Will County Audubon Society's

THE CHICKADEE

Chapter e-newsletter September 2026

Upcoming Events:

September 10: Meeting & Program, The Struggle is Real, Identifying Fall Warblers by Kara Morales, Pilcher Park Nature Center, doors open 6:15PM.

September 12: Field Trip, Pembrook-Hopkins Park, Kankakee County, Okan Welcome Center, 13851 E Central Ave, Hopkins Park, 9:00AM.

September 19: WBU/WCAS Bird Feeder Cleaning Event, Wild Birds Unlimited, 1149 Essington Rd, Joliet, 10:00AM - 3:00PM. VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

September 20: Wild Ones, Will County Seedling Chapter, It Starts in Your Yard, Joliet Public Library, 150 N. Ottawa St, 2:00PM - 4:00PM.

September 26: Illinois BIG SIT Competition, O'Hara Woods, JOIN OUR TEAM!

Through September 6: Bird Friendly Coffee Sale, Dean's Beans, must pickup on 9/13, To order email Greg DuBoise at **grgdubois@comcast.net**

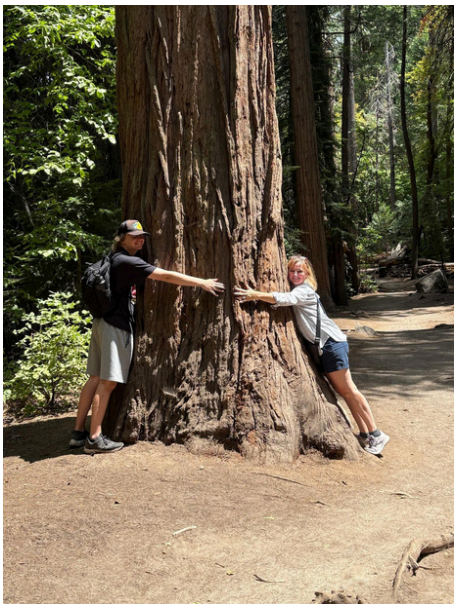
October 8: Chapter Meeting
October 10: Chapter Field Trip to Hickory Creek Preserve - LaPorte Rd Access

November 12: Chapter Meeting
November 14: Chapter Field Trip to Whalon Lake

December TBA: Christmas Bird Count

President's Message
by Martha Sojka

Welcome to the new year! I hope you all had a wonderful summer and enjoyed time outdoors. I got to visit my daughter in Irvine, California this summer and spent some time at Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks. The Stellar's Jays were bold and the trees were breathtaking! We also made a stop at San Joaquin Marsh & Wildlife Sanctuary in Irvine and witnessed American Crows gather for their nightly communal roost – quite a sight!



We have a few weeks left of summer and look forward to seeing everyone at our first meeting, September 10th. We have many ways to get involved including field trips, volunteer opportunities and educational sessions and encourage members and guests to join in! We welcome all interests and levels, so take a look at what we have to offer in September. If you have time, talent and/or treasure that you want to share with the Chapter, reach out with your thoughts and let's grow this bird loving community. Nature needs you!

WILL COUNTY AUDUBON HOSTS

The Struggle is Real:

Identifying Tricky Fall Warblers and Other Confusing Species

Presented by

Kara Morales, Kara Morales joined the Will County Audubon Society in 2022. She quickly dove in and shared her love and nerdy knowledge for bird identification and became the Field Trip Chair the following year. She is also a Prairie People Volunteer with the Forest Preserve District of Will County as a nature interpreter at Lake Renwick Heron Rookery, bird guide, and trail sentinel since 2023. While being completely self taught, Kara is a level 2 certified birder for our region in wetlands, woods, grasslands, and shorebirds plus one of the top eBird species leaders in Will County. She is co-founder of the new Illinois-based company Prairie State Birding, offering guided tours and group educational trips both locally and then internationally starting in 2027. Kara's main job and greatest accomplishment, however, is being a wife and a homeschooling stay-at-home mom of five.

September 10, 2026

Doors open 6:15pm
Business meeting 6:45pm
Program to follow

Pilcher Park Nature Center
2501 Highland Park Drive
Joliet, Il 60432

Will County Audubon programs are free and open to the public. Snacks will be available, please bring your own beverage and cup.

www.willcountyaudubon.illinoisaudubon.org

We've all been there: after an exciting Spring migration of brightly colored warblers, we eagerly await their return in the Fall only to be met with drab yellow. Many of our Eastern warbler species go through a dramatic molt in the summer from their vivid breeding plumage to dull winter colors and unfortunately end up all looking the same. So how can you tell which Fall warblers are which?

We will be exploring some of the hardest-to-ID fall warbler species by learning field marks like bill shape, leg and foot color, facial patterns, under-tail covert colors and patterns, and more. We'll also look at species more common for our area in the Fall. We will end by exploring other challenging families that that migrate in the fall such as thrushes and raptors.

What is a Big Sit?

A Big Sit, similar to a Big Day, is a competition where a team of bird watchers count as many species as possible within a 24-hour period. While the Big Day involves moving around from spot to spot to maximize the number of species sighted, a Big Sit is precisely as it sounds. You stay in one location, a 17-foot diameter circle called a “count circle”, and only species seen or heard from that circle count for the final tally.

Awards and recognition will be given to winners in the following categories:

- Most species seen by a team
- Most species seen in a yard
- Most hours of continuous occupation by a team
- Most hours of continuous occupation by an individual in one location
- Most species seen by a first-time participant
- Most clever team name

Join the Will County Audubon Team

We are forming our team, choosing a team name, the sit location (O’Hara Woods) and sit times at our meeting on September 10th!

Volunteers Needed

September 19

10AM - 12:30pm OR 12:30pm - 3:00pm

WBU & WCAS Bird Feeder Cleaning

Please consider volunteering to help out on Saturday, September 19, for our Fall Bird Feeder Cleaning event at Wild Birds Unlimited in Joliet. Funds raised at this event help support our Chapter. There are 2 volunteer shifts: 10am - 12:30pm and 12:30pm - 3:00pm. Of course any amount of time you can help is appreciated. Please email Maura at carlisle.ml@gmail.com if you can help us out!

We are cleaning up...bird feeders that is! The Will County Audubon Society will be on site to help us get those feeders squeaky clean. Come get your feeders cleaned and learn how beneficial and easy it is to do at home. Suggested $3 donation per feeder will go to the Will County Audubon Society. Call store for more details (815-744-3800)

Will County Audubon Society Meeting minutes: May 14,2026 Pilcher Park Nature Center by Bob Soukup

The meeting was called to order at 6:45 PM. A total of 25 were in attendance at Pilcher Park. The minutes of the April meeting were accepted without changes. Motion to accept: Diane Sniegowski Seconded: Janet Schleeter

Treasurer's Report: Janet Schleeter: Janet reviewed the chapter expenses and revenues for the past month. The chapter's balance as of 4/20/26 was $4883.
Newsletter: Michele Olson: Thanks to all the contributors to the most recent newsletter. Michele plans to publish the next newsletter around 6/1 and would like all articles submitted by 5/20.
Hospitality: Leigh-Anne Clark: Leigh-Anne was not present. Thanks very much to those who provided treats for this meeting.
Nominating Committee: Diane Sneigowski and Rita Renwick The committee has made recommendations for officers for the 2026-2027 season as follows:
President: Martha Sojka, Vice President: Greg DuBois, Treasurer: Janet Schleeter Secretary: Leigh-Anne Clark
No other nominations came from the floor. Motion to approve: Carol Cooley Seconded: Michele Olson. The members present voted to approve the slate as recommended.
Communications: Maura Carlisle: For the non-members present, ways to connect with the chapter are through Membership, Facebook page & group, website, & email Chat.
Field Trips: Kara Morales: Kara was not present. We will continue the summer evening hikes the second Thursday of each month: check Facebook, our website, or the Chat for details.
Programs: Greg DuBois: Greg was not present. WCAS will have a table at the Pollinator Party to be held on Saturday 6/13 at Isle a la Cache between 10AM-2PM. Volunteers are needed, sign up deadline is 5/21.
IAS Rep: Frank Ibarra: Frank was not present. Illinois Audubon has completed a strategic acquisition of the White Rock property.
Conservation: Rita Renwick: Rita was not present.
Old Business: none **New Business:** none
Announcements: No meetings will be held in June, July or August: The next meeting will be September 10, 2026.
Adjourn: motion to adjourn by Maura Carlisle, seconded by Diane Sneigowski. Business meeting adjourned.
Program: Martha Sojka introduced the evening's speaker: Dave Edlund, a grad student at UIUC, presented a program on the non-breeding ecology and migration of Eastern Whip-poor-wills in Florida.

Treasurer's Report & Budget for 2026-27 by Janet Schleeter

Treasurer's Report

Balance as of 4/20/26	$ 4,882.98
Income:	
Membership Dues	420.00
Total	$ 420.00
Expenses:	
Program	150.00
Newsletter	23.01
Book Giveaway*	135.00
Wild Ones*	87.50
Zoom License	169.90
Total	$ 565.41
Balance as of 8/20/26	$ 4,737.57

*During the summer the leadership group approved two small donations to help promote interest in birds including $135 for a children's book giveaway and $87.50 to help cover expenses for a new Wild Ones Will County chapter.

Budget for 2026-27

Income:	
Membership Dues	$1,500
Donations	300
Feeder Cleaning	300
Misc	50
Total Income	$2,150
Expenses:	
Speaker	$ 700
Zoom License	160
Newsletter	65
Affiliate Memberships	150
Feeder Supplies	100
Brochures/Misc.	300
Special Projects/Donations	2,000
Publicity	100
Post Office Box Rental	202
Total Expenses	$3,777

Beginning Bank Balance= $4,575
Projected Ending Balance=$2,948

IAS Report
by Frank Ibarra, IAS Representative
September 2026

New Director of Operations: Erin Herbez completed her first week on staff and she has been busy learning the day-to-day operations including the mechanics of the membership database and overall workflow at the organization. Erin has enjoyed meeting the volunteers at Adams Wildlife Sanctuary and connecting with those at the more distant sanctuary locations. She has attended a few committee meetings and with Matt's help, will be supporting the Long-Range Planning Committee as they go into the home-stretch on Bylaws and Policies and Procedures edits.

September IAS Board of Directors Meeting: A quick reminder that the meeting will be held on September 26th in Valmeyer, Illinois (Monroe County). An optional dinner will be held on Friday night, September 25th, for those who travel the night before the meeting. Details, including hotel room information, will be coming in early August.

Lee County Land Acquisition: On July 9th, Jo attended the closing on a 7-acre parcel in Dixon. Illinois. The total acreage within our Green River Lowlands Preserve now stands at 8,383 acres. The $70,000 acquisition price was covered by a grant from Prairie State Conservation Coalition (50%) and a donation from long-time member Rhonda Rush (50%).

Big Sit: The 2026 Big Sit is officially open for registration. It will take place on September 25-27. We hope to see some friendly competition between our sanctuaries and chapters this year! Please visit the IAS website to register. Good luck to all.

Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary Certifications: Erin and Brian have worked together to coordinate approvals with the review sub-committee. They have mailed yard signs to the 30 applications received through June and July. These certifications represent approximately 1,450 new acres of native plantings!

Black-crowned Night Heron Project Update: The herons made the news in July when a juvenile landed on the ledge of a Chicago building and caught the eye of an employee who posted a picture on Facebook. Amy Lardner gave an interview as part of the FOX32 story about the incident. Amy is a dedicated volunteer who coordinates many educational activities around Lincoln Park Zoo and other parts of the city to bring awareness of these birds to the public. In subsequent follow-up social media, IAS was mentioned several times and given recognition for our on-going support of BCNH research and Amy's outreach.

Field Trips
by Kara Morales

September 12th: Have you ever wondered what Illinois looked like before it became known for its cities and agriculture? Join us on this special field trip to Okàn Savanna, one of the last black oak savannas left in Illinois. Okàn is a 29.85-acre conservation site recently acquired by The Community Development Corporation of Pembroke-Hopkins Park with the help of the Illinois Audubon Society. It boasts pristine habitat that provides a home for state-endangered highbush blueberry, state-threatened ornate box turtle, and regal fritillary butterfly and of course, a number of bird species. Our hike will be lead by Anne Hughes-Wagner who will teach us about what makes this site so special, and birding guide will be WCAS Field Trip Chair Kara Morales.

We will meet at the Okan Welcome Center (located at 13851 E Central Ave, Hopkins Park, IL 60944) at 9am. Please dress appropriately for an outdoor walk on natural trails. As the weather will still be warm, defense against ticks (bug spray or treated clothing/shoes) is highly recommended.

Free and open to the public. No registration required. Any questions can be emailed to WCAS Field Trip Chair Kara Morales at karamorales727@gmail.com

October 10th: Birding hike to Hickory Creek Preserve- LaPorte Road Access (10501 W La Porte Rd, Mokena, IL 60448). Meet at the Shagbark Pavillion (first parking lot on the left) at 9am.

October Pop-up: Project OwlNet/Indiana Audubon Saw Whets and Smores banding event. Date TBD.

November 14th: Waterfowl Migration hike at Whalon Lake (1490 Royce Rd, Naperville, IL 60565). Meet at the main parking lot by the boat ramp at 9am.

Conservation
by Rita Renwick

Lake Renwick Volunteer Season

The summer breeding-bird viewing season at Lake Renwick concluded on Aug. 8. This season, a white cormorant made an appearance. There was an abundance of eagle watching, and visitors from all over the U.S. and a few from other countries were welcomed by twenty-three Prairie People Volunteers. Many are Will County Audubon Chapter members who greet the public and serve as interpreters from the first weekend in May through mid-August (15 Saturday mornings from 7:30 until noon). As summer wanes, colonial nesting bird numbers dwindle. When I was there on Aug. 8, only 7 great egrets were seen on the east islands and 4 double-crested cormorants were in the water. Visitors were entertained by two mature and one immature bald eagle on the island structures.

Improvements at the site are underway, with a focus on making bird-watching more accessible to the public. Outstanding visitor center upgrades were completed before the ’26 season. We have informed the district that we hope to be involved as plans are finalized for further improvements at the site.

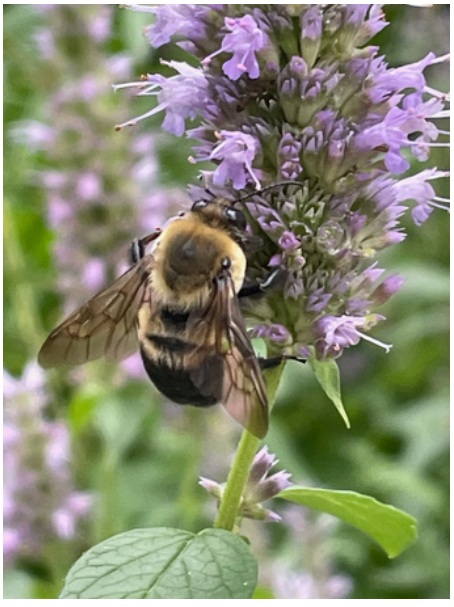
Volunteers Kara Morales and Gail Fischettii

Volunteer Tim Moore

If You Plant It… Illinois Audubon Society Bird and Butterfly Sanctuary Certification
By Rita Renwick

My yard was certified as an Illinois Audubon B & B Sanctuary several years ago. Every time I think I've gone a little overboard with too many plantings or certain plants "take over," I am treated to glimpses of nature that only a little wildness brings! The little pond I created 30 years ago is a water source for birds, but somehow frogs showed up and they survive the winter. I live near Joliet West High School, an urban area not exactly surrounded by nature, so I am constantly surprised by what appears. I'm not even sure where I got the anise hyssop that pops up abundantly in my yard every year, but bees love it! And then there is the swamp milkweed that is as tall as me -so big it had to be staked - propped up slightly by a companion pokeweed plant. I am sharing my thoughts and a few photos to encourage you to become a B & B- the Sanctuary kind that will bring albeit non-paying, but fascinating guests!

Go to the Illinois Audubon Society website to find out how to get certified.



CERTIFIED
Bird & Butterfly Sanctuary
This site contains native plants, shelter, water, food and sufficient space, which together provide high quality habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife.
Certified by the Illinois Audubon Society
illinoisaudubon.org

Blissful Books for Birders
by Diane Sniegowski

THE BALD EAGLE: The Improbable Journey of America's Bird by Jack E. Davis, winner of the Pulitzer Prize, is a captivating story about the many facets of the Bald Eagle, from early history to the present day. The author weaves a rich historical narrative about this magnificent species. When the Bald Eagle was chosen as the Great Seal of the United States back in 1782, the species had been revered by Native American Indians but had a tarnished reputation among the founders of our country. Jack Davis details the ways in which Indigenous peoples had a reverence and respect for this bird, marking life milestones with eagle feathers adorned to their ceremonial costumes. These people believed that eagles were noble, majestic, and the best parents to their young. Early colonial people had a rather negative view of this bird. Many believed that eagles carried away babies and young children and that they continually preyed on livestock. Some recorded history states (later to be disproven) that Benjamin Franklin preferred the Wild Turkey for the Great Seal. In the end, the Bald Eagle was chosen. The author wrote this book in 2022, two years before the Bald Eagle was also chosen as the National Bird of the United States, signed into law by President Biden in 2024.

Jack Davis recounts the early ornithologists who claimed that juvenile Bald Eagles were a completely different species, assigning scientific names to them. It was ornithologist Alexander Wilson who first documented the “gradual metamorphosis” of the appearance of the maturing eagle as it grew into its white feathered head. As was the case with all early bird observations, this discovery came about with the shooting of many eagles to see this physical change.

This book examines in rich detail the journey of the Bald Eagle from being chosen as a country’s symbol to almost becoming extinct. Each chapter in this book will give you a closer look into the remarkable odyssey of Haliaeetus leucocephalus, Bald Eagle. This is an excellent read for any birder who wants to learn and understand more about this incredible species.

HAPPY READING AND HAPPY BIRDING!

Give Birds a Foundation for Fall
by Ellen Green, Owner WBU Joliet

As summer fades and the first hints of autumn arrive, the backyard begins to change. Flowers fade, insects become harder to find, and many of the natural foods birds depend on become less abundant. For our feathered neighbors, fall is more than a change of scenery–it's preparation time.

One of the best ways you can help is by creating a reliable feeding foundation in your backyard.

At Wild Birds Unlimited, we call this a Foundational Feeder: a feeder that provides a dependable source of quality food day after day. Birds are constantly evaluating their food sources. When they discover a place where nutritious food is consistently available, they learn that it is a reliable stop–especially when weather turns difficult or natural food becomes scarce.

Fall is an especially important time to establish that routine. Chickadees, nuthatches, titmice and jays are busy gathering and caching food for the months ahead. Providing a foundational feeder stocked with foods birds naturally seek can support these behaviors while giving them an additional source of energy.

So, what makes a good foundational feeder?

Look for a feeder that can accommodate several birds and hold enough food to provide a consistent supply between refills. Hopper, tube and cylinder feeders are excellent choices. Pairing the feeder with a high-quality seed blend designed to attract a variety of local birds can turn your yard into a dependable neighborhood food stop.

And consistency matters. A feeder that is full one day and empty for several days afterward isn't providing the dependable food source birds have come to expect. Make your feeding station part of your routine, keep food fresh, and clean your feeders regularly.

As winter approaches, you can build on that foundation by adding high-energy foods such as suet and other foods formulated for colder weather. During periods of snow, ice, wind and extreme cold, those additional calories can become especially valuable.

At Wild Birds Unlimited, we believe backyard bird feeding is about more than putting out seed. It's about understanding birds, their changing needs and the seasonal rhythms of nature.

This fall, give your birds a place they can count on. Build a feeding foundation now–and enjoy knowing that your backyard is ready to welcome them through the seasons ahead.

Welcome New Members

Emma Alfirevic
Georgeen Polyak
Cathleen Gray
Patricia Simpson
Kyle Burkart
Michael Dufresne
Rachel Ventura
Thomas Garlitz
Paula Bozzetti
Chris Ingram

Connect with us

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https://willcountyaudubon.illinoisaudubon.org/
- **Chickadee Newsletters**
Resources page of the website https://willcountyaudubon.illinoisaudubon.org/resources/
- **Facebook page**
https://www.facebook.com/willcountyaudubon
- **Facebook group:**
"Will County Audubon Society Members"
- **Instagram account**
https://www.instagram.com/willcountyaudubon/
- **YouTube**
https://www.youtube.com/@WillCountyAudubonSociety

Chapter Officers:

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Secretary Leigh-Anne Clark leighanne_s@yahoo.com
Treasurer Janet Schleeter jsphoto222@sbcglobal.net
Conservation Chair Rita Renwick 815/725-2934 uofialumni@comcast.net
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Field Trip Chair Kara Morales karamorales727@gmail.com
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Editor Michele Olson molson0726@gmail.com

Bird Friendly Coffee: Love your morning cup of joe?

Consider using coffee that is certified Bird Friendly by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. Smithsonian Bird Friendly coffee is shade-grown, USDA organic and provides habitat for birds and wildlife that survive in the rich understory of rainforests. Monoculture plantations - where only coffee is grown, lack plant and wildlife diversity and are more susceptible to pests and diseases requiring greater use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers.

Bird friendly coffee can be purchased at Wild Birds Unlimited on Essington Rd Joliet, some Will County Forest Preserve Nature Centers (Four Rivers Environmental Center, Plum Creek) and through Audubon member Greg DuBois who offers it as a quarterly fundraiser for his church.
To contact Greg email: grgdubois@comcast.net

Semipalmated Sandpiper by Kara Morales, Sandhill Cranes by Scott King, Northern Yellow Warbler by Bill Morris

ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

Membership Categories

Memberships include all persons living at the same address as listed in the membership record.

Friend	Basic Society membership	$25
Steward	Members who wish to advance Illinois Audubon's habitat preservation and education goals at a higher level.	$50
Guardian	Members and businesses with a strong commitment to land and wildlife conservation.	$100
Advocate	Members who want to underwrite the Society's mission of protecting Illinois flora and fauna and supporting habitat.	$500
Benefactor	Members who want to help ensure the Society's continued ability to promote environmental awareness and habitat conservation for future generations.	$1,000+
Legacy	Members who want to leave a lasting mark on the Society to sustain its long-term activities	$5,000+
Organizational Affiliate	Like-minded nonprofit groups and organizations who support our mission. Organizational Affiliates will appear in our magazine and will receive two issues to share with their members.	$100
Partner Affiliate	Like-minded for-profit businesses who support our mission. Partner Affiliates will appear in our magazine and will receive two issues to share with their employees.	$100

Illinois Audubon Society Chapters

Along with your Illinois Audubon Society membership, you may choose to join one or several. Chapters provide field trips, programs and networking. Their newsletters and email updates will keep you informed about upcoming events.

☐ Birdsong Chapter	10.00	☐ McHenry County Audubon Society	10.00	☐ Springfield Audubon Society	10.00
☐ Fort Dearborn Chapter	10.00	☐ Middlefork Audubon Society	10.00	☐ Starved Rock Audubon Society	10.00
☐ Hickory Hills Chapter	10.00	☐ Morgan County Audubon Society	10.00	☐ Western Prairie Audubon Society	10.00
☐ Kane County Audubon Society	10.00	☐ Ridgway Chapter	10.00	☐ Will County Audubon Society	10.00
☐ Lake-Cook Chapter	10.00	☐ Shawnee Chapter	10.00		

Please check: ☐ **New** ☐ **Renewal** ☐ **Gift**

Name(s)_____

Address _____

City _____State _____ Zip _____ Phone _____

email _____

Pay by Credit Card: Card Number: _____ Exp. Date _____

Security Code: (3-digit code on back of card) _____ Signature: _____

Illinois Audubon Society is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. Your membership is tax deductible as permissible by law except for the $15 fair market value of *Illinois Audubon* magazine and chapter dues..

Mail to: Illinois Audubon Society, PO Box 2547, Springfield, IL 62708