

The Warbler

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

Events

- Stewardship Days
2nd Saturday each month.
- War Bluff Christmas Bird Count --
December 17, 2006
- Pope County Spring Bird Count --
May 5, 2007

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War Bluff Nature Calendar

text & photos by Terri Treacy

On April 1 blue-gray gnat-catcher and northern parula arrived. The vireos – red eyed, yellow throated, and white eyed were next, and the familiar bee-buzz song of the blue winged warbler announced its arrival.

Three predated turkey eggs were found along the trail. Red buds were blooming and the landscape was bursting with eastern tailed-blue butterflies. Spring beauties graced the forest floor, while tiny bluets brightened the grassy fields.

By the 12th prairie warblers arrived. Bluebells, Dutchmen breeches, squirrel corn, trout lily and bloodroot were blooming in the forest. *Amsonia tabernaemontana*, blue star or blue dogbane, was in full bloom along the roadside where Flicker Creek crosses the road.

By mid-April the whip-

Hundreds of tiger swallow butterflies were seen up and down Bush-whack Road in puddle groups of 10 to 15 individuals. By the time I could get close enough for a photo the groups would break up, leaving only a few individuals.



poor-wills, indigo buntings and hummingbirds had returned. The 24th brought a ½-inch rain, catbirds and black & white and Kentucky warblers. Another ¼ inch fell on the 25th.

The rain continued in May with 1.2 inches on the 1st and 2nd. Bee balm was blooming in the woods and a giant swallowtail butterfly visited the flower garden. The sight and sound of

fireflies and gray tree frogs filled the night air. On the 4th hundreds of new tiger swallowtail butterflies appeared.

On the 5th rose-breasted grosbeaks appeared at the feeders. Other migrants included four more warblers – magnolia, Nashville, Tennessee, and black-throated green, summer and scarlet tanager, wood thrush

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Nest Box Survey

by Andrea Douglas

Monitoring War Bluff's nest box trail was very rewarding. Bluebirds successfully raised 38 chicks compared to last year's 22. Carolina chickadees were able to fledge 20 -- two more than last season.

The first Egg of Year Award goes to the chickadees for their April 1st egg, beating out the bluebird's egg on the 2nd. Since chickadees have only one brood per season, the last egg was a bluebird's on June 30th, with July being last month with chicks.

Several losses occurred.

Three days after recording 5 healthy nestlings, it was a surprise to find a rat snake curled up in the box. In another case, 5 titmice died over a period of several days -- predation of the mother is suspected. Eleven bluebird hatchlings were lost in all. The chickadees fared better, fledging all their hatchlings.

Of the 14 boxes on the trail, 3 of them are Peterson-style and the others are rectangular. All of the Peterson boxes were used, but only 9 of the rectangular boxes were used. It's interesting to note that the 2 unused boxes were used last year. Two nesting attempts were made in each

Peterson box, while only 3 of the rectangular boxes had two attempts. It's not scientific, but it is interesting.

All the results were given to The Birdhouse Network, a citizen-science project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Participants gather information and submit it to a national database -- more than what one researcher could do in a lifetime. Any person can participate and while gathering valuable information, they are also providing nesting sites. Check out <http://birds.cornell.edu> and prepare this winter for next season's monitoring.

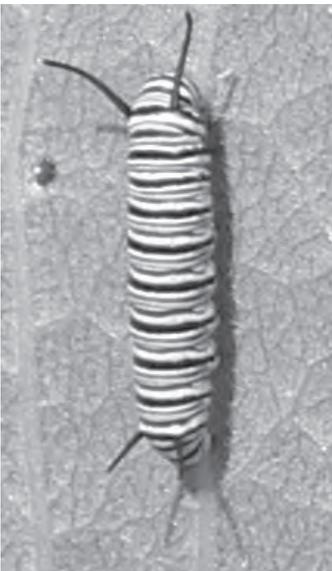


Andrea checks a nest box.



Squirrel Bob gets a little drink from Lily Pond.

*I encountered
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Monarch caterpillar. The tiny dot to the left of the caterpillar is a monarch egg.

and ovenbird. On the 8th a Baltimore oriole was in the cherry tree near the house. On the 9th bull frogs joined the nightly serenade.

The next day 1.25 inches of rain fell, followed by an additional ½-inch on the 11th. On the 12th a Cooper's hawk was seen

perching near the house gate. By the 13th the rose-breasted grosbeaks and the white-throated sparrows had moved on. On the 15th we got another ¼ inch of rain and the Japanese honeysuckle was in full bloom and full fragrance – ahh – the one time of year you get to love an invasive species!

By the 21st of May butterflies were spectacular – little wood satyr, eastern tailed-blue, white azure, tiger swallowtail, red spotted purple and pearl crescent delighted the eye as I walked the trails, and avian parents were busy taking care of their broods.

The begging calls of fledgling chickadees and titmice permeated the airwaves. A hollow tree held the hungry cries of nestling downy woodpeckers. On two occasions I encountered fledgling Carolina wrens that exploded like popcorn from the thickets as I passed by. Their parents were frantic.

Cricket frogs joined the nightly chorus. White-tail bucks were in velvet.

June brought another 1.5 inches of rain and the colorful blooms of butterfly weed, brown-eyed Susan, trumpet creeper, elderberry and yucca. Juvenile hummers had joined their parents at the feeders, and a male juvenile orchard oriole also helped himself to the sweet nectar.

July was like a tropical rain forest here – 5 inches of rain by the 14th. Spotted white-tail fawns were abundant. Wildflowers continued to bloom – St. Johnswort, narrow-leaved mountain mint, sneezeweed, tall bellflower, monard, ruella and rose pink.

On the 11th black swallowtail butterfly larva were feeding on the parsley. On the 16th a green heron was seen at Little Pond, and on the 17th a worm-eating warbler flitted about in some trees next to the yard gate.

Another 3-inch rain came on the 27th. Hummingbirds were getting scarce.

In early September glow-worms dotted the ground at night, and green darner dragonflies hawked insects over the fields and ponds. Also hawking insects were various flycatchers, especially eastern wood peewee and phoebe. The resident beaver at Dragonfly Pond began felling willow trees and continued through October.

On the 13th, a skunk digging for a meal in the middle of the trail was so engrossed in his project he didn't notice me standing there (at a respectable distance) enjoying the opportunity to observe him going about his business. As he finished up and began to amble back into the brush alongside the trail he finally noticed me. He swung into action ready for combat – fur and tail all puffed up he charged at me a few steps. I quickly turned sideways and pretended to ignore him until he no longer felt threatened and swaggered back into the brush.

As I continued on and passed his hiding spot he came out and charged after me again! I took off running and didn't stop until I was out of range of his defensive spray. He was really steaming mad now – made several more steps toward me, but I said "good-bye" and took off.

Almost 3 inches of rain fell on the 17th and 14 wood ducks flew in to roost on Dragonfly Pond. On the 22 and 23 we received another 5-inch rain, followed by an additional ½-inch four days later.

Perhaps the most remarkable sighting in September occurred on the 29th when thousands of monarchs, which had been roosting, perfectly camouflaged in the trees along Bushwhack Road, peeled off their roosts in a cloud of orange and black as I drove by.

Fall colors fall colors became more noticeable at the beginning of October. The hummingbirds were gone, but the first white-throated sparrow was heard singing on the 9th. Another 2.5 inches of rain fell the following week and the occasional American toad could be heard singing. I noticed the first junco on the 25th, two days before another 3-inch rain. I spotted a doe and her still-spotted fawn several times.

During the first week of November a sharp-shinned hawk was seen several times, and the discovery of a little tale-tell pile of feathers confirmed its success in capturing its prey.

Wood ducks continued to roost each night on Dragonfly Pond. Although they are much too shy to allow visual observation, I enjoy listening to them as they carry on conversations all night long.

Another fun sound coming from Dragonfly Pond is that of the beaver slapping his tail. The sound is reminiscent of someone doing a cannonball off the high dive. I just can't help but anthropomorphize that he's having a wonderful, playful time.

To paraphrase Thoreau, we have reached autumn, the sunset of the year – an appropriate end to this edition of the War Bluff Nature Calendar.

Volunteers

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

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

- Carol Crisp
- Andrea & Dave Douglas
- Jean Graber
- Deb Hogg
- Kevin Nagele
- Frank Rustin
- Frank & Harriet Schneidinger
- John Wallace & Karen Frailey

Stewardship Day is the 2nd Saturday of every month!!

Friends

Thanks to everyone who has become a Friend or renewed their membership since May 2006.

Hummingbird

Vernon Kleen

Woodpecker

Donald Funk

Don Goerne

Michael & Susan Shaw

Owl

Bruce & Rita Renwick

Other donations

Rose Weisburd - help with brochure layout

Jean Graber - John Deere riding lawn mower

Don Goerne - chain saw safety equipment

To become a Friend of War Bluff Valley Sanctuary please fill out the form on the other side of this page. For donations such as tools, equipment, benches, memorials, etc. please contact Terri Treacy, Sanctuary Chair, at 618-683-2222.



Kevin Nagele repairs roof of kestrel nest box.



Clint Meyer - cookin' up some mealworms at IAAD.

Stewardship

Our volunteer accomplishments have been fantastic this season. Two long-term projects were completed by the end of July -- the color brochure & trail map (enclosed), and the herpetofauna inventory (report to appear in future Warbler). These two projects were funded by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Preservation Grant. These grants are funded by the taxpayer Wildlife Fund

check-off on your Illinois state tax form -- please be sure to donate to this valuable funding mechanism when you file your 2006 Illinois taxes.

At the beginning of the season all the equipment was maintained, including doing the initial 50-hour hydraulic oil change on the new tractor. Trails were kept mowed and groomed and bad light fixtures in Kestrel Hall were replaced. Annuals to attract butterflies and hummingbirds were planted.

The entry sign/kiosk is in the process of being remodeled. The back side has new literature boxes and information signs installed, and the front is scheduled for a new paint job. We've also begun the long-term project of routing new trail signs.

And last, but certainly not least, volunteers really pitched in before, during, and after Shawnee Audubon's annual Insect Awareness & Appreciation Day. Thanks everyone!!



Harriet Schneidinger



Jean Graber



Frank Schneidinger & Frank "Rusty" Rustin

