



# The Chat

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Columbia Audubon Society

February 2010

<http://columbia-audubon.missouri.org/>

Serving Audrain, Boone, Cooper, Howard, Monroe and Randolph Counties

## President's Column Vanessa Melton

Ah, winter! It can be such a drab and dull time of the year for some, but for those of us whose sanity has somehow fallen through the cracks along the way, we love this time of year. I anticipate falling snow as much as most birders anticipate the return of Spring migrants. Have no fear – Spring will be here soon enough and you will be aching and groaning from somehow managing to get warbler neck once again. But in the meantime, if the cold weather is keeping you trapped inside snuggled up by the fire, don't forget that our feathered friends tend to hang out close to the house more these days than in Summer.

Keep your feeders full and the seed stock in good supply and you will be able to watch birds from the comfort of your toasty abode. And don't forget to count your feeder birds for the Great Backyard Bird Count on February 12th-15<sup>th</sup> (see page 2 for more information). You never know what might show up at your feeder during the cold winter months so keep your eye out for that greenfinch (if you don't know what I am talking about just ask Carl Gerhardt).

### Teacher Needed

The WOW Outdoor School is looking for someone who can teach a basic bird identification class on the weekend of May 1st and 2nd. If you can help out, please contact Vanessa Melton at 573-864-3905 or [vanndawn@yahoo.com](mailto:vanndawn@yahoo.com). Thanks.

## February Program Features Insects

Donna Brunet, a local free-lance nature photographer specializing in insect photographs, will deliver a slide show at the February 17<sup>th</sup> meeting. Her images will introduce you to a wide variety of Missouri insects, a form of wildlife that you may be in the habit of ignoring. You'll learn fun facts about insect lives, including ways insects have adapted to escape predation by birds.

Donna is a stock photographer for Animals Animals / Earth Scenes and is currently writing and photographing species for a new field guide to butterflies and moths of Missouri. Her images have been published by the Missouri Department of Conservation, the Division of State Parks, and the Entomological Society of America, among others.

If you'd like to expand your birding trips to include insects, you can find a checklist for Runge Nature Center, a butterfly checklist for Rock Bridge Memorial State Park, and butterfly coloring pages for your kids at <http://donnabrunet.com>.

The general meeting and program starts at 7:30 P.M. at Unitarian-Universalist Church, 2615 Shepard Blvd. in Columbia. The board will meet starting at 6:00 P.M. in the church lobby. All members are invited to attend.

## Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) February 12-15, 2010

Follow these four simple steps to participate in this year's GBBC.

- 1) Visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) for instructions. Download a checklist for Boone County, if needed.
- 2) Count the birds you see. Write down the highest number of individual birds you see at one time. You must count for at least 15 minutes.
- 3) Record your results at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). Count one, some or all days. You can change your location each day. Each location and each day needs to be submitted separately.

### Become a Master Naturalist

The Boone's Lick Chapter of the Missouri Master Naturalist Program is offering a training class March 1 through May 10, 2010 for those who want to know more about –and become more involved in – the management and protection of Missouri's natural resources. Registration limited to first thirty participants. Registration fee including training and materials is \$75. Registration deadline - February 8, 2010. For more information and a registration packet go to: <http://extension.missouri.edu/masternaturalist/columbia/index.html> or call chapter president, Meredith Donaldson, 443-0104.

### Cache and Field Trips

Join Bill Clark each Wednesday for a weekly trip to Conservation Areas. The Cache trips are part of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) and Audubon Society of Missouri's effort to develop bird checklists for MDC-owned property. The trips leave Parkade Plaza, promptly at 7:30 A.M. Meet in the southwest corner of the parking lot.

Also leaving from Parkade at 7:30 A.M. will be these scheduled field trips: February 20th, March 20th, April 10th, and May 15th. The destinations are currently unknown.

## 2009-2011 Columbia Audubon Society Board Members and Committee Chairs

(area code is 573)

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Natural Areas	John Besser, 874-5675 <a href="mailto:jbesser1@gmail.com">jbesser1@gmail.com</a>
<i>The Chat</i> Editor	Jim Gast 442-1481 <a href="mailto:jgast@centurytel.net">jgast@centurytel.net</a>

Deadline for submission of articles to The Chat is the Monday following the monthly general meeting. Submit articles to [jgast@centurytel.net](mailto:jgast@centurytel.net) or to 3009 Lynnwood Dr., Columbia, MO 65203.

To receive The Chat via e-mail, send your e-mail address to [jgast@centurytel.net](mailto:jgast@centurytel.net). To receive updates on CAS events between newsletters, send your e-mail address to [edgew@mchsi.com](mailto:edgew@mchsi.com).

## State Parks Funding Crisis David Bedan, Conservation Chair

The Missouri system of State Parks and Historic Sites is a model for the nation and has regularly been listed among the top four state park systems nationwide. But it is now in a serious financial crisis. The Missouri state parks receive no General Revenue funds. It is supported almost entirely by half of a one-tenth-of-one-cent state [dedicated Parks and Soils Sales Tax](#) -- support that has been re-affirmed by a two-to-one voter margin each time it comes up for renewal. The [Missouri Parks Association](#) is the citizens group that has led the campaigns for this sales tax since 1984. But diversions from the Park Sales Tax Fund and inadequate funding for capital improvements have resulted in severe staff cuts (100 staff members in this budget year) and a \$200 million backlog in vitally needed rehabilitation of facilities and infrastructure. This crisis has been building for years but has it grown much worse as sales tax revenues declined in the current recession.

While various policy and legislative changes could provide some limited relief the measure most likely to pass in this legislative session is an \$800 million billion bond issue for capital improvements similar to a referendum for higher education bonds introduced by Chris Kelly (D) and Steven Tilley (R) in the last session; it passed the House and was approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee, where it was amended to include up to \$250 million for parks and other state agencies, but then died under threat of filibuster.

**The Columbia Audubon Society supports the call by the Missouri Parks Association for the Missouri General Assembly to pass a referendum to allocate 10% of a state capital improvements bond issue for state parks, with the amount for parks specified in the bill.**

If this referendum is passed by the state legislature it would then have to be approved by the voters in the November 2010 election. Audubon members are encouraged to discuss the state park funding needs with their

legislators. For more information see the web site of the Missouri Parks Association: <http://parks.missouri.org/>.

The Missouri Parks Association developed the following information sheet concerning state park funding:

**THE PROBLEM:** Missouri's nationally renowned system of state parks and historic sites is gravely imperiled by diversions from the Parks Sales Tax (PST) and inadequate funding for capital improvements (CI). The system is only middling among the states in number of units (85), acreage (c. 140,000), staff (c. 600 merit FTE), and funding (c. \$50 million/year), yet it has been recognized as one of the best in the nation owing to the quality of the natural and cultural resources it protects, the quality of management, and strong citizen support. That quality is now severely jeopardized by recent staff cuts and years of inadequate funding for infrastructure rehabilitation and other vital capital improvements, of which there is now a \$200 million backlog. The recent draconian elimination of over 100 staff positions—at 17 percent of merit staff probably the most severe hit of any state agency—was exacerbated by the fact that parks, almost alone among state agencies, received not one cent of extra federal funding in the last legislative session to cushion the blow of the current economic crisis.

**BACKGROUND:** Missouri state parks have historically been supported by four funding sources: the state's general revenue (GR), a dedicated tax, park earnings from fees and concessions, and periodic infusions for CI from bond issues, federal funds and donations. The current 1/10<sup>th</sup> of 1% Parks and Soils Sales Tax, of which parks gets 50% (now c. \$40 million) was initially approved in a statewide vote in 1984 and renewed in 1988, 1996, and 2006 (next, 2016). Major federal funds for CI came to Missouri during the 1930s depression and the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the 1960s and '70s, while the last significant CI bond issue was the Third State Building Fund of the 1980s, of which parks was allocated about 10% or \$60 million.

When GR of about \$11 million (for salaries) was stripped in 1989, both salaries and

benefits (then 25% of salaries, now 50%, not previously charged to the park budget) had to be paid from the PST. With other diversions from the PST—for oversight, ADA compliance, legal settlements, etc.—and more than 300 sales tax exemptions by legislative or court action, the capacity of the PST to fund CI has been undermined, hence the \$200M backlog. Now the economic downturn is resulting in \$4 million *lower* PST revenues, necessitating the staff cuts.

**THE SOLUTION:** While various policy and legislative changes could provide some relief—and we must remain alert to address them—the measure most likely to pass in the next legislative session is a \$700 million to \$1 billion bond issue for CI similar to a referendum for higher education bonds introduced by Chris Kelly (D) and Steven Tilley (R) in the last session; it passed the House and was approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee, where it was amended to include up to \$250 million for parks and other state agencies, but then died under threat of filibuster. At the MPA annual meeting October 24, Chris Kelly said he plans to reintroduce such a bond issue, and that other state agencies—presumably including state parks—may be included this time.

**We advocate that 10% of a state CI bond issue be designated for state parks, with the amount for parks specified in the bill.** The measure will likely be called the Build America Bonds (for which 35% of the interest may be paid from federal stimulus funds) and/or the Fifth State Building Fund, which could utilize the annual revenue stream freed by the impending retirement of the Third State Building Fund. The referendum would have to be approved by a vote of the citizenry; the widespread public support for state parks (as reflected in the 71% "yes" vote in the 2006 PST renewal) is a major selling point for including state parks.

#### **ROADBLOCKS:**

- Current economic crisis: everyone is clamoring for funding, and parks may be considered just a luxury.
- Widespread legislative perception that parks don't need help because they have

the dedicated PST.

- Confusion of parks (in the Department of Natural Resources) with the Conservation Department.
- Difficulty of finding legislative champions for the system as a whole, especially in view of term limits.
- Park CI needs are largely for renovation of infrastructure—underground, unsexy, hard to sell.

#### **NEXT STEPS:**

- **Form broad-based coalition of organizations and individuals, including health groups.**
- Work with DNR on list of projects, economic analysis, slide show, and projects by legislative district.
- Develop website with up-to-date information and links to legislators.
- Build robust email network for alerts.
- **Beginning immediately, encourage citizens to discuss park funding needs with their legislators.**

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:** visit the MPA website at <http://parks.missouri.org>.

#### **110<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count Results Jim Gast, Compiler**

(See Susan Hazelwood's article comparing the Columbia and Cole Camp Christmas Bird Counts after this one.)

On January 1, 1961, 13 people participated in Columbia's first and Audubon's 61<sup>st</sup> annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC). For the 2009 count, 73 people and 8 feeder watchers participated. In 1961, the number one most seen species was Mallard with 600; European Starling came in second with 500. In 2009, the number one species was European Starling with 13,872; Mallard was second with 12,641. In 1961, there were 47 species seen; in 2009, there were 95. The 13 participants had 14 party hours; there were 162.5 party hours for 2009.

To find out more information about CBCs, go to <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html>. Select either by count circle or species. Our count code is MOCO.

Species	TOTAL
Greater-white Fronted Goose	9
Snow Goose	2
Snow Goose (blue form)	0
Snow Goose (white form)	2
Cackling Goose	278
Canada Goose	9662
Wood Duck	4
Gadwall	2419
American Wigeon	4
American Black Duck	1
Mallard	12641
Northern Shoveler	184
Northern Pintail	14
American Green-winged Teal	3500
Redhead	2
Ring-necked Duck	5
Lesser Scaup	6
Scaup sp.	0
Common Goldeneye	1
Ruddy Duck	20
Duck sp.	2
Wild Turkey	14
Northern Bobwhite	1
Pied-billed Grebe	1
Great Blue Heron	24
Black-crowned Night-Heron	0
Turkey Vulture	26
Bald Eagle	21
Bald Eagle (adults)	10
Bald Eagle (immature)	10
Bald Eagle (unknown)	1
Northern Harrier	8
Sharp-shinned Hawk	6
Cooper's Hawk	8
Accipiter sp.	2

Species	TOTAL
Red-shouldered Hawk	14
Red-tailed Hawk	108
Harlan's Hawk	1
Red-tailed Hawk (all others)	107
Buteo sp.	7
American Kestrel	24
Merlin	1
Virginia Rail	3
Sora	1
American Coot	134
Killdeer	4
Wilson's Snipe	25
Ring-billed Gull	141
Gull sp.	1
Rock Pigeon	1143
Eurasian Collared-Dove	3
Mourning Dove	267
Eastern Screech Owl	25
Great Horned Owl	8
Barred Owl	11
Owl sp.	1
Belted Kingfisher	10
Red-headed Woodpecker	18
Red-bellied Woodpecker	224
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	16
Downy Woodpecker	179
Hairy Woodpecker	42
Northern (yellow-shafted) Flicker	57
Pileated Woodpecker	23
Blue Jay	580
American Crow	890
Horned Lark	192
Black-capped Chickadee	343
Chickadee sp.	5
Tufted Titmouse	332

Species	TOTAL
Red-breasted Nuthatch	2
White-breasted Nuthatch	96
Brown Creeper	22
Carolina Wren	149
Winter Wren	5
Marsh Wren	9
Golden-crowned Kinglet	39
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	3
Kinglet sp.	0
Eastern Bluebird	242
Hermit Thrush	9
American Robin	523
Northern Mockingbird	30
Brown Thrasher	3
European Starling	13872
Cedar Waxwing	311
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle)	73
Eastern Towhee	3
American Tree Sparrow	205
Savannah Sparrow	56
LeConte's Sparrow	4
Fox Sparrow	58
Song Sparrow	97
Lincoln's Sparrow	2
Swamp Sparrow	103
White-throated Sparrow	511
White-crowned Sparrow	73
Sparrow sp.	14
Dark-eyed Junco	1757
Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon)	8
Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-Colored)	1749
Lapland Longspur	105
<b>Scarlet Tanager</b>	<b>1</b>
Northern Cardinal	942
<b>Indigo Bunting</b>	<b>1</b>

Species	TOTAL
Red-winged Blackbird	157
Eastern Meadowlark	5
Western Meadowlark	17
Meadowlark sp.	151
Common Grackle	12
Brown-headed Cowbird	8
Blackbird sp.	1150
Purple Finch	157
House Finch	126
American Goldfinch	454
House Sparrow	475

Species in **bold** require documentation.

Total species:	95
Total birds:	55,729
Participants in the field:	73
Feeder watchers:	8
Party hours foot:	68.0
Party miles foot:	48.25
Party hours car:	94.5
Party miles car:	681.8
Party hours other (golf cart):	2.5
Party miles other:	3.0
Nocturnal hours:	6.0
Nocturnal miles:	3.0

Participants (including feeder watchers): Harold Anderson, Kathleen Anderson, Jennifer Ballard, John Besser, Donna Brunet, Jabez Campbell, Roxie Campbell, Gail Carson, Rodney Chappel, Bill Clark, Trisha Crabill, David Diamond, Denny Donnell, Martha Donnell, Anne Downing, Ellen Ehrhardt, Sandy Elbert, Lee Elliott, Susan Flader, Andy Forbes, Jane Fore, Don Garvin, Jim Gast, Janice Gaston, Becky Gerdos Reed Gerdos, Jean Graebner, Gary Grigsby, Scott Hamilton, Joan Hathman, Susan Hazelwood, Bonnie Heidy, Howard Hinkel, Brad Jacobs, Jeff Koppleman, Greg Leonard, Jean Leonatti, Pat Luedders, Mike Mac, Paul McKenzie, Bill Mees, Vanessa Melton, Kathleen Metter, Tom Morgan, Bill Palmer, Kay Palmer, Nancy Pauley, Edward Pickett, Glenn Pickett, Ilayna Pickett, Ralph Pickett, Sue Pickett, Andy Raedeke, Jon Rapp, Nancy Rapp, Dan Reeves, Jill Sappington, Sue Schultz, Marie Scruggs, Eric Seaman, Fred Seaman, Charles Shawver, Laurie Shawver, Suzanne Specs, Mariel Stephenson, Sally Swanson, Dorothy Taegel, Boyd Terry, Carolyn Terry, Andrew Twaddle, Levi Vickery, Robin Vickery, Gretchen Volkert, Edge Wade, Jerry Wade, Mike Warnock, Walter Wehtje, Sarah Wolcott-Twaddle, Eric Wood, Suzanne Wright

## 110th Christmas Bird Count Susan Hazelwood

This year I had the good fortune to participate in two Christmas Bird Counts. I'm the organizer and co-compiler (with Jim Gast) for the Columbia Audubon Chapter sponsored count. I was simply a participant in the Cole Camp Master Naturalist sponsored count. I went to Cole Camp because a plea had been issued: "Birders needed." A trial run had been done last year but 2009 was the first official count for this area and counters were needed. Jean Leonatti and I thought it would be keen to be part of a history making "first" time event. Away we went!

As it turned out I was engaged with publicity for both CBCs. I arranged for Gary Grisby (a University of MO School of Journalism faculty member) to spend time with count parties and to conduct interviews with section leaders in Columbia. Gary's work ended up as a National Public Radio/KBIA 7 minute story with all kinds of live sound effects (from the birds and the birders). My party was tailed by the Sedalia Democrat reporter's and photographer's vehicle at the Cole Camp's CBC. My car (not me) made the front page of the newspaper. But there were additional people photos in the on-line version of the story. Many of you won't be surprised to learn I tried hard to explain "citizen science" concepts and the value of the years of data collected by participants on Christmas Bird Counts to these journalists. I'd have to say the publicity outcome was excellent.

My take-homes from my comparisons between these two events were:

- The weather is often kinder earlier during the count period. That translates in more bird species being seen as some migrants might not have left, and there is an increased chance of open water to support more lingering waterfowl.
- While Cole Camp has interesting prairie and farm habitats they have a lot less public land. There is less habitat diversity in their count circle compared to Columbia, too. Both factors reduced the number of species and number of individual birds seen.
- Columbia's long history of CBC traditions and our large population base make it easier to find CBC participants. The more eyes looking, the more birds found. The more parties in the field, the more habitat types explored and the more birds that are found. Continuity in count parties from one year to the next increases

knowledge of where birds are within our count circle.

- Love of the outdoors, laughter, and generally good times were common to both counts. You should think about joining a CBC next season. You can be a driver, an observer, a recorder of data, and/or a navigator. All are needed skill sets for a successful CBC.

	Cole Camp	Columbia
Date of Count	Dec. 30, 2009	Dec. 19, 2009
Sections in Count Circle	4	13
Number of Participants	13	73 in the field, plus 8 feeder counters
Number of Bird Species Seen	56	95
Number of Birds Seen	15,932	55729
Number of Species Requiring Documentation	0	2 (Indigo Bunting and Scarlet Tanager – both summer residents)
Weather / Road Conditions	Intermittent Snow / Snow and Ice Covered	Gray and Windy / Dry Pavement
Highlights of each CBC	Out of area participants came from Columbia & Springfield, MO and Vicksburg, MS	19 out of 73 field participants were first time Columbia CBCers
	19 Short-eared Owls sitting on fence poles at the end of the day at Hi-Lonesome Prairie	Eastern Screech-Owls in almost every draw going uphill from the Katy Trail between McBaine and Easley
Food Events as Part of Count Day	Breakfast at The Classic and compiling supper at Calgaro's Pizza with lots of good "car food" in between	Organizational holiday gathering in advance of count day and chili dinner compiling session supper

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