

February-November
2009

The Warbler

Newsletter of the Friends of War Bluff Valley Sanctuary
Illinois Audubon Society

Inside
This Issue

War Bluff
Nature
Calendar 1

Stewardship 1

Focus on
River Otters 2

Acknow-
ledgements 3

Membership
Information 4

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The Nature Calendar

As the Nature Calendar came to a close last February the first wave of woodcocks had arrived—filling the shrubby fields with their ritual song and dance routine. Joining the winter serenade were chorus frogs, spring peepers, barred owls, red bats and coyotes.

Early March brought the full, ear-splitting chorus of spring peepers lyrically entwined with the comical snores of the crayfish frogs and the clipped squeaky croaks of wood frogs.

A March 8 walk along Simmons Creek stirred up a great blue heron and a pair of wood ducks, while the first phoebe of the season began singing from his usual perches around the house. Two weeks later the first brown thrasher was heard singing atop the hackberry tree near the barn.

March closed out with a nest full of bluebird eggs, three yearling white-tailed deer playing tag in the yard, and the



Bluebird eggs in nest.

quintessential sign that spring migration has begun—the return of the first Louisiana waterthrush.

Migration during the first two weeks of April was slow but steady. Blue-gray gnat-

catchers arrived on the 3rd with Northern parula warbler and pine warbler following on the 5th. By the end of the following week Eastern wood peewee, whippoorwill, and yellow-rumped Myrtle warbler had arrived.

Things picked up speed a bit during the second half the month. Blue-winged warblers, prairie warblers, orchard orioles, white-eyed vireos, and two hummingbirds arrived on the 18th. The next day chip-ping sparrows could be heard trilling from the treetops. Indigo buntings showed up on the 14th and two days later scarlet tanager, Kentucky warbler, common yellowthroat warbler, and yellow-breasted chat arrived.

Amidst this flurry of new arrivals from the tropics, our local friends did not go un-

Stewardship

Clearing trails since the January ice-storm have dominated the Stewardship Day projects but they still are not completely cleared! Our intrepid crew continues to saw away as time allows.

Other projects have included reinstalling the barn gutter, replacing rotten window frames on guest cottage, general trail mowing and grooming, monitoring the bluebird trail, and the beginning of a barn remodel for lawn equipment and tool storage.



Dan, Frank & Kevin begin work on new storage area in barn.



John surveys large tree to be cleared from trail.



Volunteers enjoy sharing a meal on Stewardship Day!

Nature Calendar continued

noticed. Turkey gobbling echoed up from the woods, red-shouldered hawks tended nests, and a bobcat was frequently seen.

April also brought rain—not the poetic showers that bring May flowers—but rather torrents of rain. Ten plus inches caused swollen streams and flash floods—just ask any of the twenty-some folks who got stranded at the sanctuary for several hours during the Illinois Audubon Society Spring Gathering!

The first weekend in May revealed the arrival of many new migrating species. The new arrivals included both blue and red-breasted grosbeaks, Swainson's and gray-cheeked thrushes, pine

siskin, catbird, summer tanager, ovenbird, and worm eating, black & white, blackpoll, hooded and black-throated green warblers.

By early May wood frogs and crayfish frogs had long since ended their courtship crooning—taking their place, however, were the soft trill of the gray tree frog (*Hyla versicolor*, the rattling clicks of the cricket frog, and the high-pitched sustained trill of the American toad. Joining in later in the month were bullfrog, green frog, and leopard frog.

The migration frenzy having settled down, June was relatively calm, quiet, and routine. Each morning resident groundhogs, rabbits, and white-tailed does and their fawns were scattered about nibbling the tender clover that comprises much of the “lawn.” Birds were busy incubating eggs or feeding young. And, stunning black and white

striped zebra swallowtail butterflies dominated the Lepidoptera stage.

There were a couple notable exceptions to the June routine. On the 3rd two bobwhite quail wandered through the yard. Throughout the rest of the summer a covey of quail was regularly seen around the sanctuary—most often as they crossed the road from the cover of grass and shrubs on our side to the neighbor's corn field on the other side.

During the night of the 6th I heard (for the first time since living here) the song of a chuck-wills-widow.

By mid-June the buzzy trill of Cope's gray tree frogs (*Hyla chrysoscelis*) and the nasal honking of green tree frogs dominated the night sounds, punctuated by the occasional slap of a beaver's tail on the surface of a nearby pond.

July, with record low high temperatures and nearly five inches of rain, was unchar-



Yellow-breasted chat warbler.

“To my surprise and delight what came out into the water were three river otters.”

River otter swimming in Deer Pond.



Focus on River Otter

As I approached Deer Pond I didn't see the wood duck pair paddling amongst the thick vegetative cover that surrounds the shoreline of Deer Pond. They of course spotted me, and immediately took off, their rising high-pitched “jeeeeeer” trailing after them.

A moment later I heard some commotion and strange sounds coming from the same general area the ducks had been. The sounds were not too dissimilar to some of the strange sounds I've heard wood ducks make, so I was fully expecting to see a couple more ducks emerge. But, to my surprise and delight what came out into the water were three river otters.

The larger one, which I came to discover later was the adult female, swam swiftly towards the middle of the pond making a loud sort of growling trill--the juveniles following close behind. After a short while she guided her brood back to a sunny spot on the far shore. There she set about alternating between grooming herself and the two little ones. When Mom was occupied with her own grooming the kids played rough and tumble games. I watched them for a half hour and never once did any of the three ever stop moving!

Mom then gave the “it's time to move” whistle-like sound and off they went for another paddle in the pond. They alternated between jaunts into the middle, then back to the shoreline. As they worked their way around the shore I surmised that they might eventually return to the sunny spot for another rest and grooming session. I eased my way around to the sunny spot and waited.

Sure enough, twenty minutes later they came ashore within twenty feet of me. I was able to snap a couple photos with my not-so-great camera that you see here and the next page.

Nature Calendar continued

acteristically cool and wet. A snout-nosed butterfly was spotted on the 16th, but for the most part (because of the weather?) butterflies were



White-tailed doe and fawn.

conspicuously absent.

The most notable bird occurrence in July was the possible call of a barn owl. I say "possible" because outside of the recorded voice I have never heard a barn owl. But, each time I heard it, which was actually quite often between the 6th and 25th of July, I would grab my iPod and listening to the live bird in one ear contrasted to the recorded voice heard through the iPod in the other ear, the two sure did

sound the same to me.

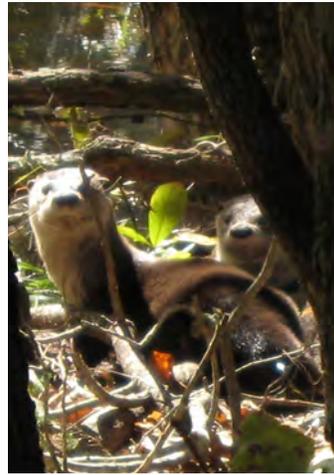
Similar to July, August was also unseasonably cool. The late-blooming summer flowers of August—Joe-pye weed, cup plant, iron weed, bidens and the like—that are normally teaming with nectaring butterflies were eerily unoccupied. Hummingbird numbers were also down; based on the amount of sugar water nectar fed, the population was down by ¼ to ½ of previous years. By the 18th the male hummers had departed. Large numbers of migrating tree swallows were seen and various flycatcher species bunched up at the



Bullfrog.

sanctuary to bulk up on insects for the long journey south.

The wet trend continued through September—7.5



River otter adult-young behind.

inches of rain fell during the month. White-eyed vireos sang almost continuously as they moved through during the first week of the month. A week later Eastern wood peewees and summer and scarlet tanagers dominated the migrants, while the resident red-shouldered hawks patrolled the valley. White-tailed fawns lost their spots, but bluebird fledglings still donned theirs.

October arrived, yet the normally dry, crisp, clear days failed to follow. At just under ten inches of rain for the month, October 2009 was declared the wettest October on record. American toads (ju-

venile males?) started singing on the 4th and, except for the very coolest of evenings, have continued through this day in mid-November. The last two hummingbirds were seen at the feeders on the 7th.

A brief week or two mid-month produced migrating monarch, painted lady, and clouded sulphur butterflies. White-throated sparrows, juncos, and ruby-crowned kinglets arrived from the north on the 18th. Another fun sighting on this day was a family of river otters playing, feeding, grooming, and sunning at Deer Pond.

It is now mid-November. The weather has been warm and dry—reminiscent of a normal October. Winter-resident migrants observed at the beginning of the month included brown creeper, winter wren, and fox sparrow. As I close out the Nature Calendar this time a phoebe sits perched on my front gate, the cry of red-shouldered hawks pierce the air, male cardinals are singing, and spring peepers and chorus frogs are singing in the background. Hmmm—sounds like May around here!

Volunteers

The success of War Bluff Valley Sanctuary is a direct result of fantastic volunteers--many of whom come on a regular basis every month and even between our regularly scheduled Stewardship Days.

Many thanks go to the following people who have volunteered since the last issue of the Warbler.

- John Behl & friends
- Ann Douglas
- Jean Graber
- Kevin Nagele
- Frank & Harriet Schneidinger
- Terri Treacy
- Dan Underwood
- John Wallace

Friends

Thanks to everyone who has become a *Friend* or renewed their membership since February 2009.

Hummingbird

- John Nagel
- Randall & Nancy Schietzelt

Warbler

- Debra Maklezow
- John White

Woodpecker

- Kelly Cichy & Lorezno Cristaudo
- Patricia Ganyard
- Janet Kelley-Harmon
- Susan E. Kaley
- Robert & Janet Keisker
- John & Cindy McKee
- Mary Glenn Kirkland

Michael & Susan Shaw

- Katy Takahashi & Richard Brewer
- Richard & Vicki Zimny

Heron

- Jack Grange & Cathy Gorden
- Bruce & Rita Renwick
- Rod Tally
- Laurel Toussaint

Owl

- Ray, Liesel & Tad Boehmer
- Joan S. Palincsar

Eagle

- Marilyn Campbell
- Mary Anne Harrison

Become a Friend... or Renew Your Membership

Name _____

Date _____

Address _____

Phone _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Email: _____

- _____ \$5
- _____ \$15
- _____ \$25
- _____ \$50
- _____ \$100
- _____ over \$100

- Hummingbird
- Warbler
- Woodpecker
- Heron
- Owl
- Eagle

We invite you to be a Friend of War Bluff Valley Sanctuary. Your membership helps fund the many special projects and equipment needs of the Sanctuary. Membership runs for one year from the date you join and is tax deductible. You will receive two newsletters per year, and good feelings the whole year through. Complete this form and mail it with your check payable to:

I.A.S./War Bluff Valley Sanctuary
 RR 1 Box 216A
 Golconda, IL 62938

Visiting War Bluff Valley Sanctuary

The Sanctuary is open from dawn to dusk every day. Bring drinking water, wear sturdy shoes or boots, and don't forget your binoculars! Please sign in at main kiosk sign--you'll also find trail maps, bird checklists and other information there.

For out-of-town visitors, there are many great choices for lodging or camping in the area. With advance notice it's possible to arrange primitive camping or staying in the guest cabin at the Sanctuary. Call Terri for more information -- 618-683-2222.

Directions: From Golconda, IL take Rte 146 north out of town 3.5 miles to Bushwhack Road (look for brown Wildlife Viewing Area sign) -- turn left -- go another 2.2 miles to Sanctuary entrance on right (IAS sign on left across from drive).

Plan now to come visit your Sanctuary.



Illinois Audubon Society
War Bluff Valley Sanctuary
 RR 1 Box 216A
 Golconda, IL 62938



Save Stamps for Wildlife.
 Return with your renewal or
 send to IAS office.