

The Chat

Volume 54 Number 3

Columbia Audubon Society

December 2011

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

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

Eighteen Months Later...

As a newcomer to CAS governance when I began in May, 2010, I conferred with as many current and past Board members as I could, wanting to find out what goals members had for the Chapter and what they perceived were the impediments to achieving those goals.

The goals were easy to identify; they are spelled out, though broadly, in Article II of our Bylaws: "to promote an understanding and appreciation of the unique and important natural habitats of Missouri, especially mid-Missouri, the birds and wildlife they support, and their benefits to humans." Easy enough. That is our "Purpose."

Impediments that were identified were primarily these: declining membership, major costs associated with the deteriorating rental house at Wildhaven and with printing all copies of "The Chat" and, of course, the Scott's Branch Trail. Although these problems have not been solved to everyone's satisfaction, we have made significant progress on all.

***Membership** is increasing. (At November's meeting we even welcomed a 7-year old boy and his mother as new members; several rows behind them was a not-so-new, mighty fine birder, about 15-years old.) We hope that all new members will join some of our field trips and that they will become active in the Chapter's activities.

***Costs** are being reduced by about \$3600 per year thanks to many members having agreed to receive "The Chat" via e-mail. We lost revenue but escaped escalating maintenance costs by no longer renting out the Wildhaven house.

***The Scott's Branch Trail** resolution, though not to our liking, at least allows Audubon close watch and final say on construction and placement issues. The Board's attitude, I think, is determination to get beyond our valiant but lost battle and continue to improve the Sanctuary in ways that will make it a beautiful place for wildlife, people, and nature education programs.

I thank the Board for all its work and Chapter members for their help and support of the Board and Audubon activities. Columbia Audubon Society is a great place to volunteer.

In April or May, CAS will be selecting several new officers and Board members. Please let me know if you would like to become involved in Chapter governance and planning. Call me at 424-4471 or e-mail me at hinkelh@missouri.edu.

Howard Hinkel
Columbia Audubon Society President



Inside this issue:

Christmas Bird Count	2
Eagle Bluffs	2
Program Update	2
Tips for Tyros	3
Field Trips	4
Parking Lot	5
Book Review	5

Christmas Bird Count and Chili Supper

Date: Saturday, December 17, 2011

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Place: Community of Christ Church
1111 Fairview Road

Program: Potluck dinner begins at 6:00 p.m. immediately followed by compilation of the day's sightings.

Contact person: Laura Hillman, 442-3703 (leave a message) or hillmanl@missouri.edu

This is your chance to hear about what birds were most common and what species were missed. We'll also learn if there were any unexpected species found. The Christmas Bird Count is about "Citizen Science" at work. It reflects volunteers (Citizen Scientists) collecting data for scientific use.

Walking at Eagle Bluffs during Waterfowl Hunting Season

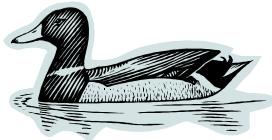
In October 1999, representatives of Columbia Audubon Society and the Audubon Society of Missouri met with Eagle Bluffs CA manager, Jim Lovelace and Jim D. Wilson, State Ornithologist, to discuss access for birders and other wildlife viewers during the period generally known as "waterfowl hunting season". The discussion led to the 1 to 3 p.m. daily access along the main road in Eagle Bluffs that we continue to enjoy today.

This fall a question arose regarding pedestrian access to areas behind closed gates with signage reading, "Authorized Vehicles Only" or a similar message. For most of the year, these areas are open to people on foot. What is the rule during the "waterfowl hunting season"?

Vic Bogosian, manager of Eagle Bluffs, explains that these areas are off limits to walkers during the various waterfowl hunting seasons, even during the 1 to 3 p.m. period. He acknowledges that the signs are not clear on this, and hopes to have better signage in the future.

For personal safety and for the welfare of birds seeking refuge in "no hunting" zones, all areas behind closed gates at Eagle Bluffs CA are closed to vehicles and to pedestrians during the waterfowl hunting seasons.

Edge Wade
ASM Conservation Partnership Coordinator



Program update from VP Julie Fisher

After the Christmas bird count, CAS will kick off the new year with terrific guest speakers focused on various aspects of conservation.

January 18, 2012: Paul Nelson, Forest Ecologist for the Mark Twain National Forest presents, "Threats to Biodiversity in Missouri".

February 15, 2012: Brad Jacobs will present his work on bird conservation efforts in Mexico and Central America.

March 21, 2012: Mike Leahy will take us on a virtual tour of natural areas across Missouri.

April 18, 2012: Edge Wade will wrap up our year's formal meetings with a presentation on ways all of us can help with Missouri bird conservation.

May 2012: Stay tuned for information about our annual picnic

Our programs begin at 7:00 p.m., followed by a business meeting and refreshments. Join us at the Unitarian-Universalist Church, 2615 Shepard Blvd., Columbia.

Thank you!

Hospitality Update

Thank you to the hosts who have provided delicious treats for the September and October meetings: Delores Clark, Bonnie Heidy, Alice Robinson, and Eric Seaman

December: Christmas Bird Count dinner hosted by membership

January hosts: Kate and Bear Kelly and Jan Mees

February hosts: Nancy Bedan and Lottie Bushman

TIPS FOR TYROS

For a Successful Wild Goose Chase

This month's column is about geese because several species and subspecies are in Missouri in winter and you will likely see them and want to sort out who is who.

CANADA GOOSE (note: that is CANADA, not Canadian)

There are several subspecies of Canada Goose (experts can't decide how many). We'll talk about the two that are most likely to be seen in central Missouri.

The Giant Canada Goose is our resident Canada Goose (that is, around all year long). These are descendants of the geese that Lewis and Clark saw nesting on the bluffs as the Corps of Discovery went up the Missouri River through mid-Missouri. This non-migratory subspecies was thought to be lost to us until a small semi-domesticated flock found at a farm in south Boone County was purchased by the Missouri Department of Conservation and their offspring released into the wild.

Giant Canada Geese are big. They have the white "chin strap" that is characteristic of all Canada and Cackling Geese (see below). They have dark legs, fairly long, gently sloping black bills and sloping foreheads.

In fall and winter, migratory subspecies of Canada Geese appear in mid-Missouri. They may be seen feeding alongside our resident geese. The most common migratory Canada Goose we'll see is the Interior subspecies.

Like the Giant subspecies, Interior Canada Geese have fairly long, gently sloping black bills and sloping foreheads. The Interior geese are noticeably smaller. You can see the size difference easily as you scan a feeding flock.

CACKLING GOOSE (split from Canada Goose in recent years)

Now we're digging deeper into what taxonomists call the "white-chinned goose complex." Ornithologists have decided that the diversity of these geese goes beyond subspecies, to the point that several subspecies formerly classified as Canada Goose are now recognized as subspecies of a newly accepted species: Cackling Goose.

In migration, as they pass through Missouri, one subspecies of Cackling Goose is likely to join the feeding flocks of Giant and Interior Canada Goose. The most likely Cackling Goose to visit central Missouri is the RICHARDSON'S CACKLING GOOSE.

Richardson's Cackling Goose is not much smaller than the Interior Canada Goose. The best field marks to separate the two: Richardson's Cackling Goose has a rounder head, a stubby, steep-sloped bill (pug nose look) and a steeply vertical forehead. The noticeably short and thick neck may be best observed in flight.

Be very careful when checking your field guide to help separate CANADA and CACKLING GOOSE. The older the field guide, the less helpful it will be. You may have one printed before or during the splitting process. The big Sibley's has incorrect information; the 5th edition National Geographic has at least one incorrect illustration.

It is especially important to understand that the Cackling Goose species was named for one subspecies found primarily in

California. This is the really tiny one (minima). It is not found in central Missouri. The Richardson's Cackling Goose we see is much larger. It is definitely larger than a Mallard.

SNOW GOOSE

This goose has two color phases (phase here means "form" or "variation"). Most common is the white phase. Two white phase Snow Geese can have offspring that are "blue". These dark gray colored geese with white heads are just a color variation of Snow Goose.

Both the white and blue color phase Snow Geese have orange legs and their orange bills are convexly curved on top. Along the lower bill (called "mandible" in birds) is a thick dark line. This is called a grin patch.

ROSS'S GOOSE

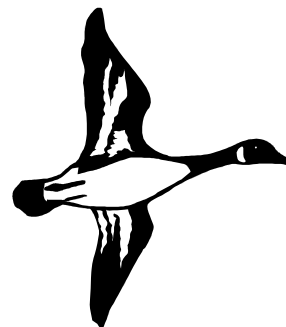
A Ross's Goose looks a lot like a Snow Goose. Use these characteristics to separate them:

- Ross's Goose is 10% smaller than Snow Goose. This doesn't sound like much, but it's obvious when they are close to one another;
- Ross's Goose has a rounder head;
- Ross's Goose does not have the black "grin patch" on the bill. This gives it a "sweeter" looking face;
- Ross's Goose's bill is stubbier and steeper--the equivalent of a "pug nose" compared to the Snow's bill (another part of that "sweet" look);
- When in a feeding flock, the Ross's are often in a small group together, often on the fringes of the main flock;
- When among Snows in a flying formation, the smaller Ross's often have trouble keeping up. They must flap wings more often, may not be evenly spaced in the line, or are often at the end of the line.

GREATER WHITE-FRONTED GOOSE

This mostly gray-brown goose is about the size of a Snow Goose. Distinctive features include stout orange legs, the white band on the forehead and alongside the bill that gives it the species name, and the splotchy black marks on the belly that give it a commonly used name: Speckle Belly.

These tips for goose identification should give you a good start in separating them in the field. Head out to a cornfield to see them feeding, or to a pond or lake to watch them at rest between feeding sessions. Take your field guide with you to double check your call.



FIELD TRIPS--DECEMBER TO MID-JANUARY

Information about these trips is posted on the Audubon Society of Missouri website Event Calendar: <http://www.mobirds.org/ASM/Calendar.aspx>

Columbia Audubon Society field trips are free and open to anyone interested in birds. All trips are probably "a go" even in light rain. If in doubt, contact a trip leader the evening before or one hour before the scheduled meeting time.

These trips are appropriate for adults, teens, and children (accompanied by an adult) who have demonstrated an active interest in birds. Few children under age nine will benefit from these walking trips.

For a winter field trip, bring: Binoculars, field guide, water, layered clothing (remember hat and gloves).

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10

- Location: Grindstone Nature Area (destination changed due to deer hunt at Rock Bridge Memorial State Park)
- Details : Trip co-sponsored with Songbird Station. Beginners especially welcome. Meet at Songbird Station at 8:00 to caravan to Grindstone Nature Area. We'll return to the store between 10:00 and 10:30 for coffee and donuts.
- Contact Person: Allison Vaughn, 573-703-6448.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13

- Location : Columbia Audubon Nature Sanctuary
- Details : Meet at the sanctuary entrance at the Cunningham stub off Bray at 8:30 a.m.
- Contact Person : Leaders Bill Mees 445-7781 and Howard Hinkel

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17

- Christmas Bird Count. People will be in teams in the field and watching feeders at home.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2012

- Location: Forum Wetlands
- Details: Trip co-sponsored with Songbird Station. Beginners especially welcome. Meet at Songbird Station at 8:30 to caravan to the wetlands. We'll return to the store between 10:00 and 10:30 for coffee and donuts.
- Contact Person: Laura Hillman, 573-442-3703

TUESDAY, JANUARY 17, 2012

- Location : Columbia Audubon Nature Sanctuary
- Details : Meet at the sanctuary entrance at the Cunningham stub off Bray at 8:30 a.m.
- Contact Person : Leaders Bill Mees 445-7781 and Howard Hinkel

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2012

- Location : Columbia Audubon Nature Sanctuary
- Details : Trip co-sponsored with Songbird Station. Beginners especially welcome. Meet at Songbird Station at 8:00 to caravan to the sanctuary or join us at the sanctuary at the Cunningham stub entrance off Bray at 8:30 a.m. We'll return to the store about 10:00 for coffee and donuts
- Contact Person : Leaders Bill Mees 445-7781 and Howard Hinkel



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Hospitality

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Bird Counts

Laura Hillman (see above)
Allison Vaughn (see above)

Past President

*Vanessa Melton
vandawn@hotmail.com

Summary of Proposed Layout and Design of CANS Parking Lot

Howard Hinkel

Columbia Audubon Society (CAS) continues to make improvements to Columbia Audubon Nature Sanctuary. These improvements are intended to make the sanctuary a destination for nature enthusiasts.

In that vein, CAS is designing a small parking lot that will be a more welcoming entrance to the property. It will also provide a convenient location for off-street parking and thus, minimize congestion and intrusion on our neighbors.

The parking lot's entry driveway would be centered on Cunningham and would be 24 feet wide and 29 feet long (leading directly to the parking area itself).

The parking area would be 60 feet wide and 34 feet deep, thus allowing 4 parking spaces on each side of a center driveway for a total of 8 spaces. (Each space would be 8 ½ feet wide and 18 feet deep, thereby meeting the City code.)

The Scott's Branch Trail (bike trail) will pass between the parking lot and Cunningham; hence it will cross the parking lot's proposed entrance driveway.

Timetable is uncertain. We had hoped for Fall / Winter construction.

Funding required: The only cost to CAS would be for concrete. At its October meeting, the Board approved spending up to \$6,000 for the concrete. Engineering and construction costs are being donated. Concrete was selected because it has the lowest maintenance cost.



Did you know?

December 8, 2011: Snow goose population at wetland areas is at its peak.

Source: Missouri Department of Conservation, 2011 Natural Events Calendar

Field Guide Recommendation for Those In Between

Howard Hinkel

Although my background as an advanced birder still lies darkly before me, I nonetheless am studying Kenn Kaufman's Field Guide to Advanced Birding, 2nd edition, 2011. This seems a good book for those of us making progress with identifying species according to some standard field marks--wing bars, patterns, "giss" and so on. As Kaufman says, his guide is not about memorizing field marks but about "truly understanding what you see and hear" (p.7).

This is a dense, challenging book; a general description would be reductive. Maybe it is best to focus on a particular segment (pp. 138 – 40) that suggests how Kaufman works throughout. These pages focus on "Field Exercises for Improving Your Identification Skills." The following are three of those exercises.

*Find a common, readily identifiable bird with a complicated pattern of field marks and describe it in details, not in generalities. Kaufman recommends the Killdeer (and other Plovers) because of its complicated face pattern. I would suggest the pattern of blue, black, and white in the Blue Jay.

*Explain how you would describe a strikingly beautiful bird without reference to its color or markings. Kaufman suggests a male Vermilion Flycatcher; I would try one of our Orioles or Tanagers.

*Make and fill out a checklist, not of species, but of parts of the bird. This list would resemble a species checklist but would use bird topography terms such as scapulars, lesser coverts, or median coverts. Kaufman suggests that a good look at a perched Vesper Sparrow "might allow us to determine that the rusty color on its shoulders was limited to the lesser coverts—so fill in that line on the checklist."

Three other exercises, more briefly, are: notice some new or unfamiliar thing about a familiar bird; find a bird that cannot be identified with certainty and try to learn why that is the case; don't count species in your list lest you become complacent with the increasing numbers rather than increasing knowledge.

The common denominator in all sections of this guide is the author's insistence on forcing ourselves to look at and learn details, especially those that can be found after we have identified the bird before us.

Columbia Audubon Society Membership

Dues support Columbia Audubon Society functions such as the nine issues of our newsletter (*The Chat**), the Christmas Bird Count, educational initiatives with schools, and property maintenance. The membership is for 12 months. Make checks payable to the Columbia Audubon Society. Mail the check with this form to: Columbia Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1331, Columbia, MO 65205.

Check membership category: Student (\$10.00) Individual (\$15.00) Family (\$25.00) Donor (\$50.00)
 Friend/Business sponsor (\$300.00) Accept my donation of \$ _____

Name _____ Phone _____

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Columbia Audubon Society wants to thank our corporate sponsor: **Songbird Station**—selected by the Columbia Chamber of Commerce as the 2011 Small Business of the Year. Songbird Station is located at the corner of Forum and Chapel Hill, 573-446-5941, or on the web at www.songbirdstation.com

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