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NOVEMBER 2012

The Warbler

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

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Over the wintry
forest, winds
howl in rage
with no leaves to
blow.

~ Natsume Soseki,
1867-1916

NATURE JOURNAL

by Terri Treacy

This edition of the Nature Journal is drawn from the online version started February 2012. To keep up as the year goes along please follow the Nature Journal at <http://warbluffvalleysanctuary.org>. Be sure to "subscribe" so that you will be notified by email when a new entry has been made.

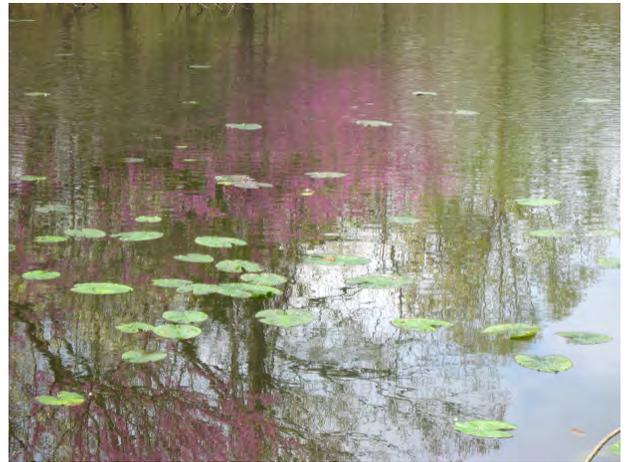
On the afternoon of February 8th twenty sandhill cranes flew north over the sanctuary. They were flying so high that if it weren't for their raucous vocalizations their passing would have gone unnoticed. Chorus frogs began chorusing at the beginning of the month, while a few spring peepers made intermittent calls on the warm nights a couple weeks before that.

On February 9th the fabulous courtship display of the American woodcock began. The now shrubby former agricultural fields at the Sanctuary are perfect habitat for this shy, seldom seen member of the scolopacidea (shorebird) family.

I thought I heard a phoebe singing on February 22nd, but on the 28th there was no question; a phoebe was singing! Bluebird couples were carrying on long discussions about the various nest box options. The incessant "peter peter peter" of the titmice and the "chicka dee dee dee" of the Carolina chickadees rounded out the sound of morning.

On March 18th, I returned from vacation to discover Spring had arrived at War Bluff. Tiger and zebra swallowtails had emerged, a three-foot long green speckled kingsnake slithered through the grass, very vocal red-shouldered hawks buzzed about overhead, and bluebirds had started building nest in nest box near vegetable garden. Oh, yea, and ticks were on the move, too!

The first bird heard the next morning was the Louisiana waterthrush--nearly a month earlier than usual! Plants seemed to be in step with the birds. Redbuds, oaks, maples, and sassafras were all blooming and the forest floor was covered in a carpet of spring beauties. Everyone was hoping that the insects that feed on the plants and in turn feed the birds would also be in sync.



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What a difference a year makes!

By December 2011 southeastern Illinois had achieved an all time annual rainfall record of 72.86 inches. As of this fall, the drought of 2012 has left us about 12 inches below normal. The good news is, the winter of 2011-12 was calm – no ice storms, no derechos, no winter tornadoes, no monster snowstorms. Here's looking to another calm winter ahead!

PAST EVENTS

Illinois Ornithological Society Field Trip

On May 19th a group of about a dozen Illinois Ornithological Society (IOS) members visited War Bluff Valley Sanctuary. A great kickoff to the day was a really good look at a pair of blue grosbeak in the shrubby field behind Kestrel Hall. Many IOSers are northerners, so getting to see our prairie warblers was quite a thrill, too. Towards the end of the morning walk we came across a species that is all too common to many of those northerners -- *garlic mustard*! It was a patch that Ann Douglas and I had missed on our garlic mustard obliteration foray the month previous, and it was flowering. Our guests, many accustomed to the garlic mustard scourge, happily dove right in and within an hour we had pulled the entire patch. We can't thank our visitors enough!!

Land for Learning Institute Road Scholars Visit War Bluff

On April 11, Land for Learning Institute Road Scholar participants enjoyed visiting the Sanctuary. After a morning bird walk everyone regrouped for lunch. Curt Carter led the group in story-telling and interactive environmental awareness and education discussions before heading out on another, short afternoon walk. The arrival overnight of a cold front made for a gorgeous day, but it apparently affected the birds – they were quiet and oddly absent! One new arrival was spotted though, a palm warbler. Folks also enjoyed seeing several butterfly species: pearly crescent, painted lady and blue azure. Blue star (*Amsonia tabernaemontana*) was a treat for people who had never seen this lovely wildflower.

Bluebird Nest Box Workshop

On February 11, 2012

A group of 15 people,
led by John Wallace and assisted by Dan Underwood, Frank Schneidinger, Ann Douglas and Terri Treacy, made Peterson-style bluebird nest boxes.



On March 20th field sparrows could be heard singing from every corner of the Sanctuary. Other local residents busy communicating with their mates included cardinals, titmouse, Carolina chickadees, blue jays, red-shouldered hawks, barred owls, turkeys, etc. And a downy woodpecker spent the day drilling on the TV antenna!

With the temps in the low 80s, the first day of spring felt more like the first day of summer. The clues continued to add up—we were in for a horrendously hot and dry summer. March 21st also brought the first brown thrasher and leopard frogs chorusing from all the ponds!

By March 29th whip-poor-wills had returned from their southern wintering grounds. The next day, chipping sparrows arrived. And, 3 days later blue-winged and northern parula warblers, white-eyed vireos and blue-gray gnatcatchers arrived.

On April 7th the first ruby-throated hummingbird was seen. Others were seen again, but none visited the nectar feeders until April 17th.

A very *unwelcome* guest was also spotted on April 7th—garlic mustard! Ann Douglas and I pulled, bagged and hauled away all we could find. Garlic mustard started popping



up along Simmons Creek a few years ago. So far we've been able to keep it pulled by hand.

On April 12th a palm warbler was seen, as were pearly crescent, painted lady and blue azure butterflies. Blue star was in full bloom. April 16th a summer tanager was seen, and the next day yellow-rumped Myrtle and common yellowthroat warblers and rough-winged swallows were all seen.

April 25th brought a case of the blues to the Sanctuary. Baby bluebirds and blue-winged teal! The first clutch of bluebirds fledged their nest, and spotted at Dragonfly Pond were a pair of blue-winged teal. The next morning there were 14 (7 pair) blue-winged teal at the pond! Other migrants that day included Tennessee warbler, rose-breasted grosbeak, indigo bunting, great-crested flycatcher, and tree swallow.

Spring Bird Count on May 5th added many first-of-the-season migrants to the list—see separate article.

On May 20th a turkey could be heard raising quite a ruckus in the woods below the house. A short time later a bobcat was seen fleeing the woods. Since it didn't have a turkey in its mouth nor was it covered in feathers, it's assumed the turkey won the battle. Of course, the bobcat may have snatched a few eggs before getting run out of town.

By mid-June, with migration madness well past, the breeding birds had settled into their routines of incubating, feeding and fledging the little ones. Many, like the bluebirds, titmice, chickadees and Carolina wrens were already fledging

their second broods.

One of the most enjoyable experiences of the season is listening to baby birds practice their songs. Not all juveniles are automatic virtuosos! It's a struggle for some to get it right. For a couple weeks I heard what for sure was a flycatcher, but I really I couldn't tell if it was a phoebe trying to imitate a peewee, or a peewee with a hoarse, gravelly voice of a phoebe! For several days a field sparrow started out just right, but the "ping pong ball" ending was actually much closer sounding to the towhees' "drink your tea" ending.

June, July and August brought seemingly endless days of 100+ degrees and no rain. One upside to the drought was the drying of Cedar Pond into a mudflat, which attracted lots of herons and possibly other shorebirds while no one was looking.

Throughout the month of August a bachelor group of about 10 white-tailed bucks could be seen each morning lingering in the tall foxtail grass along Bushwack Road. Others joining the breakfast club were hundreds of indigo buntings gorging on seed and insects before migrating south.

The remnants of Hurricane Isaac gave some relief with a 5.6-inch rain on September 2nd and another 4/10s on September 4th. After three hot, dry months the pungent scent of moist vegetation permeating the cool morning air was aromatherapy in the most visceral sense. Birds seen on the 4th included blue grosbeak, cedar waxwing, brown thrasher, eastern phoebe, empidonax flycatcher (refused to speak leaving exact identity a secret), warbling vireo, white-eyed vireo, summer tanager, towhee, indigo bunting, field sparrow, American goldfinch, mourning dove, titmouse, chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, bluebird, cardinal, bluejay, ruby-throated hummingbird, Carolina wren, flicker, red-shouldered hawk, and wood duck.

By mid-October, white-throated sparrows and juncos arrived and took the indigo buntings' place at the roadside seed bar.

White-tailed deer had shed their auburn-colored summer coats for their grayish-brown winter coats. And, this year's fawns had completely lost their baby spots.

During October two visitors were lucky enough to spot bobcats. October was also notable for hundreds of American robins in large feeding groups, lots of bluejays and flickers, and the occasional troop of cedar waxwings cruising through.

November has come and is nearly gone. Sure signs that autumn is clearly sliding into winter are the early morning frost flowers, the family of bluebirds feasting on the poke berries right outside the window, and a yellow-bellied sapsucker checking out the maple trees.



COUNTING BIRDS AT WAR BLUFF

by Ann Douglas and Terri Treacy

SPRING BIRD COUNT

Per usual, the shrubland warblers, prairie, blue-winged common yellow-throat and chat had high counts. Right behind were Tennessee warblers, with a count of 16 individuals. Other warblers included northern parula, Kentucky, magnolia, chestnut sided, American redstart and Cape May.

Two other warblers, worm eating and black and white were found in the exact same spots they are always found each year. The worm eating on the hillside along Turkey Trot and the black and white just before North Pond.

Speaking of North Pond, this was the site of the “best” birds of the day—a female wood duck with 12 babies in tow. A wood duck pair was also recorded at Deer Pond. Cedar Pond added a green heron to the list. Normally seen at Cedar or Barn Ponds, but missing on the count day, was belted kingfisher.

Other birds that were noticeably absent on count day included American goldfinch, white-breasted nuthatch, Louisiana waterthrush and American crow. Not absent, but in lower numbers than normal included hummingbird, red-eyed vireo and Eastern wood peewee.

Two fairly common birds didn't announce their presence until the end of the day—wood thrush and ovenbird were heard singing their distinctive songs on far west side of the sanctuary in the late afternoon.

In addition to the normal sightings of red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, a broad-winged hawk joined the *buteo* species. Among other birds of prey, the only owl was a barred owl, which waited until nearly 9 pm to make a peep (ah, I mean, hoot).

2012 BLUEBIRD TRAIL RESULTS

With the mild winter in the beginning of the year, the bluebirds started nesting early. We first started checking the boxes on March 25 and two boxes had completed nests and two other boxes already had eggs. The Peterson box by the parking lot had four bluebird eggs and the slot box by our kiosk had two.

Just eight of our fourteen boxes had any kind of nesting activity in the spring. Carolina wrens fledged five out of five eggs, the titmouse fledged three of five and bluebirds fledged 15 out of 19 eggs. While purple martins checked out the martin house, it was tree swallows that raised a family. Some bluebird boxes had completed nests but never had eggs. A moss nest was started in another box, then had a grass nest built on top before it too was abandoned.

Then the heat spell came. Some nests were started and left. Some had a few eggs that never did anything and after a month of no changes were discarded. It wasn't until late July that there was one more successful bluebird nesting with four babies fledging. The total of successful fledglings was 27 for the year.

In 2011 we had a total of 26 fledglings out of 52 eggs. We didn't have as many eggs this year but ended up with a higher percentage of success. We were only monitoring our nest boxes, which exclude all the natural nest sites. We would welcome assistance in checking our nest boxes since more frequent checks would help in determining when the first egg was laid and when the first egg hatched and when the birds fledged, all information reported to the Nest Watch survey for Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

WHAT'S ALL THE COMMOTION?

by Terri Treacy

[July 5, 2012] It's about 6 pm. I'm sitting on the couch watching the news when out of the blue, Topaz, the cat, sits up from her slumber in the bay window overlooking the front yard and begins to growl. When a domestic critter growls I've learned it's best to check it out. What I notice when I peer out the window are LOTS of songbirds—cardinal, titmouse, chickadee, bluebird, indigo bunting, common yellowthroat warbler, maybe more, I'm not sure, all perched fairly low on shrubs or flitting about in close proximity to one another. Strange—why would a cat growl at birds? And, why would so many different species be hanging out in such close proximity to one another? I'd never seen such a thing.

Topaz continues to growl, so I keep scanning the landscape. What does she see? Then I notice that she's not looking *out*, she's looking *down*. Following the direction of her intense gaze I see it, a rattlesnake slithering across the yard! By now Jade is barking because she knows something exciting is happening and she must get in on the action. Finally the dog and cat calm down and I'm able to watch the rest of show in relative peace.

As the rattler moves across the yard it continues to cause quite a commotion with the birds. They each seem to be taking turns flying low, right over the snake, as if to harass it. A couple of times the titmouse hovers over it like a hummingbird over a flower. The path of the snake is easily tracked by the commotion and antics of the birds. I lose sight of the snake as moves under some shrubs near the fence. I believe the snake finds a way out of the yard because the bird activity inside the yard ceases, but like a wave receding out to sea I can see the activity continuing beyond the fence.

This incredible experience is such an important reminder that non-human animals have a language and we can learn much from paying attention to it.

VOLUNTEERS

The success of War Bluff Valley Sanctuary is a direct result of fantastic volunteers. Many thanks go to the following people who collectively spent over 200 hours this past year volunteering.

- John Behl
- Ann Douglas
- Kevin Nagele
- Georgia Norman
- Frank & Harriet Schneidinger
- Norma Tomas
- Terri Treacy
- Dan Underwood
- IOS field trip participants to WBVS who helped pull garlic mustard!

SPECIAL THANKS

As a reminder, we have Drs. Richard and Jean Graber to thank for their extraordinary donation of War Bluff Valley Sanctuary. But, the giving did not end there. Over the years Jean has continued to give and this year was no exception. By adding to her previous donation to the WBVS stewardship fund we were able to purchase a utility vehicle for transporting volunteers and tools to the job site. Thank you, Jean! You've made our volunteers very happy!

FRIENDS

HUMMINGBIRD

Jack White

WARBLER

Vern Kleen

WOODPECKER

Kelly Cichy & Lorenzo Cristaudo
 Donald Funk
 Debbie Newman

HERON

Karen Frailey & John Wallace
 Robert and Janet Keisker

OWL

Arnold Bock
 Ray, Liesel and Tad Boehmer
 Mary Anne Harrison
 Joan Palincsar

Become a Friend....Renew Your Membership....Give a Gift Membership

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ Phone _____

City, State, Zipcode _____

Email _____

- _____ \$5 **HUMMINGBIRD**
- _____ \$15 **WARBLER**
- _____ \$25 **WOODPECKER**
- _____ \$50 **HERON**
- _____ \$100 **OWL**
- _____ over \$100 **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 one to two newsletters per year, and good feelings the whole year through. Complete this form and mail it with your check payable to:

IAS/War Bluff Valley Sanctuary
 228 Bushwack Road
 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 the 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 cottage at the sanctuary. Call Terri for more information at 618-683-2222 or email warbluff@shawneaudubon.org.

Directions: From Golconda, IL take Rte. 146 north out of town 3.5 miles to Bushwack 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.

War Bluff Valley Sanctuary
Celebrating Our Volunteers and *Friends!*

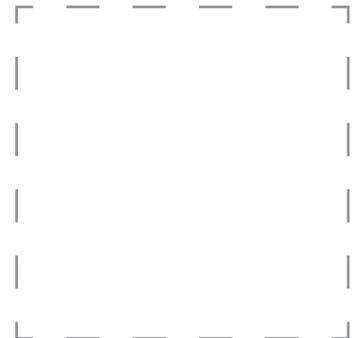
For every project that gets accomplished at War Bluff Valley Sanctuary there is a volunteer or a *Friend* to thank. It's only with the time and talent of our volunteers and the financial support of our *Friends* that we are able to offer visitors to War Bluff a pleasant and memorable experience.

To our Volunteers and *Friends*,
may your holiday season be joyous
and your new year filled with the
dazzling delights of nature's bounty.

-- Peace



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