

TALE FEATHERS

St. Louis Audubon Society, P.O. Box 220227, St. Louis, MO 63122-0227
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Calendar

BEGINNER BIRD WALK FIELD TRIPS

FOREST PARK VISITOR CENTER AT 5595 GRAND DRIVE

FIRST SATURDAY OF MOST MONTHS

WALK FROM 830 AM TO 10 AM, MEET AT 815 AM

FOR INFO CONTACT AMY [BIRDING@FORESTPARKFOREVER.ORG](mailto:birding@forestparkforever.org)

BIRDING FIELD TRIP—PAGE 3

RIVERLANDS MIGRATORY BIRD SANCTUARY

SATURDAY DECEMBER 14TH AT 8A

BIRDING FIELD TRIP—PAGE 3

RIVERLANDS MIGRATORY BIRD SANCTUARY

SATURDAY JANUARY 11TH AT 9A

BIRDS OF WINTER RAPTOR PROGRAM

AUDUBON CENTER AT RIVERLANDS

SATURDAYS IN JANUARY FROM 10 AM TO 2 PM

[HTTP://RIVERLANDS.AUDUBON.ORG/EVENTS/BIRDS-WINTER-RAPTOR-REALITY-SATURDAYS-JANUARY-4](http://riverlands.audubon.org/events/birds-winter-raptor-reality-saturdays-january-4)

BIRDS OF WINTER EAGLE WATCH

AUDUBON CENTER AT RIVERLANDS

SUNDAYS IN JANUARY FROM 10 AM TO 2 PM

[HTTP://RIVERLANDS.AUDUBON.ORG/EVENTS/BIRDS-WINTER-EAGLE-WATCH-SUNDAYS-JANUARY-5](http://riverlands.audubon.org/events/birds-winter-eagle-watch-sundays-january-5)

REGAL EAGLES PROGRAM

BUSCH MEMORIAL CONSERVATION AREA

THURSDAY, JANUARY 9TH FROM 930 AM TO 11 AM

RESERVATIONS REQUIRED.

FOR DETAILS: [HTTP://MDC.MO.GOV/EVENTS/EAGLEDAYS](http://mdc.mo.gov/events/eagledays)

EAGLE DAYS AT OLD CHAIN OF ROCKS BRIDGE

NORTH ST. LOUIS COUNTY

SAT & SUN JANUARY 18TH AND 19TH FROM 9 AM TO 3 PM

[HTTP://MDC.MO.GOV/SITES/DEFAULT/FILES/RESOURCES/2010/03/EAGLEDAYS2013-14.PDF](http://mdc.mo.gov/sites/default/files/resources/2010/03/eagledays2013-14.pdf)

OPEN HOUSE SOCIAL—PAGE 2

AUDUBON CENTER AT RIVERLANDS

SUNDAY JANUARY 26TH FROM 3P TO 6P

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Birdwatching and Me

by Deepa Mohan

Editor's Note: Ms. Mohan calls India home but has become a seasonal resident of St. Louis. She is a regular visitor to Forest Park and a passionate birder. This piece was written while in India, with reference to birds found there, but her experience translates easily to the U.S.

I went to attend a Naturalist Training Program, where the focus was on birdwatching. Great, I thought, birdwatching is much better than trying to spot mammals, especially big cats. For over 30 years I have gone to wildlife resorts and apart from seeing a leopard the first time we went to Kabini Forest Reserve, I have never, ever, seen any big cat. Birds would be MUCH easier. They are not to be found only in the distant—and expensive—wildernesses. They are all around us; it doesn't take much effort to go and watch birds.

Or so I thought, until I went on the first nature trail. Karthik, who was conducting the course, told us to spot the bird, observe its colors, flight patterns and behavior carefully, and then, instead of having him help out, to look the bird up in the book. Fine, I thought.

Then came the first rude awakening. We were in the early morning light, and there was this bird flying against the face of the rising sun. It was a black blob.

See Birdwatching on Page 4

Board Meetings

Open to All. 2nd Tuesday of Every Month at 7 pm at the Sunset Hills Community Center at 3915 S. Lindbergh Boulevard.

Board recruitment is an ongoing process and requires a long-term commitment. If you have thought of serving in such a way, just stop by or call one of us.

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Newsletter

TaleFeathers is published monthly. For submissions, comments or corrections, contact Mitch Leachman as noted above.



Mid-Winter Open House
Come One, Come All!

St. Louis Audubon Society
Webster Groves Nature Study Society

Sunday, January 26th
3:00 pm to 6:00 pm

Bring a dish. Beverages will be provided.
Door prizes will be given.

Audubon Center at Riverlands
301 Riverlands Way
West Alton, MO 63386

Come early and check out the Eagles and Trumpeter Swans. The Center and its exhibits will be open during the social. For Center info, including volunteer needs <http://riverlands.audubon.org/>.

Take Hwy 367 north from I-270. Turn right on the last road before the Alton Bridge (at the gas station). Continue $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to Center on your left.

A Gift of Bird Habitat

Looking for a sustainable gift for that special someone who likes to play in the dirt. A coupon for a landscape survey through our Bring Conservation Home program may be just the thing. Simply click the Donate Now button at www.stlouisaudubon.org, choose your giving method and note "BCH certificate" on the purpose line. Cost is just \$50 and includes a chapter membership. We will mail the certificate direct to you. Program info at www.stlouisaudubon.org/BCH.

NATURESCAPING COUPON

Holder is entitled to
One BRING CONSERVATION HOME
SITE SURVEY from
St. Louis Audubon

Includes written report with specific steps to improve your landscape for birds and wildlife.

Expires June 1, 2013

www.stlouisaudubon.org/BCH or (314) 599-7390 for details



Bring Conservation Home
A St. Louis Audubon Society Community Partnership

From the Director

By Mitch Leachman

It's hard to believe we're fourteen years into the new millennium (what happened to Y2K...) and just one short year from St. Louis Audubon's 100th Anniversary in 2015! Each year seems to just disappear, but that is certainly an artifact of memory and hindsight. For the days have been packed, and it shows.

I urge you to read our year-end letter; it includes highlights of just some of the projects that kept us busy in 2013. Many of you will receive the letter in the mail, but it can be viewed online through a link on our website home page at www.stlouisaudubon.org. We are fortunate to have a growing number of volunteers and supporters that help us achieve our results. In 2013 alone, over 800 volunteers assisted with one of our programs, contributing over 5,000 hours. Since 2009, some 2,400 people have given over 16,000 hours to St. Louis Audubon projects! I am unbelievably proud of each one of them!

It is worth noting that all our projects and programs are in some way connected to birds. The Education Team uses bird skins in most of their programs. Our stewardship projects are restoring habitat for birds. Field trip leaders help folks observe and identify birds. Even Bring Conservation Home advises landowners on how to provide habitat for birds. Birds are the Audubon way; they're accessible, colorful, musical, and they FLY! Birds can directly connect us to their habitat—which is our habitat, too.

One day last week, I was surprised to find a Ruby-crowned Kinglet in my backyard. It was foraging among the goldenrod and aster plants; I'm not sure if it was eating the seeds or gleaning tiny bugs. This was the first time I've known of this bird in my small Maryland Heights yard, and it was just awesome!

I've had a number of other bird firsts this year at my home. A Summer Tanager early this fall was fly-catching unsuspecting bees that were visiting my New England Asters. A Baltimore Oriole visited in late summer to pick some berries from the Pokeweed. Also, a yellow-colored warbler stopped briefly in late summer, but I could not identify its species. Finally, I've had several visits by Cooper's Hawks including one that snatched a Mourning Dove—WOW! I love doves as much as hawks, but everyone has to eat.

My life has changed because of birds, because of Audubon. Watching a hummingbird hover and feed on plants that I have nurtured—time stops; the artificial wall between us dissolves, and I feel PART of nature, if only for a moment. I expect many of our volunteers could recite similar experiences in their backyards, on field trips, when conducting bird counts and such. Many of you have likely had such encounters, and I ask you to share them. Tell your family and friends about the little miracles called "birds" just outside their windows. Take them on a bird walk around work or the neighborhood; help them realize that connection.

Thanks for all of your support! Have a wonderful and safe holiday season! ◆

Field Trips, Etc.

Dec 14th to Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary:

This half day trip will start at 8:00 am. Take Hwy 367 north from I-270. Turn right on the last road before the Alton Bridge (at the gas station). Turn right on the next road to the Teal Pond lot.

the Alton Bridge (at the gas station). Turn right on the next road to the Teal Pond lot.

All field trips are FREE. Reservations not required, unless noted—consult our website for details. For questions, contact Mike Grant at mikecurlew@att.net.

Jan 11th to Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary: This

half day trip will start at 9:00 am. Take Hwy 367 north from I-270. Turn right on the last road before

Birdwatching and Me

Continued from Page 1

This would not have been so bad if it had been a black blob to everyone else taking the course, and they had all identified it as the “Black Blob Bird.” But no. They all yelled, “Coppersmith Barbet!” practically in unison. I looked again at the black blob, and it had already disappeared.

We walked on, and suddenly the whole group stopped, staring intensely into a nearby tree. I looked too. And looked. And looked. Thankfully the bird moved, otherwise I think I would still be there, looking. “What were the colors?” asked Karthik. “There was a crest!” cried one. “The vent was red!” said another. As far as I was concerned, it was the “People Move–I Leave Bird.”

Things improved slightly over the next trail. I actually saw a bird (well, it was sitting on a dry branch and there was no way I could have missed it). I noted all its attributes carefully, and looked at the book...blankly. Where on earth was I to look in the book? Was it a shrike, a shikra, or a swan? (Something told me it might not be the latter.) Karthik took pity on me and opened the book to the right page. Huh! ALL the birds on the page looked pretty much the same to me! “Warblers do look alike,” said Karthik kindly, and as usual, a kid less than half my age helpfully identified the bird for me.

Another bird. This one had an easily identifiable red head, a white body, but I had no clue what sort of bird it was. I had to have the book opened at the right page again. The only bird on the page that matched the one in the tree was the Wire-tailed Swallow. I looked at Karthik, who nodded. “But, but...” I said. “That bird doesn’t have that long tail at all.” “It’s fallen off...that happens,” Karthik said. How would I identify a Wire-tailed Swallow without the wire tail? The others required a camera, a pair of binoculars, and a bird book. I required, in addition, a bird-book opener.

Then came the problem of the names. We saw a tree full of birds. As usual, I seemed to be the only person who looked, and was, ignorant. All the rest piped up, “Rosy Starlings!” and “Rosy Pastors!” Apparently, both were names for the same bird, and I stopped looking for two different birds.

I spotted a bird with plumage that looked very different from its illustration in the book. “The feathers are growing out right now”, explained one of my fellow-students. How did he know that? I didn’t. Every bird that was being spotted was being identified by me about twenty minutes after the others had moved on to the next bird. Why didn’t God populate the Earth with only mynahs, sparrows and crows? Things would have been much simpler.

I learned about eclipse plumage, and this depressed me even more. I also found in my bird book such arcane, esoteric stuff next to the illustrations as: “non-br,” “br” and “imm.” I am yet to muster up the courage to ask what these are. I am sure they are techniques birds adopt to disguise themselves from me. “imm” to a bird probably means not “immature” but “immediately change feather colors so the lady below can’t identify you.”

When I thought I had spotted another bird, it turned out it was the female of the last bird, or the male. Little rings with arrows and crosses on them began to dance before my eyes.

A couple of successes spotting the Pied Kingfisher and the Purple Sunbird led me on to further traps. “Look up!” said a youngster, at the birds swooping up and down. “Yes?” said Karthik. “What colors do you see?” Colors? I thought it was the Black Silhouette Bird. “It has a red rump,” said my co-students with great ease. As far as I was concerned, I was BENEATH the bird. How on earth could I see what color its rump was? Unless it

Article concludes on next page

Birdwatching and Me

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was going to fly upside down for me? Did these others have eyes on stalks that went out above the birds and spotted the color of its feathers under and below the wings?

Then came the double names. The Drongo Cuckoo. The Magpie Robin. I started dreaming up my own combinations, like the Mynah Hawk, and the Swallow Woodpecker.

Topping it all came the news that names of birds keep changing, and quite often people name a bird the way they choose. But somehow I just KNOW that if I call a bird the “Unfamiliar Plumage Bird” or the “Lesser-Known Looks-like-a-tree-branch Bird,” those names are not going to be accepted by the birding community.

And the worst of these creatures all seem to be Swifts, Swallows or Splits. That is, they are swift to disappear, the sky or the greenery seems to swallow them up, and they are gone in a split second. I am just left standing there, with the open book in my hand and the usual huge question mark hovering over my head.

I now call myself the “Utterly Green Bird-spotter.” I may soon give up birdwatching and go back to spotting trees, which at least don’t suddenly flit off, and are there when you come back the next day with a friend. It might even be better to get back to tigers, which are at least never there for me to see. That’s much less frustrating than these birds which, at a clap of our hands (and in fact, even when I am standing stock-still trying to identify it) suddenly “lift into the air and vanish into their own natural world” where I, for one, cannot see them.

That’s it. I am giving up birdwatching. These creatures are too smart for me. But meanwhile...ooh, that lovely purple plumage! Is that the Indian Moorhen? Ah well then, maybe just ONE more attempt at spotting the next bird! ♦



Lesser Pied Kingfisher (left) and Coppersmith Barbet

Wikimedia Commons Photos

Get Involved in the Christmas Bird Count

Since the Christmas Bird count began over a century ago, it has relied on the dedication and commitment of volunteers like you.

Sign-up for the 114th Christmas Bird Count is now open! Find a circle near you and sign up to participate. <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBC/public/default.aspx>. There are 4 count circles in Missouri and another 4 in Illinois, all within about 50 miles of downtown St. Louis. It is free to participate!

When does the count happen?

All Christmas Bird Counts are conducted between December 14 and January 5, inclusive dates each season. Your local count will occur on one day between those dates. Participate in as many counts as you wish!

How does participation work?

There is a specific methodology to the CBC, and you must make arrangements to participate in advance with the circle compiler, but anyone can participate.

Each count takes place in an established 15-mile wide diameter circle, and is organized by a count compiler.

If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher.

If your home is within the boundaries of a CBC circle, then you can stay at home and report the birds that visit your feeder on count day as long as you have made prior arrangement with the count compiler. Check out the sign-up link above for information on how to contact the compiler.

Visit the CBC Frequently Asked Questions to learn more. <http://birds.audubon.org/faq/cbc>

Since it is free, how is this program funded?

The Christmas Bird Count now relies 100% on donations to provide support to compilers and volunteers on count day, to manage the historic database, and to fund the technology to make historic data available to researchers. Until recently there was a \$5.00 participation fee which annually funded this hemisphere-wide program.

The data collected by CBC participants over the past century and more have become one of only two large pools of information informing ornithologists and conservation biologists how the birds of the Americas are faring over time.

In 2012 we made CBC participation free to make it accessible to anyone. Now we ask for your support to keep the program free and to help us ensure the future of the program. Please make a donation today to this very important citizen science effort. Go to <http://www.audubon.org/>. ◆

Riverlands Field Trip Report

Excerpts from Bill Rowe's Report

The St. Louis Audubon Society field trip to Riverlands on November 9th was a nice one. The turnout of members and guests was impressive. Christian Hagenlocher and I served as co-leaders, and many skilled birders among the group helped with identifications and shared their scopes.

On Teal Pond, the Red-necked Grebe continued, Bonaparte's Gulls were numerous, and a tight-knit flock of 70 Franklin's Gulls dropped in some time between 7:00 and 8:00, then rose all together and took off again about 8:30, while we were still there to watch. As a bonus, an American Avocet flew by at close range, to be seen again later along the margin of Heron Pond. Two Dunlin on Heron were the only other shorebirds noted at Riverlands.

Ducks of many species carpeted Heron Pond, as usual, and also parts of Ellis Bay and the river beyond; we spent a lot of time sorting through these. No rarities were around, but a couple of Greater Scaup and an American Black Duck were good additions to the list, bringing it to a total of 18 waterfowl plus Horned, Pied-billed, and Red-necked Grebes, and an abundance of American Coot.

Over the water, increased numbers of Herring Gulls were present, along with plenty of Ring-bills and lingering Tree Swallows in at least the low hundreds—and of course some cormorants and pelicans. Raptors included just one Bald Eagle, a couple of accipiters, a single Northern Harrier, a handsome adult Red-shoulder, several Red-tails, and two American Kestrels.

Following a break at the Audubon center, we went around to the Illinois side of the dam, where we had good scope studies of adult and first-cycle examples of both Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Along 143 on the return drive, a few Wild Turkey appeared, and we added Killdeer, Least Sandpiper, and a Peregrine.

The total trip list for the Riverlands portion of the trip, with my own conservative estimates of numbers, can be seen here: <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist?subID=S15624129>

With a few extra IL birds seen in the afternoon, this makes 55 species for the trip, although I imagine other folks may have had a few species that I wasn't aware of.

Thanks to all who participated! ◆



Red-shouldered Hawk (left) and Dunlin

Al Smith Photos

St. Louis Audubon Society Year-end Fundraising Appeal

We are proud of everyone who helps us achieve our goals, including passionate volunteers, dedicated members and enthusiastic donors.

Your past support has made our success possible, and we need your help to sustain our programs. Help us continue to connect our community to the nature that surrounds us all. Please send in your gift today.

\$250 \$100 \$60** \$30 Other _____

** Donations at the \$60 level or higher will receive a *Birds of St. Louis* or *Birds of Forest Park* note card set as our gift (please select one).

No thanks. Please do not send me any gifts.

Thank you so much for your interest and support!

If you prefer credit card, visit our website
<http://www.stlouisaudubon.org>

Donations are tax-deductible.
St. Louis Audubon is a tax-exempt charity.

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