

December 2009

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DAVISS COUNTY AUDUBON SOCIETY

# THE GOLDFINCH

## Hunting them down

*Holiday season means it's almost time for Christmas Bird Counts*

**H**unting season is almost upon us – bird hunting, that is. The Daviess County Audubon's Christmas Bird Count is set for Dec. 28. The "official" count, which has results submitted to the national office will cover southern and southeastern Daviess County.

To maximize the time in the field during the key early morning hours, Mike Henshaw said he hopes to organize teams before the count day, rather than have everyone start from his home. An owl count will be included. Lunch will be provided at the Henshaw residence, 11201 Fields Road South, as morning searches conclude.

In case of inclement weather, the rain date is

Dec. 29.

Tips for participants in the CBC will be offered during the Dec. 1 meeting by Henshaw, a longtime CBC coordinator for the club.

The club will meet at 7 p.m. at First Christian Church, J.R. Miller Blvd. and Seventh Street.

There may be several opportunities to use these tips.

The western Daviess County count, which also includes Ohio River banks, will begin at 8 a.m. Jan. 1 at the home of Jan Howard, 3534 W. Parrish Ave. Lunch will be provided for those gathering data for the Kentucky Ornithological Society.

At press time, final details were not available for two other counts also are planned during the count period of Dec. 14 to Jan. 5. Tony Eaden hopes to host a count in eastern Daviess County, and Starla Cravens expressed hope that DCAS members could

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### December Calendar:

Monthly meeting, 7 p.m. Dec. 1, First Christian Church, Seventh Street and J.R. Miller Blvd..

DCAS south Christmas Bird Count, early morning Dec. 28.

DCAS western Christmas Bird Count, 8 a.m., Jan. 1, Janet Howard's residence, 3534 W. Parrish Ave.

Christmas Bird Counts for eastern Daviess County and Wayland Alexander: To be announced

## From the president's perch Directors toil behind scenes to improve chapter

**By Brenda Little**

**T**he officers and directors of our organization have been trying to comply with the guidelines in our chapter's organizational documents for the past 3 months. This is the related wording in our constitution and by-laws: "The control and conduct of the property and business of the Society shall be vested in a Board of Directors."

In case you are wondering who the directors are, at this time we have six: Carolyn Williams, Mike Henshaw, Mary Kissel, John Thacker, Charles Morris and Rob Rold. Beginning in September, we have had the luxury of meeting at the home of Judy and Bob Adams. Judy takes minutes during the meeting, and an effort is in the works to have the minutes of directors' meetings along with our monthly treasurer's report posted to our Web site, [www.daviessaudubon.net](http://www.daviessaudubon.net). Please note the change from .org to .net in our web site address.

At the first directors' meeting in September, I made a promise that I would do my best to keep the directors' meetings no longer in length than 1 hour. There was a tone in my voice that made this promise a sure thing, and that is probably what jinxed my promise. We've now held three directors' meetings, and each one has been longer than the first. There is no goofing off or wasting time at these meetings when we "conduct the business of the Society." November's meeting lasted two hours, and we had to give a passing glance at the items at the end of our agenda due to exhaustion, lapsed attention spans and obligations to be elsewhere.

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# State study is all about Bob(white)

## *Williams excited about restoration efforts, potential for insights*

**T**he state's efforts to save one of Kentucky's most cherished grassland bird was the subject of the Nov. 3 meeting. Eric Williams, a state wildlife biologist and manager of Peabody Wildlife Management Area, discussed their tactics to assist bobwhite populations.

In 2008, state small game officials designated Peabody WMA as a top priority area for quail restoration. With limited manpower and equipment, they looked at the habitat and decided to focus on helping grassland species in 18,000 acres in their eastern units: Ken, Homestead and Sinclair units in Ohio and Muhlenberg counties.

Wildlife biologists from the southeastern United States spent three days to help establish a strategy. Some of the problems to be targeted included:

- \* Grassland habitat quality. When mine land was reclaimed, tall fescue and sericea lespedeza was planted, too thick to be effective habitat. They are trying to convert it into warm season grasses. Unfortunately, during their first 10-12 years of conversion, grasses were planted too thick, because they feared they weren't being established. They also need to better distribute the type of woody cover that's available.

They are using herbicide to kill lespedeza and will plant native vegetation. They will be block disking these areas to clear out one to three acres to disperse vegetation, provide bare ground for nesting and activate annual plants and planting native plants.

Control burns will kill off some of the undesirable woody cover. They will plant 40 to 60 foot block of native shrubs, like wild plum, some dogwood species and sumac. They also want to establish a series of fire breaks.

- \* Lack of quality food. They don't have the seed bank, because in some areas, they have little or no topsoil. "They took out every seed that was ever pro-



*Eric Williams shows a trap being used to trap bobwhites in Peabody WMA.*

duced on that ground," he said. They need plants for yearlong seed production. Sericea lespedeza is a prolific seed producer, but it has little nutritional value. Williams conceded they can never get rid of it, but they hope to be able to control it.

They want to provide a wide variety of seed sources that will provide quail with nutrition all year round.

- \* Quail demographics. Officials don't really know how quail live. With all of the problems the area has, there is still a respectable population there. If they had better evidence, they could do a better job adjust hunting seasons to optimize the population. At this point, it's been reduced by 80 percent in the target areas, but they want to be able to adjust according to hatch seasons. The average bird has a lifespan of nine to 16 months, so they want to set seasons that have a minimal effect on population levels.

They are working with the University of Tennessee. Grad students have trapped the birds, banded them and are using radio transmitters to track their movement and see what they're eating and if they're on the right track with the block disking.

He showed the audience the milo-baited traps and the backpack harness transmitters, which fit around the birds' necks. He is excited about the possibility of finding new information about quails that has never been discovered,

The transmitters have a lifespan of about nine months. They hope to put them on 200 birds. Each have a mortality signal, which is activated if a bird hasn't moved in 48 hours. Of the 150 birds with transmitters, 21 have died. The top cause was predators, but weather is also a culprit. The cold, wet snap in October killed six.

To combat issues for quail, they received almost \$500,000 this year for manpower and equipment.

He also briefly discussed the characteristics of the birds. Males have more pronounced white markings and are heavier. They also eat seeds, leaves and other smaller vegetation and insects. Young birds feed up to 99% on insects for proteins.

They were named for their distinctive call "bob-white," most often heard

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# Bird classes conclude for fall at garden



*Jan Howard, left, discusses woodpeckers with Burns students, and Judy Adams watches as East View students ID a goldfinch.*

“I want to keep doing this.” The sentiments of an East View Elementary fourth-grader summed up the enthusiasm of the last three fall beginning bird classes at Western Kentucky Botanical Garden. More than 200 fourth-graders enjoyed the sessions as they split their time between garden activities and biotech classes at the Owensboro Area Museum of Science and History.

Mary Kissel and Judy Adams worked with the East View students, delighting in the small classes. The feeder activity Oct. 15 was the highest of the three sessions, and

there was plenty of vocalization to reaffirm bird calls the kids were learning.

High winds forced Kissel, Adams and Janet Howard inside the kids’ playhouse for Highland Elementary’s day Oct. 16. It did help keep the kids focused during binocular introduction. The same conditions limited the amount of birds the kids saw, but a female white-crowned sparrow enhanced the bird population. The kitchen area turned into a useable blind, as kids scanned the feeders and the evergreen line, spotting primarily house sparrows and house finches.

Ken Hurm joined Kissel and Howard for the Nov. 6 session, as Burns Elementary fourth-graders benefited from his expertise in using binoculars and spotting scopes.

Burns was the first school of the year to spot dark-eyed juncos at the feeder, and Howard told them about their “snowbird” nickname. Their arrival didn’t seem to match the balmy weather. Happily, the real birds complemented lessons using the fake ones, as a dull goldfinch showed up at the feeder minutes after kids learned about their winter coloration. Another boy spotted a pair of turkey vultures.

## Hunt

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assist Wayland students with their count.

CBC days perhaps signify the best of the Audubon Society experience. It’s citizen science at its best, because results help scientist track trends in birding population and how they are affected by such factors as habitat loss and climate change.

It’s also a way for birders of all levels to make an important contribution. The more eyes the better, as carloads travel roads in a 15-mile radius and spend time in forests and fields. It’s also a way to foster fellowship by spending hours in the field and gathering together for lunch afterward.

Last year, 54 species were noted, with a total of 9,923 individuals, in the southern Daviess County count. Forty-one species were recorded to the west, and 43 on the east count.

“Everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count plays a critical role in helping us focus attention and conservation where it is most needed,” said Audubon Chief Scientist Dr. Tom Bancroft. “In addition to Audubon’s reports on the impacts of climate change on birds and our analysis of Common Birds in Decline, it is the foundation for Audubon’s WatchList, which identified species in need of conservation help.”

“The Christmas Bird Count is all about the power of citizen science,” says Geoff LeBaron, Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count director. “Our theme is ‘I Count’ because the work of tens of thousands of volunteers, extending 110 years, really adds up for the conservation of birds and our environment.”

To help the CBC ... and generate additional enthusiasm, Henshaw will present Christmas Bird Count 101 at the Dec. 1 meeting. Along with explaining everything about CBC count days, he will also discuss identification tips for several species likely to be seen, such as those darn sparrow species. Gray skies can pose many challenges for even the most experienced bird watchers.





**Left:** Eric Williams, Peabody Wildlife Management Area manager, discussed the state's quail restoration initiative. In this photo, notice a mixture of tall fescue and sericea lespedeza, two invasive exotic species that generally provide poor habitat for most grass-

land birds. **Right:** Spotting scopes allowed Daviess County Audubon Society members to observe and study waterfowl. (Trip photos by Winny Lin.)

## Members get bird's eye look at restoration efforts

By Winny Lin

**A**s a follow-up to the November meeting, a group of 15 traveled to Peabody Wildlife Management Area (Peabody WMA) on Monday, Nov. 9, to do a field study on the quail restoration project. Not only did they spot 27 different species of birds, they also enjoyed dinner and great fellowship at a restaurant on the way back to Owensboro.

Peabody WMA contains more than 3,000 acres of water in a large number of impoundments ranging from 1 to 150 acres as well as numerous swamps and sloughs. To help Daviess County Audubon Society members observe and study waterfowl, Charles Morris and Tony Eaden brought spotting scopes, and the club used one gifted to the chapter by the late Kathryn Clay.

The group spotted mallard and great blue heron in the water.

Eric Williams, Peabody WMA manager, explained the state's quail restoration initiative.

Notice in the photos a mixture of tall fescue and sericea lespedeza, two invasive exotic species that generally provide poor habitat for most grassland birds.

Improving both the quality and the quantity of quail habitat is the overarching goal of the initiative on Peabody WMA. This will be accomplished by prescribed



From left are: Tony Eaden, Robert Baird, Kenny Little, Steve Anderson, Bill Little, Kenny Lin, Brenda Little, Charles Morris, Ben Taylor, Pat Augenstein, Mike Henshaw, Judy Adams, Eric Williams and Scott Harp.

burning, eradicating the noxious plant sericea lespedeza, planting forbs and legumes for quail to use and block disking.

These practices will benefit turkeys, deer, rabbits and songbirds, as well as quail.

Luckily, the group spotted 27 species of birds that day: short-eared owl, great horned owl, Carolina wren, barred owl,

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### On The Web

For more photos from the trip see:

<http://picasaweb.google.com/suhwa.w.lin/200911#slideshow/5404182607381844498>

For more information on Peabody WMA, see [www.fw.ky.gov](http://www.fw.ky.gov).

# Study

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during the spring when males are marking territory and attracting females. They also make a covey call – “foy pay” to communicate with other birds who may or may not have roosted overnight together. In the fall, they form tight circles overnight, with their tails pointing inside. Part of their study is to see how many birds are in these coveys.

Up to 15 to 20 birds hang out together during the day for protection.

“The more eyes they have, the better chance they have at escaping something,” he said.

Studies have debunked the notion that the birds are monogamous. They nest in sparse ground with a tall structure. They lay up to four broods a year, but the mortality rate is 60%, because predators can find nests easily. Once fledged, it is a poor flier and has no defense mechanism, so it is easy prey for almost any predator.

## Directors

*From Page 1*

What caused us to return to the practice of having directors tend to business matters is that we are making a valiant effort to streamline our monthly members’ meetings. It is our hope that we can attract new members by limiting the monthly meetings to beginning with a social time built around refreshments and followed by the program with a length of 30 to 45 minutes.

I would like for everyone to know how dedicated the directors have been these past three months. They are working hard to dot the i’s and cross the t’s necessary for taking care of the club’s business. I also want to tell every member that anyone is welcome to attend the directors’ meetings. We are not trying to hide anything or to do anything that is not in the best interest of the Society.

I hope that all of you will check our Web site from time to time to see the secretary’s recording of the details about the directors’ meetings. We owe a debt of gratitude to the directors for helping us to play by the rules and to spare the members from the tedium that goes along with taking care of business.



*Peabody Wildlife Management Area encompasses approximately 60,000 acres in Ohio and Muhlenberg counties. The majority of the property is reclaimed strip mine land. (Photo by Winny Lin)*

## Efforts

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northern harrier, song sparrow, eastern meadowlark, mallard, double-crested cormorant, mourning dove, European starling, eastern bluebird, pied-billed grebe, common goldeneye, common yellowthroat, red-winged blackbird, pileated woodpecker, American robin, northern mockingbird, eastern towhee, Canada goose, white-throated sparrow, great blue heron, red-tailed hawk, Cooper’s hawk, swamp sparrow, and savannah sparrow. Not only did they spot birds, they also found other creatures, including a praying mantis crawling on Tony Eaden’s jacket.

Williams indicated that one of the goals is to bring a diverse life back to the Peabody Wildlife Management Area which encompasses approximately 60,000 acres in Ohio and Muhlenberg Counties.

The majority of the property is reclaimed strip mine land. Brenda Little, DCAS president, considered it as a very successful trip. It is the very first trip the chapter took during the week instead on the weekend. She was thrilled that 15 people participated: Tony Eaden, Robert Baird, Kenny Little, Steve Anderson, Bill Little, Kenny Lin, Brenda Little, Charles Morris, Ben Taylor, Pat Augenstein, Mike Henshaw, Judy Adams, Eric Williams, Winny Lin and Scott Harp.

## DCAS program videos to be available at Ford library

Thanks to Bob Adams, we have DVDs of a number of our meeting programs available to borrow.

So, if you missed a meeting, or just want to view the program again, you’re in luck. The DVDs will be available to borrow at the Dec. 1 meeting.

After that, you may sign them out from the Joe Ford Nature Library at

Brescia University or watch them there. Call 316-1632 to check library hours.

Available titles include:

- \* Hummingbirds
- \* Purple Martins
- \* Vultures
- \* Monarch Butterflies
- \* Bobwhite Quail