



Temporary Service Outage

Who hasn't experienced a temporary service outage. It could have been the result of a downed powerline, busted watermain, sliced phoneline (for those of us who are still hard wired), or a drop in WIFI service. While some last only a few hours, others can go on for days and days, an inconvenience causing frustration. We take so much for granted that when a disruption occurs, we often are not as patient or understanding as we should be.

The pandemic is like a never-ending service outage but with dreadful repercussions. It has been over a year since our lives were first disrupted. Vaccines are now our linemen, slowly working to repair and fortify the human infrastructure. By the second week of April, all Illinoisans will qualify for vaccine shots, moving us closer to herd immunity. Patience is a virtue.

The SIAS board is in ongoing discussions as to how soon we can comfortably and safely get together. An outdoor picnic seems the likely event, when and where is still in debate. We so miss being with you, our members and friends. *-Rhonda R.*

On a somewhat similar note, the Birding Blitz of Southernmost Illinois has been postponed for another year. Plans are to have a Big, 20 (less 2) Year Anniversary Blitz in 2022! We're thinking of scheduling it on April 29th in 2022, the 5th Saturday in April rather than the 4th Saturday in April as it has been in the past.

David Sibley's New Book 'What It's Like to Be a Bird'

In his latest offering, the renowned David Sibley explores the remarkable adaptations and abilities of birds, and how their experiences are far richer and more complex than even he realized.

One might expect that there's little in the avian world that would surprise Sibley at this point. Not so, he explains in the introduction to his new book: "One of the themes that impressed me throughout my work on this book is that a bird's experience is far richer, more complex, and more 'thoughtful' than I'd imagined."

This work consists of essays organized by bird type, and every page features at least one gorgeous, informative illustration. Sibley doesn't necessarily expect readers to make their way from front to back. Each essay stands alone, but all are interconnected—providing a deeper understanding of avian evolution, instinct, and survival—and helpful cross-references suggest which page to flip to next.

All birds have feathers, but Sibley's captivating exploration gives readers a deeper appreciation for, and understanding of, what those seemingly simple outgrowths tell us about avian evolution, instinct, and survival. *From: www.audubon.org/news*

SIAS member Lilly Crane states the book is very interesting, the 330 illustrations are excellent, and it contains info like if you were really going to eat like a bird, you would need to eat 25 large pizzas daily.

IN MEMORIAM - Tracy Evans

An active SIAS member from the 1990s, who kept her membership after moving to Springfield 20 years ago, Tracy Evans died on March 16, 2021, age 70. She was retired from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources with a Ph.D. in biological sciences. Her recent research concerned insect populations in native prairies. Our loving condolences to her two sons, grandchildren, and husband Andrzej Bartke.

What Happening in Southernmost IL?

Movie Screening: A Squirrel's Guide to Success

Thursday, April 8, 2-3:00 p.m., at the Cache River Wetlands Center
Explore the squirrel family, from tiny chipmunks to big prairie dogs, and learn which is most widespread on Earth. For more details, contact the Visitor's Center at 618.457.4836.

"Changing Snowpack, wet-dry cycles, and wetland types for birds"

Thursday, April 8, 7 p.m., Shawnee Sierra Club via Zoom
"Changing snowpack, wet-dry cycles, and wetland types for birds in an irrigated Wyoming landscape" by James Lovvorn, SIU Professor of Zoology. Learn how changes in snowpack in the Rocky Mountains affect the food webs supporting birds in complexes of wetlands throughout a semi-arid landscape in Wyoming. For the Zoom link, registration access will be shared by Email and on the Shawnee Group's website:
<https://www.sierraclub.org/illinois/shawnee>

2021 Illinois Indigenous Plants VIRTUAL Symposium

April 15, 6-8 pm; April 16, 6-8 pm; April 17, 9 am-4 pm
-Putting theory into Practice: Ecosystems Restoration & Management-
The closing plenary will be delivered by Mike Baltz, who will discuss the Let the Sun Shine In conservation partnership that has helped to bring order and efficiency to the oak ecosystem recovery effort in southern Illinois. The symposium is being offered by the SI Chapter of the IL Native Plant Society for free through Hopin, a virtual delivery platform. Register at <https://hopin.com/events/2021-illinois-indigenous-plants-symposium>

Native Plant Sale Fundraiser

April 18, 9 am – 2 pm, at the Carbondale Pavilion
Native perennial wildflowers and grasses from Southernwood Gardens. Online shopping and curbside pickup available. Visit greeneearthinc.org for more information. Sponsored by Green Earth and the Native Plant Society.

The Spread of the Nine-Banded Armadillo in Illinois

Sat., April 25, 2-3:30 p.m., at Shawnee Community College Main Campus
Here's your chance to learn all about the nine-banded armadillo from Carly Haywood, master's student in zoology at SIUC. Learn why it is migrating north and its potential impact on our region. This is part of a new quarterly speaker series cosponsored by Shawnee Community College and the Friends of the Cache River Watershed. The Campus is located at 8364 Shawnee College Road, Ullin.



Seeing Birds

What is the difference between weather and climate? *Weather describes what is happening at a particular time and place. Climate refers to the average weather over a much longer period of time.*

Now that our temps are closer to average, the 9+ inches of snow has long since melted away, ephemeral wildflowers are in bloom, and cardinals are singing at sunrise, spring is here! What isn't here, not on our 40 acres, is a Carolina wren. I haven't seen or heard one on or place since before the snow melted. Checked for them at other spots along Hickory Ridge south down to Cedar Creek bridge (Shawnee National Forest land), even played songs and calls, but got no response. Heard no "tea kettle tea kettle", no harassing trills. Many likely succumbed to those days of arctic-like winter. My heart aches.

Others have better news. Richard Thomas reports that he and Nancy still have Caroline wrens coming to their feeders. Richard says they kept providing mealworms for them throughout winter and especially through the winter snow freeze.

Joe Merkelbach still has two Carolinas wrens visiting his bird feeders, and a pair of eastern towhees too. Last week Joe visited his daughter in Wentzville, Missouri. He heard lots of woodpeckers, chickadees, and titmice in the woods behind her house but no Carolina wrens.

At least one pair of Carolina wrens have survived on Mark Vukovich's place in Union County. eBird has lists multiple reports of them in local counties as well. My wish is for all of you reading to have at least one pair of Carolina wrens nesting near your house this summer. *-Rhonda R.*

Karen Kaufman reports that a pair of red-shouldered hawks have made a nest in an oak tree in her front yard. She's been observing the pair for several weeks but is trying not to be intrusive.

On 03/03, Kimberly and Kevin Rohling watched as 100 sandhill cranes flew overhead at Dixon Springs Agricultural Center in Pope County.

While at Mermet Lake on 03/14, Keith McMullen spotted an Osprey. In recent years, osprey have become summer nesters at the lake.

Vicki Lang reported a northern rough-winged swallow at Giant City State Park on 03/20. On the same day, Keith McMullen located his "first of the season" Louisiana waterthrush at Fort Massac State Park. Also on 03/20, Robert Rothrock heard fish crows flying over Hickory Ridge. When Rhonda came out to see, she counted a very vocal group of 21 in all.

As of 03/22, a flock of evening grosbeaks were still visiting the feeders at Cathy DeNeal's place in Saline County.

A few days ago John Schwegman emailed me with his concern that finches visiting his feeders were possibly infected with the finch eye disease. He had recently visited Mike McNerney where he observed goldfinches with the condition too. John also had an image of a house finch with a crossed bill, wondering if the two conditions might be related.

I had been observing finches at my feeders with the eye disease but but they were female and male purple finches, one each. So, I looked into it and found good information at Cornell's Project FeederWatch website.* The eye disease is called mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, caused by *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* (a pathogen of poultry) and was first reported in wild house finches in 1994. Initially the eye disease primarily affected the eastern house finch population but it spread to goldfinches, purple finches, and evening grosbeaks and is now found from the Atlantic to Pacific coasts of the U.S.A. and in Canada.

Birds with the conjunctivitis often have red, swollen, watery, or crusty eyes; in extreme cases the eyes are so swollen or crusted over that the birds are virtually blind. Project FeederWatch asks that everyone keep an eye out for infected birds and report any sightings of infected birds to Cornell via FeederWatch. Also, they ask that everyone wash their bird feeders regularly with a diluted bleach solution or boiling water to curb the spread and rake the ground below all feeders to prevent accumulation of waste.

As for bill deformities, I found that the crossed bill condition, called Avian Keratin Disorder or AKD, is unrelated to the eye disease. A previously unknown virus, the Poecivirus, has been found in 100% of the birds with deformed bills that were tested for Poecivirus while the virus was present in only 9.4% of birds with healthy bills. Full details for both conditions are at: <https://feederwatch.org/learn/articles/deformed-bills-alaska/>

*<https://feederwatch.org/learn/house-finch-eye-disease/>

-Rhonda R

Roomba Chipmunk

Roomba* Chipmunk is my nemesis. I'd venture to say some of you might have a similar nemesis. Maybe it's Snidely the Squirrel, Drowsy the Opossum, or Prince Trashmouth the Raccoon. While squirrels, raccoons, and opossums all visit our yard in search of food, it's Roomba Chipmunk that gets my hackles up.

I take all our bird feeders in each evening to keep the raccoons from destroying them. Our squirrels are still countrified and wild enough to still fear humans. They find adequate food in the woods. And they are well aware of the presence of Queen Bean. I suspect tales of her ruling with a heavy paw and sharp jaw have spread far and wide amongst the local rodent and small mammal populations.

Yet Roomba Chipmunk is defiant. Not the only chipmunk living by the house, Roomba is either too young and inexperienced to be wary or so motivated as to be blind to all threats. Honestly I love chipmunks, but Roomba drives me crazy. The amount of wild bird seed Roomba has sucked up and stashed since fall is massive. And it's all being stored in tunnels along the house foundation. If the New Madrid fault line ever gives, it won't be liquefaction that sends our house sliding down the back hill, it will be birdseedefacation. Millions of peanuts along with tons of millet and safflower seeds will roll us down the hill as if they were wheels on a travel trailer.

How much is enough? National Geographic Kids states that a single chipmunk can gather up to 165 acorns in a day. In just two days, a chipmunk can collect enough food to last an entire winter, although typically they hoard much more food than necessary. Their dual pouches can hold a stash three times the size of their head. So rather than the dozens of bird seed fill-up trips day after day, surely just one or two loads a day would be enough to last well beyond winter. And if fewer trips were made, the calories need to keep Roomba charged up would be greatly reduced.

While their hoarding behavior is understandable, must Roomba always suck up everything? And how is it that the least expensive bits like cracked corn, wheat, and milo aren't pouch worthy? I know I will be putting seed out every day for the foreseeable future, at least until mid-April but Roomba doesn't. For Roomba I guess it could be as simple as hoard food today because no chipmunk can know what tomorrow will bring.

If Roomba Chipmunk is a female, we could be in big trouble come next fall.

**Just in case you're unfamiliar with the reference, Roomba is the trademark name for one of those self-driven, rechargeable round vacuum cleaners. Another is iRobot, but I thought that name might communicate a greater sense of control and power and Roomba Chipmunk doesn't need the encouragement.* *-Rhonda R.*

Highlights of Recent Bird Research...

GREAT BLUE HERONS may choose to nest very close to bald eagle nests despite the eagles being a prime predator of their eggs and hatchlings. Researchers in British Columbia theorize that since eagles are very territorial and chase away other eagles, they expose the herons to only one eagle pair, not a crowd. Since herons and eagles use fish as their main food source, the herons also learn good sites for abundant fish.

SCARLET TANAGERS still struggle to breed successfully in the mostly fragmented forests of the Midwest. In Illinois, cowbirds parasitize more than 80 percent of the tanager's nests, creating a probable population "sink." First pointed out by researcher Scott Robinson in his Shawnee National Forest studies of the 1980s and 1990s, scarlet tanagers need a deep stand of oak-hickory woodlands, something else that is in danger of disappearing here as maples and birch take over.

CAROLINA CHICKADEES seem to wax and wane in numbers in local areas. Some reasons: outbreaks of West Nile virus, abundance of non-native plants (that don't host insects chickadees feed on), and enough natural food found in places other than our backyard feeders.

BUS SHELTER WINDOWS kill thousands of birds and are being studied in the U.S. and Europe. About half of the shelters had documented bird deaths. A simple solution: encourage the public to tape posters, maps, announcements on paper, etc., to the glass, "graffiti" that would warn the birds away from the shelters and not try to fly through them.

MALE BELLBIRDS (the size of doves) in the northern Amazon make the loudest bird songs ever recorded. At 125 decibels, the song is louder than a jackhammer. Females come right up to the males as they are singing despite the debilitating noise. Other research shows that bellbirds have unusually thick ribs and abdominal muscles due to their loud calls.

FOREST MANAGEMENT to remove and control non-native plants really works long term. Plots where invasives were removed in Pennsylvania proved that the regeneration of native plants was even stronger than in areas where non-natives were already absent.

UNHATCHED YELLOW-LEGGED GULLS vibrate their eggshells when they hear alarm calls from adult birds. The vibrations alert the embryos of their nest mates, a form of communication that may well occur in other bird species, say ecology researchers in Spain.

CAVITY-NESTING BIRDS in North America have recently been ranked by Partners in Flight in order of priority for conservation. First is the ivory-billed woodpecker, long considered extinct yet recently with a question mark now added: "maybe not?" The next fourteen species on the priority list of 63 are red-cockaded woodpecker, spotted owl, Lewis's woodpecker, flammulated owl, oak titmouse, gilded flicker, prothonotary warbler, elf owl, bridled titmouse, Western screech-owl, brown-headed nuthatch, red-headed woodpecker, chimney swift, and white-headed woodpecker. The least worrisome cavity nester is the house wren, with an estimated global population of 190 million. (In spring, it seems like half of those are in my yard. Thankfully.)

EASTERN BLUEBIRDS have a varied diet made up of 68 percent insects on average. Those of us with bluebird boxes on our properties, take note of these provisions. In nesting season: caterpillars, grasshoppers, and spiders. Others on the bluebird plate: ants, wasps, bees, flies, moths, weevils, termites, fruits, and even small snakes, tree frogs, and one recorded instance of a shrew.

-Laraine Wright

"The Effects of Forest Management on the Relative Abundance of Forest-Breeding Birds"

Dr. Jeff Hoover, of the University of Illinois Champaign and the Illinois Natural History Survey, and a friend of SIAS, recently presented a program of his recent ecological research to the Shawnee Resource, Conservation and Development council. As we are now somewhat accustomed, the meeting was conducted by Zoom technology, but power point seems to be ancestral to online meetings and it was a very informative presentation.

Jeff and his students have taken some steps up and out of the swamp-lands of deep southern Illinois and are now studying the process and effects of natural/unnatural succession in the forests of Illinois. Birds are good indicator species of habitat health and relatively easy to observe both visually and aurally, so their populations are a means of reviewing forest health.

The secondary regrowth of forests, at least in southern Illinois, has proceeded through a stage of mature oak and hickory with plenty of mast for wildlife towards a generation of maples and beeches with less species diversity and mast (seed/nut) potential. This tendency of deep shading determining which trees come to dominate the mature forest has been, mostly inadvertently, brought about by consistent human suppression of forest fires. This has made the occurrence of closed densely shaded forest canopies more uniform and universal.

The plan of opening forest canopies to restore a better mix of food for wildlife, including insects for breeding birds, involves selective thinning and controlled burning of the understory.

Jeff and his crew of graduate students are using point count censusing to evaluate population density for four grades of evaluated habitats. Untreated areas are used as a control and lightly thinned and burnt, burnt at extended intervals, and burnt at frequent intervals are the four categories. The burns are not exactly uniform in character as some portions of the tracts are drier or wetter depending on topography.

The bird species involved are all of those that are detected as breeding in the forest and typically include 50-70 species at a given site. These species represent guilds of birds that nest and/or forage in different strata within the forest (e.g., nest exclusively on the ground, in shrubs, in the sub-canopy or the canopy, and also species that are more general in their use of the forest strata). Not surprisingly, those species that depend on the leaf litter for nesting or foraging are the most likely to have reduced numbers in management units that are frequently burned or in the breeding season immediately after prescribed fire occurs.

Numbers of most shrub and canopy nesting species in units managed with thinning or light harvest are either similar to or greater than in non-managed units. The greatest breeding bird species diversity occurred in units managed with light harvest and prescribed fire. In many instances, initial decreases immediately after prescribed fire were reversed just a year or two later. It is important for managed forests to be managed as a mosaic whereby management units within the forest are not all treated the same way at the same time. This allows for breeding bird species to shuffle between units if necessary if a particular type of forest management temporarily displaces them.

The individual species responses to treatment types vary, but nearly all show positive or mixed responses to the types of forest management being employed.

Thinning and/or controlled burning seems a valuable potential tool in achieving forest management goals of having better recruitment of oak and hickories. These management practices, while being done to benefit the composition and structure of the plants in the forest, are also having mostly positive or neutral effects on the breeding birds residing in the forests.

-Joe Merkelbach, edited by Jeff Hoover

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Earthquakes Don't Plan Ahead, But You Can!

Earlier this month, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) reported a 2.3 magnitude earthquake occurred in southern Illinois, near Thompsonville in Franklin County. While no damage was reported associated with the tremor, the event serves as a real-time reminder that earthquake can happen at any time and anywhere.

The USGS estimates that 500,000 detectable earthquakes occur in the world each year. To better prepare and further reinforce earthquake preparedness, the Illinois Emergency Management Agency has put together a series of videos with step by step instructions for Do-It-Yourself mitigation projects to better prepare your household for an earthquake. Learn more about preparing your home, business and family for an earthquake at www.Ready.Illinois.gov.

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Dad! Dad! There's a feeder!...Can we stop? (Hummingbirds on vacation.)

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