

# SOUTHERN ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 222 CARBONDALE, ILLINOIS 62903-0222

## NEWSLETTER

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### Still No Scheduled Meetings or Programs

Sounds like the proverbial broken record to again write that SIAS will be not be holding any programs for the foreseeable future. Until vaccinations become available to a greater number of age categories, restrictions will remain for indoor group meetings and for the availability of places to hold those indoor gatherings.

The use of the phrase “like a broken record” dates me. I suspect many of you can remember that situation when your favorite 33 1/3 record album acquired a serious scratch or mysteriously warp. When played and the needle got to the marred spot, the needle would jump or bounce back to a point previous to the damage. This disruption would continue...this disruption would continue...this disruption would continue...this disruption would continue as long as the record was left to play or until the needle was placed beyond the damaged spot.

If we could only move the needle well beyond the CoVid-19 disruption. Even with the recent weather-related interruptions, measures are moving forward. We're going in the right direction. Illinois is in Phase 1a & 1b with regard to who qualifies for shots. Vaccinations are available and being offered at more and more venues.

The first day of spring is less than a month away. Days are getting longer, allowing for more time spent outside. Get outside if you can. But if you're stuck inside, bring out your old turntable and play your favorite recording, maybe something birdie.

-Rhonda R.

### US Congress Needs to Act to Address Climate Change

We need to keep in mind the harmful environmental impact that deforestation has on our climate globally. According to the United Nations, an estimated 18 million acres of forest are lost to deforestation each year. Fifteen percent of all greenhouse gas emissions are the direct result of deforestation, and the overall long-term impacts are even greater. Dozens of endangered species live in forests around the planet that are cleared for agricultural purposes. According to the World Wildlife Fund, seventeen percent of the Amazon Rain Forest has been cleared in the last 50 years, primarily to create more land for cattle ranching.

The poorest nations on earth can't solve a problem such as deforestation alone. Foreign assistance can help meet humanitarian needs and promote economic development in the areas that need it most. Our forests are one of this planet's greatest and most irreplaceable natural resources. They provide important access to green space and recreational opportunities for families, and they protect habitats for wildlife. The preservation of our natural resources is one of the most important legacies we can leave to future generations.

Congress needs to take action to address climate change. If we choose to ignore climate change and its consequences, we are placing our planet and our future in grave danger and could face large-scale economic repercussions that threaten our national security and global stability.

-Excerpts from a letter from Senator Dick Durbin

### Opposition to the Elimination of MBTA Protections

*The following is a National Audubon alert regarding changes to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA.) SIAS president Joe Merkelbach modified it and, with Board approval, forwarded it to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on SIAS's behalf.*

I greatly appreciate that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is reviewing and delaying implementing the rule that eliminates protections for birds under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). I urge FWS to take all available actions to undo this harmful and unlawful rule, restore protections for birds, and pursue a permitting approach for incidental take.

Birds are a fundamental part of our ecosystems and culture and provide significant value to my community, the nation, and the world. Yet, our bird populations face serious threats that have led to a decline of 3 billion birds in North America since 1970, while two-thirds of our bird species are at risk from climate change.

We need to be doing far more to protect and conserve birds, but the attack on the MBTA has only put birds at greater risk. The MBTA has provided longstanding and bipartisan protections for birds from avoidable hazards. The 2017 legal opinion and the rulemaking to codify it has undermined the ability to reduce preventable bird deaths and help birds recover from events such as oil spills.

I urge FWS to restore protections for birds under the MBTA and create a new pathway for permitting under the law to help conserve birds and encourage practices that protect birds from the variety of threats they face. Now is the time to act to save our nation's birds, and I stand in strong support of the MBTA to help give them a fighting chance.

The recognition of the need to value and conserve birds, as symbols of freedom to rise and of the philosophical value of nature, was one of the first stirrings of the conservation movement in the United States of America. In order to keep our linkage to the natural world as strong as possible we should fully commit to restoring the protections of the MBTA. Additionally, as this recent aberration in sensible scientific management has shown, we need to more fully value wise study of the nature. The consideration to strengthen the MBTA's provisions would be a good goal of government environmental policy.

As president, I am sending these thoughts on behalf of the Southern Illinois Audubon Society based in Carbondale.

-Joe Merkelbach

The article “Textile waste by the numbers” states that the average American throws out 70 pounds of clothing each year.

Unsustainable fashion is causing waste to pile up and contributing to climate change.



## Seeing Birds

When the ground is covered in nine inches of snow, seeing birds become a bit easier. Not necessarily conditions preferred by either birds or birdwatchers.

Based on their near empty shelves, wild bird seed retailers are doing well. For me it was quite overwhelming to realize so many folks not only watched and fed backyard birds but cared enough to stock up for bad weather. The day after our heaviest snow, I ran into an elderly man who had been sent to Rural King by his wife to get more wild bird seed. The store was almost completely out but I told him about chicken grains and then located a couple bags of a millet mix for he and I. *-Rhonda R.*

Not knowing how long it will take stores to re-stock, SIAS members have provided some recommendations. Valerie Blakely suggested checking your local feed store. She picks up seed at Herrin Feed store. As of Feb. 21st John Palis said Carbondale Lowe's had seed mixes in stock, but no bags of sunflower seed. Mary McCarthy reported that PetCo in Carbondale had wild bird seed in stock. If you cannot make it to any of these locations, check the farm animal or pet bird department of your local stores. The chicken scratch grains mix is quite similar to the least expensive wild bird mix containing milo seed, cracked corn, and wheat. Pet bird mixes for parakeets and canaries are comparable to finch or millet mixes sold for wild birds.

Just before the deep freeze, Joe Merkelbach reported that every time it snows, a pair of towhees that live in the brush part of his backyard come to scratch in the snow under the feeder. He says he hears them all the time but only sees them when the ground is covered.

When our temps were at their coldest and no open, unfrozen water was to be found, Greg Kupiec observed common grackles eating snow. As with M&M candies, it "melts in your mouth, not in your hands."

An over-wintering orange-crowned warbler had been visiting the suet feeders at Aimee Rell-Hemphill home. It was last seen around 02/16.

Amber Hanson shared a picture of a brown thrasher that visited her suet feeder on 02/17. And it was also quite thirsty as it drank and drank from the bird bath.

Maybe not the best decision on their part but fish crows are making their way back to our area. Dr. Bill Eddleman reported 2 on 02/22. He stated they were on target with their annual arrival time in late February.

Don Mullison has continued pursuing his new passion for bird photography even during our deep winter blast. On 02/21 he finally got what he called a reasonable shot of a Lapland longspur. He located them in the floodplain of western Jackson County. Longspurs often hang out with horned larks and like the wide open spaces of grasslands or harvested crop lands.

## Big Losses and Big Little Losses

The U.S.A. has just crossed the threshold of 500,000 lives lost to CoVid-19 and CoVid related illnesses. That's very hard to fathom and not to be disparaged.

For some of us, one way of dealing with this crushing sadness has been to escape into nature. I totally resemble that statement. So when our recent winter storm and extended below freezing temps hit, many of us were observers, helpless observers, as it struck a deadly blow to some of our beloved feather friends.

Little Ricki was a ruby-crowned kinglet. I'd named him little Ricki because the red crest identified him as a male, because he was so very small, and because the 4-letter ornithological alphabetical bird code for the species is RCKI. Arthur Cleveland Bent states, "The ruby-crowned kinglet is not brilliantly colored, for it is clad in soft olive and gray, but it is a dainty little bird with attractive manners; only when it shows its red crown-patch under excitement is there any brilliancy in its plumage, but when it bursts into its marvelous song it ranks as one of our most brilliant songsters. What it lacks in color it makes up for in music." The well-known mnemonic for a RCKI song is, "see see see, where where where, Look at Me! Look at Me! Look at Me!"

Ruby-crowned kinglets (RCKIs) are migratory songbirds. They're just over 4 inches long with tail and weigh only 0.23 ounces. They pass north through southernmost IL in spring on their way to their breeding grounds in Canada. Then they pass back south through our area in fall on their way to winter in the southern coastal U.S. states.

In just the 25 years that I've been birding, climate change has had an effect on the migration habits of songbirds like RCKIs, orange-crowned warblers, common yellowthroats, and other species that over-winter in coastal states. Our warmer winters have tempted them to extend their stop-over in southernmost IL rather than moving on to the coast. This February has likely ended migration for many including Little Ricki.

I really didn't want to write such a depressing article but as the newsletter deadline came and passed, I was mentally as frozen as our ponds. Being the "half-empty" kind of person I am, I can't even watch the animated penguin movie "Happy Feet" without being overcome by thoughts of hardship and loss. Writing has actually broken the ice.

The extended below freezing temperatures combined with deep and frozen snow covered ground we've experienced for nearly two weeks has been tragic for the fragile. In the weeks running up to the big freeze, Little Ricki had become my buddy of sorts. I'd locate him or knew he was around by his "chid-it chid-it" calls. Appearing to have no fear of humans, he would fly right up when I hung the suet out each morning. And he was usually the last to visit it before I brought it in at night. Watching thorough-out the day, I noticed he never approached the suet when other birds were there. Rather he patiently waited until the feeder was unoccupied. Similarly, as I'd go out throughout the day and other birds flew away, Little Ricki would fly in. Many an evening I stood at a short distance from the suet feeder, so he could get in his last snack of the day before I took the feeder in. (If I didn't take my feeders down, the raccoons would.)

So, it was easy-ish for me to monitor his behavior. When the freeze hit, it was easy for me to evaluate his resilience and detect his decline. For weeks I'd been sprinkling a seed mix containing sunflower hearts on our window sill. Little Ricki visited the sill with some regularity. His visits to the sill greatly increased in number as temperatures dropped.

RCKIs always seem to be fluttering. Little Ricki was no different, but his fluttering started to seem more purposeful. He began holding all his feathers, including his red head crest, fluffed up as birds do for warmth. A big part of me wanted to go out, snatch him up, and bring him inside. But the implications of that did not bode well. It would not have been the divine intervention it might have seemed to be. On Feb. 14<sup>th</sup>, Valentine's Day, on what was to be Little Ricki's last visit to the sill and the last time I saw him, I managed to capture several short videos of him.

I'd spent much of the daylight hours between Feb. 10<sup>th</sup> and Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> closely observing the birds around the house. On around the 13<sup>th</sup> hordes of common grackles, red-winged blackbirds, cowbirds, and a few starlings began raiding the yard below a standing feeder. We scattered a cheap seed mix and horse oats around that area from them. All our ground-level window sills were converted to feeders for smaller songbirds. I replenished them every few hours and easily shoed the more skittish blackbird species from near the house.

While I mourned the apparent loss of Little Ricki, I observed others were also losing their battle. Similarly, tragic stories are being reported by other observers with bluebirds being significantly hard hit. These little losses hurt as much as the big ones. *-Rhonda R.*



←  
Brown Thrasher  
at  
Amber Hanson's  
home.

Little Ricki,  
Ruby-crowned  
Kinglet,  
on Rothrock's  
windowsill.  
→



## Civilian Climate Corps

One of the most popular programs from the New Deal is making a comeback, nearly 90 years later. President Joe Biden recently signed an executive order to create a Civilian Climate Corps. The initiative, he wrote, will provide “good jobs” for young people and train them for environmentally friendly careers, putting them to work restoring public lands and waters, planting trees, improving access to parks, and of course, tackling climate change.

It's inspired by the original Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), one of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's signature New Deal programs launched to take on the Great Depression. Naomi Klein, activist and author of *This Changes Everything*, said Biden's announcement was a “hard won victory.” Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York had reportedly sold Secretary of State John Kerry on the idea of a climate corps.

The CCC employed 3 million men, in the depth of the Great Depression, to 1942, after the country had joined World War II. Lasting reminders of the CCC are all around us. Go into a state park or national park anywhere in the country, and you'll likely see buildings, trails, and hiking shelters built by the program's volunteers.

Reviving the CCC resonates right now because the pandemic has sent the country into crisis mode with some 18 million Americans receiving unemployment benefits. According to a December survey from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, some 85% of Americans support reestablishing the Civilian Conservation Corps, though that survey didn't mention anything about the climate. A different poll from Data for Progress last May found that nearly 70% of the public supports the idea of a new, climate-focused corps. Even a majority of Republican voters, 62%, liked the idea.

But making it work could prove to be a complicated task. “The original CCC was extremely popular, but it also had some problems,” said Neil Maher, the author of *Nature's New Deal* and a history professor at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. The Corps' history provides insights — encouraging signs and cautionary lessons — for how the Biden administration could structure and promote the program.

Biden's initiative will likely face some criticism once the details get figured out. Some have expressed concern that problems could arise if the new CCC were modeled after AmeriCorps, as some have proposed — a program that sends people all over the country to help with disaster recovery, support build affordable housing, conserve the National Parks, and more. This could be a relatively cheap and fast way of reestablishing the CCC but modeling it on AmeriCorps might mean low wages instead of good-paying jobs, or sporadic investments in projects dedicated to tackling climate change.

The program is also likely to get some negative press from the conservative media, that are likely to equate it to socialism. So far, however, Biden's approach seems to be working against such talking points. He's been countering those narratives by talking about the tangible benefits of job creation, leaving a more sustainable world for future generations, and making sure the country has clean air and clean water for our kids and grandkids. Excerpts from the Grist Magazine, Inc. <https://go.grist.org/signup/biden-100-days>

*“It's easy to anthropomorphize the wild birds, to see their dramas as parables for our own, but even the most cursory observation allays such thoughts. The birds are hungry, and they eat. They are thirsty, and they drink. They are cold, or wet, or afraid, and they seek shelter. The world is complicated for them, just as it is for us, but they don't ponder its complexity. They face only that day's need. Just that one day's need.”*

*-Margaret Renkl, 02.08.2021*

## Drilling in Western Arctic Blocked

One his way out the door, former President Trump rushed through a permit allowing ConocoPhillips to start a massive oil and gas drilling project in the pristine, culturally important landscape of the Western Arctic. The Center for Biological Diversity and partners sued, and as a result a court has temporarily stopped the construction.

ConocoPhillips' “Willow” project would consist of fine drill sites. A processing facility, up to 3816 miles of pipelines, nearly 40 miles of new gravel roads, seven bridges, an airstrip, hundreds of miles of ice roads, and a gravel mine. It would be built in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, public lands that provide essential wildlife habitat for polar bears, migratory birds, caribou and other iconic species. And it would permanently jeopardize the health and traditional practices of nearby Indigenous communities.

The center for Biological Diversity states they will continue fighting this project and other Arctic drilling with everything they've got. [www.biologicaldiversity.org/](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/)

## Arctic NWR Oil and Gas Leasing Halted

On Inauguration Day, President Biden temporarily halted oil and gas leasing activities in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In 2017, Congress voted to open the refuge to drilling. The state of Alaska acquired most leases at a Trump approved auction. Congress must now vote to permanently protect the refuge from oil and gas projects.

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### 3,500 Sea Turtles Rescued

During the week of 02/17, about 3,500 sea turtles were rescued from the frigid temperatures in Texas. Turtles are among some of the state's wildlife that have been threatened during last week's winter storm. [www.nytimes.com/](http://www.nytimes.com/)

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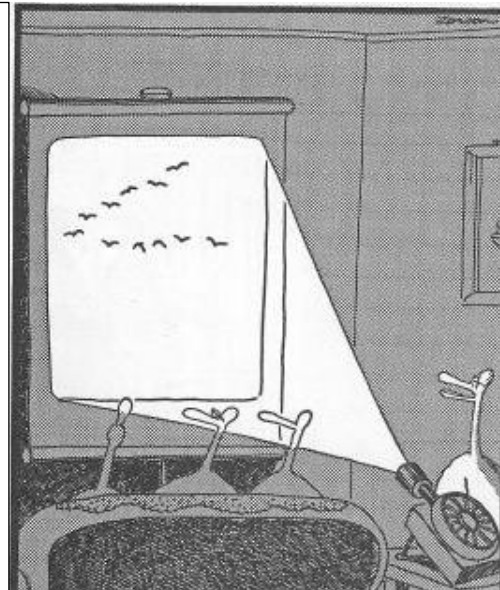
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### "A New Lease On Birding" by Jacob Cooper

Thurs., Mar. 18, 7 p.m., Shawnee Sierra Club via Zoom  
 Jacob Cooper, Evolutionary Biology PhD Candidate; Research Affiliate for Field Museum in Chicago will speak on his new appreciation for local birds in Carbondale since his extended quarantine in Southern Illinois. For the Zoom link, registration access will be shared later on the Shawnee Group's website: <https://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/shawnee>

### Guided Hike at Cedar Bluff

Sun., Mar. 27, 1-4 p.m., Ferny Clyffe St Pk /Cedar Bluff  
 Enjoy a spring walk at Cedar Bluff Natural Area, an annex of Ferny Clyffe St. Pk., utilizing the Cedar Bluff and Bork's Falls Trails. Experience bluffs, overhangs, a shelter cave, and dramatic views of the early spring landscape. Meet at the parking lot for climbers next to Cedar Grove Church, south of Happy Hollow Rd., Johnson County. For directions and more details, phone 618.657.2064. Please plan to observe all CoVid-19 restrictions in effect.



And here we are last summer going south...Wait a minute, Irene! We went *north* last summer! The stupid slide's in backwards!"

**Southern Illinois Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 222**  
**Carbondale, IL 62903-0222**

*Affiliate of the Illinois Audubon Society,  
 the Illinois Environmental Council,  
 & the North American Bluebird Society*



### Ruby-crowned Kinglets

