

SPRINGFIELD AUDUBON SOCIETY

WINTER 2019

President's Message

President's Report

The Springfield Audubon Society has many activities scheduled in 2019. The Annual Meeting is scheduled for January 20 at the Adams Wildlife Sanctuary. We will start with a bird walk at 1:00 PM followed by a short meeting to approve the slate of officers and board members for 2019. A potluck meal will follow. please bring a covered dish to share.

The Decatur Raptor Center will present Raptor Focus Programs on February 21 and March 21. Both programs will feature live animals. Be sure to bring your camera. The programs will both start at 6:00 PM and there will be a \$5.00 charge per person.

The Springfield Audubon Society will sponsor a field trip to the Decatur Raptor Center on February 23. Details will be available soon.

Let us know if you have any interesting bird sightings at your feeders or in the area.

The Society has a need for volunteers to assist us with our obligations to Adams Wildlife Sanctuary and help us with society activities. We need volunteers to organize treats for meetings, setup and tear down for meetings, attend Thursday workdays at the Sanctuary and help at fundraisers for The Society to name just a few of our needs. Please contact me at 899-6150 or mike@holinga.org.

I hope that you have all had an enjoyable holiday and I look forward to visiting with you at the Annual Meeting.

Mike Holinga

Birds of interest in our area Fall 2018 to early Winter 2019

LAKE SPRINGFIELD

Red necked Grebe
Eared Owl

Black bellied Whistling Duck

Long Tailed Duck

Franklin's Gull

Black Scoter

Surf Scoter

Nipper

Short



Short Eared Owl by W Huckabee

All of us at Audubon are bird and nature lovers, but many of us are cat lovers as well. We lament the negative impact that feral cats have on our birds and other wildlife, but we also have compassion and regard for the feral cat, which, we believe, is simply trying to avoid suffering and is trying to feed itself and its family.

Dr. John Boone gave an interesting presentation at our December meeting of the Springfield Audubon Society on the use of TNR (trap-neuter-return) programs on managing populations of feral cats.

The subject of feral cat control is very controversial. Environmentalists typically want the cats eliminated at any cost, while animal welfare advocates want a more humane approach that doesn't involve euthanasia. I was rather surprised, when organizing this presentation, just how controversial this could be. I posted an announcement on our Face Book page inviting the public to attend Dr. Boone's presentation, and we subsequently received several negative comments, including the following:

"TNR programs do nothing to help bird population decimation from cats. If people can catch feral cats, they should be able to either (1) get the cats adopted or (2) euthanize them. There is no excuse to release cats back in to the natural world so they continue to kill birds and any other wild animal."

Dr. Boone is a wildlife biologist with the Great Basin Bird Observatory in Reno, Nevada. He received his Master's degree at Idaho State University and his Ph.D. at the University of Colorado at Boulder, working with mammals and conducting academic ecological studies. Since then, he conducts applied ecological studies. He also works extensively on animal welfare, consulting and working to manage street dogs around the world, and he is now doing feral cat research.

Dr. Boone emphasized that TNR advocates and wildlife conservationists often take incompatible positions, and both sides' efforts devolve into an unproductive debate.

On one side, does TNR work? It must! "We're spaying hundred of cats which would produce thousands of kittens, so of course it helps!" Unfortunately, without any monitoring, there are no data to verify this benefit (and there are several studies which show that these programs often have very little overall impact).

On the other side, wildlife advocates use unsubstantiated and alarming estimations of bird predation by cats to support their stance. This is meant to stir emotional responses, and it does.

But numbers out of context don't tell the whole story, whether those numbers are 'number of cats spayed' or 'number of birds killed'. We can't measure one outcome in isolation and use it to describe the whole system.

Dr. Boone feels that we have two options:

Option #1 is to focus exclusively on TNR failures. This, however, results in direct conflict with large numbers of "animal people" and paints the conservationists as "the bad guys". A combative approach downplays locale diversity (feral cat populations vary greatly from locale to locale), and it encourages the drawing of draw broad, anecdotal conclusions. This often leads to a generic "any means" attitude. With this approach, TNR never gets better and its limitations are never clearly delineated.

Option 2 is to collaborate. With this model, partners are identified who want more effective programs. Expertise is provided and support is garnered to pursue common goals, and to aim for situationally appropriate guidance and insight. With this option, TNR potential is better realized and limitations understood

Feral cat control involves population management. There are some scary realities which must be acknowledged in the management of feral cat populations. Once achieved, a high sterilization rate must be perpetually maintained by active management in order to produce lasting population change.

In summary, Dr. Boone acknowledges that lethal removal methods for managing free-roaming cats will not gain wide public acceptance. Regardless of its potential wildlife benefits. However, he also believes that transition to a more effective TNR is possible. Encouraging the improvement of TNR practice along with efforts to improve responsible pet ownership ultimately be of more practical benefit to both cats and wildlife than the current polarized and protracted debate between pro- and anti-TNR advocates. However, for TNR to be effective, effective monitoring MUST be employed. Many groups focus on effort but do not have clear goals and have little or no monitoring. Validated protocols and tools are needed to regularly measure direct outcomes-baseline data, initial indicators of population change, sterilization rate, population change, population size, immigration and abandonment rates, etc. “Improving the effectiveness of TNR as a population management tool can benefit both cats and wildlife potentially on a broad scale. The fields of population biology and wildlife management can provide useful guidance.” N. Primm

Leucistic Hummingbird Spotted in Backyard

Feeder

In early September, a leucistic hummingbird visited the hummingbird feeders in the backyard of a home not far from Lake Lou Yaeger in Litchfield. A leucistic bird can be white or whitish (due to the reduction of pigment in its feathers, while its feet, eyes and beak are black) and are somewhat rare—only 8 were reported in summer 2018, none in Illinois, according to one website I visited. Leucistic hummingbirds are not as rare as all-white “albino” hummingbirds, meaning a genetic mutation that results in the absence of pigment, including in its eyes, feet and beak; albino hummingbirds are deemed “extremely” or “incredibly” rare, according to two other sources. Check out the websites of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, national Audubon organization, Hummingbird Central and the Hummingbird Society, as I did after observing the leucistic hummingbird from just a few feet from the feeders.

According to the homeowner whose feeders the leucistic hummingbird visited, it appeared with several ruby-throated hummingbirds during their migration and stayed to feed at the feeders in her yard for about 10-14 days. This was the first year that the homeowner had observed this bird, though she’d been feeding hummingbirds in her backyard for several years. I was thrilled to have been invited to view this bird by a friend who is also an experienced wildlife photographer, Barbara Ellis, as the photographs of the leucistic hummingbird, along with resident Bald Eagles, migrating white pelicans and an Osprey on Lake Lou Yaeger show. By Christine Zeman, photographs by Barbara Ellis.



Springfield Birds Unlimited Purchases

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Remember, when purchasing items at Springfield Wild Birds Unlimited, inform cashier that you are a Springfield Audubon member. Our chapter receives a percentage of purchases by members.

Jan. 20 1:00 PM Annual meeting; see President's message for details

Feb. 21 6:00 PM Decatur Raptor Center Program

March 21 6:00 Pm Decatur Raptor Center program



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