President’s Message

It’s February, southern Illinois. I am standing in a field. It’s edging toward sunset. Pat Lueders, our field trip leader has taken me with her to find short-eared owls. Suddenly they rise. Five, six, seven, eight. They circle just above our heads, something I’ll not forget.

St. Louis Audubon Society’s (SLAS) birding field trip program relies on a terrific team of volunteer leaders. I’m personally grateful to Bill Rowe and Pat Lueders as I learned to become a birder. All our field trip leaders are expert birders and teachers. Last fall Mike Thelan pointed out a rare Kelvin-Helmholtz cloud formation on a bird walk at Shaw Nature Reserve. You never know what you’ll see and learn on the trail.

Birding and conservation go hand in hand. With Mitch Leachman’s leadership and the contributions of trained volunteer habitat advisors, Bring Conservation Home is integral to SLAS. Over 1,200 homeowners have participated in this signature program. Both BCH and our birding field trips reflect our mission to create a community connection to nature through education and conservation.

This mission is inspiring. And I am inspired by Past-President Katy Fechter’s leadership. During Katy’s tenure we’ve grown and now we must continue our momentum. Our Board and volunteers are hard-working and I’m counting on lots of help.

As I look ahead to the path for SLAS here are a few priorities. We need to revitalize our education program, particularly at the school level. A new plan is emerging, and we will share details and encourage volunteers in the coming months. We need to adapt to new ways of delivering our conservation and education programs virtually and we are learning how technology can make us more effective. We need to diversify, to expand our reach in order to fulfil our core mission. And importantly we need to firm up our financial footing to support our mission and staff.

All of this while the world is shifting under our feet. But I am optimistic. We have a dedicated Board. We have great volunteers. In Amy Weeks and Mitch Leachman we have outstanding staff. We will be forming new committees and seeking to expand the Board.

It’s May. Get out for a walk (social-distancing please). The garden beckons. Participate in our Birdathon. Stay engaged and thanks so much for your support of SLAS.

Dennis Martin
Board Meetings
Open to All. 2nd Tuesday of Even Months at 7 pm at the Sunset Hills Community Center at 3915 S. Lindbergh Boulevard.

Please Note: Board meetings will be held by Zoom and will not meet in person until further notice.

Board recruitment is an ongoing process and combines your interest and our need. If you have considered serving in such a way, stop by or call one of us.

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Newsletter

Tale Feathers is published monthly. For submissions, comments or corrections, contact Amy Weeks as noted above.

Cathleen Creley Memorial Conservation Grant
Accepting Applications

St. Louis Audubon Society works to positively impact birds and their habitats throughout the St. Louis region. The Cathleen Creley Memorial Fund Conservation Grant was established to distribute grants that will support bird conservation projects in the St. Louis region and appropriate wintering habitats. The total amount available for the 2020 grant is estimated to be $5,000.

One or more grants will be awarded depending on the income of the fund for a given fiscal year, the quality of the grant proposals received, and the results of the grant ranking system. Learn more here.

St. Louis Birdathon has begun!

The Birdathon is like a walkathon, only instead of counting miles, you count birds. Anyone can participate, from beginners to expert birders. This is a fun and educational event for all ages and runs the entire month of May!

No time for birding? You can still make a difference for birds by making a pledge to support our conservation, education, and advocacy work.

For more information, to register, or make a donation, visit St. Louis Birdathon.

Every bird counts!
BCH Welcomes Volunteers and Announces Restart of Consultations

Mitch Leachman

Volunteer Habitat Advisors have been critical to the success of our Bring Conservation Home program since it was rolled out in 2012. In those eight years, dozens of advisors have assisted with the habitat consultations and detailed written advice we have delivered to over 1,200 landowners in the St. Louis region.

Each spring we recruit native plant enthusiasts to attend our Habitat Advisor Training, especially from the ranks of Master Gardeners, Master Naturalists and Wild Ones members. This year, 12 completed the training that ran five Monday nights for two hours each. It was our largest class since 2015, and we ask you help us congratulate them all: Susan Burk, Sheri Goldsmith, Pam Hass, Jennifer Holder, Chris Hull, Eileen Kinsella, Don Knobbe, Peggy Menke, Leslie Penning, Lisa Picker, Lisa Saffell and Chris Sawall. As apprentices they will continue their training by shadowing experienced Habitat Advisors or program staff until they are comfortable operating as part of a consultant team.

Their support will be essential as we strive to reach 200 new landowners this year, a 30% increase over our long-term average. That may not sound too bold, but we did shut down the program (and all other St. Louis Audubon in-person programming) in mid-March due to the coronavirus, just as we were ramping up for our busy spring season. We put nearly 50 landowners on hold and crossed our fingers we would be able to re-start at some point.

We are very happy to report that as of April 27th we have resumed the BCH program! We spent most of April investigating various apps and processes that would allow us to conduct the in-depth, personal consultation without the need to physically visit with landowners on-site. A video call tool was clearly called for, but all such platforms are not created equal. After testing several and exploring the use of the video call by the landowner to take us on a ‘tour’ of their landscape in real time, we have settled on a two-step process.

After receipt of a BCH request form, we call the landowner to review the program and process, answer any questions, and schedule the video call. Currently, we are using the Zoom platform, but we may switch to Google Meet for logistical reasons. The week before the video consult, we stop by the owner’s landscape to take pictures and notes. The owner knows we are coming to take pictures, but we do not engage with them in person. The pictures are uploaded to a Google folder which we then use during the video consult to conduct a virtual walk-through of their landscape. So far, we have received only enthusiastic ‘thumbs-ups’ from the landowners.

Like all of us, we have no idea what the future holds and just when it might be safe to engage up-close with strangers. Further, we expect many will be very hesitant to engage as they did before long after effective treatments or a vaccine are available. This new video consult approach means we do not have to wait for either the medicine or the total easing of anxiety. As noted, we have a number of consults awaiting scheduling, but should you be interested in our personalized advice on improving your landscape for the benefit of birds, butterflies or other wildlife, please complete the online request form and watch for our call. The birds, and their friends, will thank you!
A Celebration of Giving; May 5 - 7, 2020

St. Louis Audubon is joining the global celebration of giving event beginning Tuesday, May 5 and ending with Give St. Louis Day on May 7.

In these times of crisis, concerns for health and safety must come first, and so it’s harder than usual to maintain a focus on nature, conservation, and wildlife, including birds. Yet that is still important, and it is up to organizations like St. Louis Audubon Society to "keep that burner lit."

With this in mind, we ask for your participation and support for the St. Louis Birdathon and the resulting efforts.

Your contributions will help us focus on these priorities:

- conservation and creation of habitats for native plants and animals
- nature education for kids and adults
- study and observation of birds and other living things
- advocacy for conservation and wildlife in the public arena

During this time of giving, we can still show social connection and come together on behalf of our communities even while practicing social distancing. Check out our Facebook page for more details.

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Membership Matters

When you join St. Louis Audubon Society, you are supporting year-round nature education, vital habitat restoration and stewardship opportunities for people of all ages. Your support goes a long way!

Visit St. Louis Audubon Society to join now!
St. Louis Audubon Society
Chapter–Supporting Membership Form

**Mission:** to create a community connection to nature through education and conservation.

Your Chapter-Supporting membership runs concurrently with your National Audubon membership, if you choose to maintain the latter. To continue to receive the *Audubon* magazine, you must maintain your National membership.

Make checks payable to:
St. Louis Audubon Society
Mail Checks to:
St. Louis Audubon Society
P.O. Box 220227
St. Louis, MO 63122–0227

If already a Chapter–Supporting member, you need do nothing but accept our thanks!

Memberships are Tax Deductible

*Less the $15 Cost of the Gift*

**Memberships of $50 or more may choose from these gifts:**

- *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas W. Tallamy
- *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of Eastern & Central North America*

Please indicate your choice.

100% of your dues stay in St. Louis supporting our local efforts. Thank you very much!