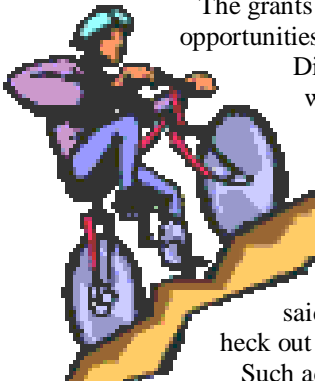
President Mike Henshaw reviewed the proposal and said it called for the closure of 1.3 miles of trail deemed too steep for bikes. If approved, Dixon would be bringing in trail-building consultants, who would walk the property and determine where new trails would be least likely to cause erosion. They would be removing dead trees and saplings only a few inches high. He said the proposal does not indicate heavy equipment – like backhoes -- would be used.

On behalf of the club, a letter to local and state parks officials was sent to express their concerns, focusing on the importance of having quiet, undeveloped green space, not only for animal, bird and flower, but for children in a world filled with overstimulation. Individuals who would want to contact the state may pen their remarks to state parks commissioner Gerry van der Meer, 500 Mero St., Kentucky Department of Parks, 10th Floor, Frankfort, KY 40601.

At the February DCAS meeting, members also discussed a county proposal to turn a former 70-acre landfill in eastern Daviess County into a wildlife refuge. They were not impressed.

"It's nowhere near the habitat of Ben Hawes," Hahus said, pointing out there's no mature trees.

"It's a hole in the wall," Henshaw said.



## Park to host March hikes

The Daviess County Audubon Society's March field trip is tentatively set for March 28 at Ben Hawes State Park. Doing it later in the month will give members a chance to spy spring wildflowers and early migrants, Steve Hahus said. Plans will be finalized at the March 9 meeting.

Meanwhile, hikers are invited to attend a Joe Ford Nature Library hike at 10 a.m. March 14 at Ben Hawes. All who register by calling Grace Ford at 316-1632 may buy plush Audubon birds with authentic bird sounds for \$4 -- a 50% discount).

## Trash pickup request submitted

The Daviess County Audubon Society has been selected to participate in the 2009 county Trash for Cash program. Last summer's efforts was wildly successful, raising more than \$300 for the club.

The club has requested the same roads – Keller and Fisher roads off Kentucky 81 southeast of Owensboro. For the club's application, members offered to pick up along 3 miles at \$100/mile or \$200/mile. August is a preferred month.

## Thanks, Wal-Mart!

The Daviess County Audubon Society has received \$250 from Wal-Mart on behalf of volunteer work by chapter secretary Sherry Henshaw, who is a Wal-Mart employee.

## Chapter will have May Day booth

The Daviess County Audubon Society will have an information booth at this year's May Day celebration at Yellow Creek Park. It will be from 1 to 3 May 2 at the park.

The event is co-sponsored by the Daviess County Parks Department and Joe Ford Nature Library.