



Southern Illinois Audubon Society

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P.O. Box 222
Carbondale, IL 62903-0222

NEWSLETTER

Established in 1970

Tom Ulrich Returning on March 27th!

Tom Ulrich will return to give a program “Anomalies & Curiosities” for SIAS on Friday, March 27th. This program will be at the Fellowship Hall of the First United Methodist Church, 214 W. Main St., Carbondale, at 7 p.m.

In the 40 years of his career, Tom has been put into many unusual situations. He will show some of the rarest birds in the world and behavior not yet listed in the literature. Tom states that the program is just full of some of the strangest things he has photographed over the years.



A freelance photographer since 1975, Tom Ulrich is highly acclaimed around the world for his nature photography skills. Many of his 800,000+ images have been used by numerous magazines and other publications, including National Wildlife, Audubon, Outdoor Oklahoma, Sierra, American Hunter, Ranger Rick, Alaska, National Geographic, Life and many others. Tom is also responsible for publishing seven nature books, Mammals of the Canadian Rockies, Birds of the Canadian Rockies, Mammals of the Northern Rockies, Birds of the Northern Rockies, Once Upon a Frame, Photo Pantanal, and Mt. Reynolds: The Story.



February Program Highlights: Seeing the Seychelles

Dr. George Waring, emeritus professor of zoology at SIUC, and a good friend of Southern Illinois Audubon, gave us a visually exciting tour of a truly little known area of the world. The Seychelles Islands are located on the edge of the Indian Ocean, itself an exotic if expansive region; but they have a mixed origin in a hard to reach corner. The location is 600 to 800 miles north of the large island of Madagascar and between 900 and 100 miles to the east of Somalia and Kenya in Africa.

There are two different geologic formation islands; some are granitic peaks from volcanic eruptions in past eons when the Indian Ocean and African tectonic plates contacted. These islands are covered with dense rainforest vegetation on their rugged slopes, and have lots of endemic plant and animal species. The majority of the islands are coral atolls with heights of only a few feet above sea level; some of these will certainly be endangered by global warming and subsequent rising sea levels.

Most of the nation's 90,000 population lives on the largest island of Mahe and make a living from fishing or support of ecotourism. The Warings visited a few of the largest granitic islands on a small cruise ship. The coral reefs are not just on the atolls, but also surround the larger islands; and diving and visits to the reefs are a major lure of cruises. George had a wealth of brightly colored images of corals, fish, and other marine organisms. It was good to learn that although he saw evidence of past bleaching on some reefs George felt that the ones he saw were all recovering or fully healthy.

Most of the hilly islands are covered with recovering native vegetation, as agriculture is no longer a major contributor to the economy. There is some problem with invasive plants.

On both granitic islands and atolls there are seabird-nesting colonies of many species that spend most of their lives over the open Indian Ocean, but visit the Seychelles to nest. Terns, noddies, and shearwaters are among the most numerous species. Some of the land birds of the islands are endemics such as Seychelles warblers (old world), parrots, fody's, and blue pigeons. The warbler and the magpie-robin are birds that have been recovered from precariously low populations due to environmental disruption. Both now have small but viable populations in a nature reserve island.

Bats, such as flying foxes, are the only native Seychelles mammals.

There are native skinks, geckos, snakes, and turtles but probably the best-known Seychelles animal is the giant tortoise. There were large sized long-lived tortoises on most of the islands; many were driven to extinction due to exploitation by sailing navies. The tortoise of Aldabra survived and is now fully protected and cherished by the nation. There are colonies on some of the other islands to assure the species survival.

Thanks to the Warings for sharing a virtual trip to a bit of paradise that began with a touch of serendipity.

– Joe Merkelbach, President

2015 Meetings Calendar

April 25th: back by popular demand: Member Slide Night!

May 17th: Annual SIAS Picnic

June & July: No meetings / Summer break

Upcoming Events & Outings

April-May – Movie Nights at the Cache

Bring your family and friends for a relaxing evening with fellow nature lovers on the First Thursday of each month. These free Movie Nights are held at the Cache River Wetlands Center from 6-8 p.m. April 2nd is *Leave it to Beavers*, and May 7th is *Earth Flight*. For details call the Wetland Center 618.657.2064.

April 11 – Birding at Michael Wolff Wetland

Join Master Naturalist Anne Parmley on a birding walk at the Michael Wolff Memorial Wetland from 9-11 a.m. Meet at Marshall Ridge Access, located $\frac{3}{4}$ mile north of the Cache River State Natural Area headquarters, 930 Sunflower Ln., Belknap. For details call the Cache Wetlands Center at 618.657.2064.

April 17 – Van Tours thru Cache River Watershed

Take advantage of this opportunity to go along on one of three guided van tours for senior citizens and persons with physical limitations. View the animals, native plants, and spring colors of the bottomland sections of the Cache River Watershed.

Advanced registration required. For more details or to register, call the Cache Wetlands Center at 618.657.2064

April 19 – Cache Spring Wildflower Hike

Join in on this wildflower hike and familiarize yourself with the local spring plants of the Cache. Meet at Limekiln Springs West Access, off Cache Chapel Rd. by 1 p.m. and run until 3 p.m. For details, call Cypress Creek Refuge at 618.634.2231.

May 1-3 – IAS Spring Gathering

From limestone cliffs and caves to hill prairies and glades, Southwestern Illinois' Ozark region has many uncommon natural communities. Spend the weekend exploring this unique area, including the large reserve that Illinois Audubon Society has played a critical role in preserving. Hosting this event are Clifftop, Kaskaskia Valley Audubon Society and Salt Lick Point Stewardship Committee. To register visit:
<http://www.gifttool.com/registrar/ShowEventDetails?ID=2046&EID=19355>

May 2 – The Birding Blitz of Southernmost IL

Visit www.birdingblitz.org for all details!

May 9 – Spring Bird Count

May 15-17 – IOS Spring Birding Weekend –
in Galena/Northwestern IL. Songbird migration should still be in full swing in the scenic hills of the driftless area of northwestern Illinois and the wetlands along the Mississippi River always hold a few surprises. Lodging will be at the Chestnut Mountain resort. Details on the field trips are being finalized and all registration information will be posted on the IOS website. <http://www.illinoisbirds.org/>

Welcome New SIAS Member! Judy Groskind of Carterville.

14th Annual Birding Blitz - May 2nd, 2015!

The 14th Annual Birding Blitz of Southernmost IL will take place on Saturday, May 2, 2015! This is the first time the Blitz hasn't been on the last Saturday in April. This May 2nd date should coincide with the arrival of more migrants. We're hoping many birders will join in on the fun. To find out more about the competition and to download registration forms, visit the Birding Blitz website www.birdingblitz.org.

As part of competing, teams much collect donations in support of habitat restoration and preservation in the Cache River Wetlands. Since the first Birding Blitz in 2001, competitors have raised over \$30,000 in donations. These funds initially helped pay for the construction of mini dams, designed by Natural Heritage Biologist Mark Guetersloh, to stop gullies draining off-channel wetlands along the upper Cache River and Dutchman Creek.

More recently, Blitz donations have also provided matching funds used to finance the building of the Michael Wolff Memorial Wetland and contributed towards the purchase of an 80-acre parcel of land on the north end of the Cypress Creek NW Refuge.

If you would like to help the cause but prefer not to participate, please consider pledging to a competing team. Pledges can be made per species seen or in a lump donation. Or you can donate to the Friends of Cache River Watershed in support of all teams.

Birding Blitz organizers would like to thank all the birders who have participated throughout the years. The organizers (and the participants) would also like to express our gratitude to all of those individuals and groups which have supported the Birding Blitz through the years with cash pledges and in-kind donations, with a special thanks to the Chicago Ornithological Society, the DuPage Birding Club, the Illinois Ornithological Society, the Illinois Audubon Society, the Illinois Birder's Forum, ILBirds Listserve, Crab Orchard NW Refuge, Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau, and Jim Shofstall.

—Rhonda R.

27th Annual Tropical Adventure / May 30-June 6, 2015

Trinidad & Tobago: Experience a tropical evergreen rain forest, a mangrove, tide pools, a tropical deciduous forest, a giant Leatherback Turtle watch, and West Indian cuisine. Land Cost: \$1495 (with ten participants, includes all meals, lodging, and field trips with local naturalist guides). For information, contact: Nelda W. Hinckley at 618.549.5588 or neldahinckley@jalc.edu

Be a Crab Orchard NW Refuge Volunteer!

Crab Orchard NW Refuge is still in need of volunteers to lead a couple of wildflower walks on the beautiful Rocky Bluff Trail. A leader is needed for the first hike of the season on April 4th. One is also needed for the hike on April 25th.

Staffing cuts have made it difficult to offer all the services our visitors enjoy. Many wonderful volunteers have stepped forward to help keep eagle tours and school programs going. If you can help with these walks or other spring programs, please contact Kim at 618.998.5955 or reply to this email.

Seeing Birds

The temperature is rising, the snow has melted and migration has begun. Folks have been seeing some really wonderful birds!!

Early in March, Karen Kaufmann reported that for several days, 3 Trumpeter Swans hung around in a corn field just north of IL Rt. 13, west of Cambria Road.

The evening of 03/09, Mark Seiffert phoned me (Rhonda Rothrock) to say he'd just gotten back from Glen O. Jones Lake, Saline County, where he'd located a Red-throated Loon. An upstate birder first spotted the loon. That night I put the word out via email.

Cathie Hutcheson made it over to Glen O. Jones Lake the following day. She spotted the loon and stated she has now seen all the loon possible to see in the U.S.

On 03/11 3 more folks reported seeing the loon. John and Martha Schwegman and local birder Jim Tudor. John snapped this -> image. The bird was still in winter plumage similar to a Common Loon but the slightly upturned bill was noticeable.



The afternoon of 03/12, Don Mullison and Judy Groskind, were conducting a waterfowl survey at Crab Orchard Lake when they spotted 2 White-winged Scoters on the west end of the lake. Don contacted me and I put the word out.

About 45 minutes later that day, Don phoned again to say that 100+ Sandhill Cranes were flying north over Wolf Creek Causeway at Crab Orchard. I emailed out that news. Within hours the Sandhill sightings came rolling in.

Linda Bobo of Cartersville saw the Sandhills flying over her home on 03/12, but it seems she'd seen a different flock because she tallied 300-400 cranes.

David Brewer reported Sandhill Cranes flew over his home in DeSoto at about 3:38 p.m. on 03/12. He heard their calls and finally spotted them at high altitude (maybe 2500-3500 feet?). They were circling slowly and obviously riding thermals, as there was very little wing movement. David added that a fellow camera club member indicated the cranes were over his home in Ziegler shortly after the time they were over David's home. Another camera club member indicated they came over his home at Lake of Egypt that afternoon (time not noted) and he had a couple of images as proof.

The last 03/12 report came in from Mary Maginel who wrote that she and Jim estimated about 1,000 Sandhill Cranes had flown over their farm in Alexander County that day. Mary and Jim were thrilled to watch as 14-16 flocks flew over between 1:30 and 3 p.m. in the afternoon.

The next day, 03/13, Chris Benda, in east-central Illinois, heard Sandhill Cranes fly over his location.

On 03/14, Linda Bobo emailed that she'd sighted 200+ Sandhills flying from the south bearing northeast over IL Rt.13 near I57, Williamson County.

The same day, 03/14, Tracy Evans emailed to say 11 Sandhill Cranes flew over her farm in Buckhart, IL, at the border of Sangamon and Christian counties. Also several hundred American White Pelicans and 2 Peregrine Falcons!

This documented number of Sandhill Cranes flying over southernmost Illinois must have been a record. But it was a record topped the following day, 03/15 when Keith McMullen spotted 2260+ Sandhill Cranes flying over Mermet Lake, Massac County. He wondered how many might have flown over at other times that day. Keith added that he's never seen that many anywhere in Illinois but he's never been in Chicago during the annual Sandhill Crane flights over that corner of the state. Other migrants that Keith spotted on 03/15 in the Massac County floodplains were 35 Pectoral Sandpipers and 2 American Golden Plovers. Keith also said the Red-throated Loon was still at Glen O. Jones Lake on 03/15 as were 2 more American Golden Plovers.

On 03/12 Brent Pease located the White-winged Scoters at Crab Orchard Lake but was sad that he'd not seen any cranes.

Don Mullison lead a "small but fun" group of birders on the 03/14 SIAS outing. Rather than going south to Union County where it was raining, they decided to drive over to Crab Orchard Refuge. The bird(s) of the day were the White-winged Scoters. The two scoters were still in the general vicinity of the Crab Orchard Spillway. The birders tallied 42 species including Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Redhead, American Black Duck, and American White Pelican. Also on their list were two spring migrants: Tree Swallow and Fish Crow!

Just before sunset on 03/15, Bean Rothrock flushed an American Woodcock behind the Rothrock barn. Bean was accompanied by Robert (Rothrock) who saw the bird fly up but was not able to re-locate it. Every year, 3 or 4 male woodcocks perform their courtship display on the Rothrock's acreage.



The above image is of an adult Sandhill Crane, taken by David Brewer during one of his past imaging trips.



To Join SIAS or Renew Your Membership, please fill in this form and return it with payment. Thank You!

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I/We would like to received our newsletter via email: YES / NO

Annual membership renewal month is January and coincides with board elections held at the annual meeting each January.

Member mailing labels reflect current dues status.

The March equinox signals the beginning of spring in the Northern Hemisphere and autumn in the Southern Hemisphere. It marks that special moment when the sun crosses the celestial equator going from south to north. In 2015, this equinox arrives on March 20 at 22:45 UTC, or 5:45 p.m. Central Daylight Time. In the Northern Hemisphere, the sun is rising earlier now, and nightfall comes later. Plants are sprouting. Winds are softening. In the Northern Hemisphere, people are enjoying the warmer days of spring. South of the equator, autumn begins. There is also a total eclipse of the sun at this 2015 March equinox.

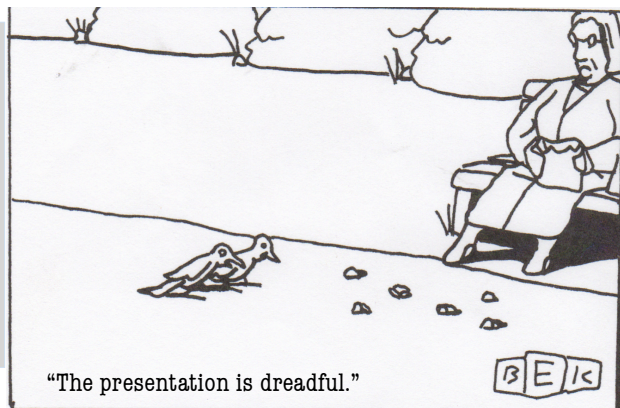
The equinox is an event that happens in Earth's orbit around the sun. At the equinox, the sun crosses the celestial equator, to enter the sky's northern hemisphere. The equinox can come on March 19, 20 or 21. But the equinox will be on March 20 for the coming four decades. The sun rises due east and sets due west at the equinox. And that's true no matter where you live on Earth, because we all see the same sky. From: <http://earthsky.org/astronomy-essentials>

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Image by Tom Ulrich