



Southern Illinois Audubon Society Newsletter

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Southern Illinois Audubon Society (SIAS)
P.O. Box 222
Carbondale, IL 62903-0222
Established in 1970

<http://www.siaudubon.org>
Email SIAS at:
siaudubonsociety@gmail.com

SIAS Board of Directors
President & Programs Chair:
Vicki Lang-Mendenhall
618.697.9868
Vice President: Joe Merkelbach
618.532.3112
Secretary: Mary McCarthy
618.684.8182
Treasurer: Laraine Wright
618.201.1515
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Cathie Hutcheson
618.529.2022
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618.549.9819
Membership Chair: Kirsten Trimble
618.521.4266
Outings Chair & Newsletter Editor: Rhonda Rothrock
618.684.6605 / woodthrusheola@hotmail.com
SIAS Webmaster: Jim Shofstall

SIAS is the sponsor of
The Birding Blitz of Southernmost Illinois
Details can be found at:
www.facebook.com/group/s/317666471615613/



Join SIAS on Friday, Jan. 24th at our new meeting time of 6 p.m., in the meeting room at Carbondale Township Hall, 217 E. Main St., C'dale* for a presentation by Dan Wood on the Oak Savannah Habitat Restoration Project at Crab Orchard NWR.

Dan Wood will discuss the Hampton Prairie Project, an oak savannah habitat restoration project at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge. Dan has worked at Mingo and Muscatatuck NWR with the USFWS and now the wildlife biologist at Crab Orchard NWR since 2015. He oversees and manages the Biology, Agriculture and Natural Resource and Restoration programs. Dan has a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology and Master's of Natural Science degree from SEMO.

This is SIAS's annual meeting night with a silent auction and election of officers.

Note: NO Potluck this year. This year's silent auction will be a big fundraiser for Free Again Wildlife Rehabilitation! This year the slate of officers to be re-elected are: President - Vicki Lang, Vice-President - Joe Merkelbach, Treasurer - Laraine Wright, Secretary - Mary McCarthy, Hospitality Chair - Phyllis Beck, Membership - Kirsten Trimble, and Outings Chair - Rhonda Rothrock.

*Entrance to the Township Hall is from the rear of the Building, off 216. E. Monroe St., where two parking lots are available.

Nov./Dec. SIAS Meeting Highlights- A big thank you to Kimberly Rohling for a wonderful presentation for the SIAS Nov./Dec. meeting.

Kimberly provided an excellent overview of the 124 years of the Christmas Bird Count. Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns to shoot every animal they came across—whichever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

So began the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of 27 dedicated birders, 25 Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

As part of her presentation, Kimberly screened several short video interviews with a variety of individuals from across the Americas, including kids, who described how they became involved with CBCs and expressed their joy in participating. One video in particular, an interview with American ornithologist Chandler Robbins, brought tears to this writer's eyes. An avid naturalist, enthusiastic birder, and citizen-science innovator, 'Chan' Robbins (1918–2017) was a conservation titan. Among his conservation efforts, he participated in over 408 CBCs. Mr. Robbins spent over 3/4ths of his 98 years of life observing birds for study and for the love of them.

Kimberly provided details of the 12 southernmost IL Christmas Bird Counts and their locations. She gave a mini class on the ABCs of CBCs, including methods used, forms needed (some of which she provided), and introductions to the count compilers. Kimberly has intentions to produce a CBC presentation that includes local efforts and local participant interviews.

It was disappointing that attendance was low but as we enter December there are always so many activities and events taking place. But low attendance didn't keep Kimberly from enthusiastically giving it her all. Again, thank you Kimberly! Your efforts were enjoyed and greatly appreciated! -Rhonda R.

A Few CBC Results

Two & 1/2 days without power slowed the start of my CBC data compiling. I think all those that helped during this count season would agree we're glad we finished the counts ahead of the storms.

Just a few cool birds found during local counts:

A Lapland longspur on the Cypress Creek CBC that I kept unintentionally calling a larkspur. A Canada/greater white-fronted goose hybrid on the Crab Orchard CBC. Multiple long-eared owls and northern saw-whet owls on the Arklands CBC. Eurasian tree sparrows on the Union Co. CBC. An American golden plover and a great egret on the Mermet CBC. A prairie falcon during the count week of the Jackson Co. CBC. And trumpeter swans on the Middle Miss NWR CBC.

Vern Kleen reported a total 95 species on the Horseshoe Lake CBC and 101 on Union Co.

When I finished the tally for the Arklands CBC, we'd located a total of 104 species. Results for other CBCs to follow in the next newsletter. -Rhonda R

Treasurer's Report for 2024 By Laraine Wright

Our checkbook balance at the SIU Credit Union is \$7,379.47 as of January 13, 2025, with \$2,405.20 earmarked as money raised through the 2024 Birding Blitz. That must be passed on soon to a conservation organization. We also have \$1,075.62 in our shares account which is available to underwrite the next Birding Blitz.

Our major expenses are the Post Office box (\$200), newsletter stamps (\$300), and affiliate fees (\$100 to Illinois Audubon Society, \$150 to Illinois Environmental Council). We made one donation, \$100 to the Heartland Conservancy.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to the board and others who give their time and attention to SIAS to keeping it active in its 55th year and also to those who keep up their paid memberships. We also thank people who donate money in addition to their dues. For 2024 that list is: Phyllis Beck, Valerie Blakely, Lily Crane, Mary Dresser, Linda Dutcher, Andy and Janet Earnest, Carolyn Ferdinand, Amber Hanson (in honor of Cathie Hutcheson), Lew Hendrix and Cathie Hutcheson, John Kirkpatrick, Judith Keasler, Greg Kupiec, Richard LaSalle, Joe Merkelbach, Mike McNerney, Kimberly and Kevin Rohling, Ann Sanders, Jean Seller, Mark Seiffert, Laurel Toussaint and Tom Bik, Kirsten Trimble, and Lyle White.

I also keep track of paid memberships. We have just 18 so far for 2025. Please contact me if you want to check on your status. Since no one has stepped forward to take over as SIAS treasurer, I will continue one more year on the board. Thanks to all of you for keeping us going in whatever form that takes.

TIME TO RENEW Your Membership! or PLEASE JOIN if you appreciate our newsletters & programs!

Fill in this form and return it with payment. Thank You!

Individual Member	\$15
Family	\$25
Student Voting Member	\$ 5
Donation	\$ _____
Amount Enclosed	\$ _____

Your Name	_____
Street Address	_____
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**Mail to: Southern Illinois Audubon Society
Attn: Membership
P.O. Box 222, Carbondale, IL 62903-0222**

I/We would like to receive our newsletter via email: YES / NO
If you receive your newsletter electronically,
contact Laraine W. or Rhonda R. to check your dues status.

Enjoyed all you folks counting me and my friends these last several weeks. Would love to see you at SIAS programs!



Robert Ridgway Bird Haven: observations of 1914 *By Laraine Wright*

Not far north of us in Olney, Ill., is a beautiful piece of land called Robert Ridgway Bird Haven. A hundred years ago he was our country’s premier ornithologist as curator of birds with the Smithsonian from 1874 until his death in 1929.

By then he and his wife had moved to rural Olney on an estate called Larchmound. Among his 500 publications (13,000 printed pages) was the extensive reference “Birds of North and Middle America,” thought to be the first book of its kind to describe every species.

Ridgway also wrote extensively for the bi-monthly magazine, “Bird-Lore,” published for members of what is now the National Audubon Society. One of his articles is in the March-April 1915 issue that I bought with others through eBay.

Called “Bird Life in Southern Illinois,” it is a recap of his daily diary of 1914. “January 4. Neither sun, moon, nor stars have been visible for three weeks!” He believed in diverse plantings to provide as many food and nesting options for birds as possible. Among his plants were red maple, persimmon, American mulberry, pin oak, dogwood, holly, pokeberry, laurel oak, post oak, hickory, ash, red cedar, black walnut, pecan, and sycamore.

He observed 38 bird species wintering at Larchmound that year. “January 12. 17-1/2 degrees. First Tree Sparrows appeared near house; Bewick’s Wren again at feeding box by window.” On Jan. 17, “A Fox Sparrow sang today.” On Jan. 28, “Killdeers clamorous in adjoining field.” Feb. 1: “A Phoebe appeared on our place today.” He identifies a western tree sparrow on Feb. 12, “Bronzed Grackle” on Feb. 14, bluebirds on March 3, red crossbills on March 13. Among the other wintering birds: sparrow hawk (kestrel), purple finch, pine siskin, Montana junco, winter wren, and golden-crowned kinglet.

The articles in my copies of “Bird-Lore” are primarily full of data, dates, encounters with rare birds, advice on feeding, and how to keep wild birds alive in captivity. Ridgway so hated grackles and blue jays (who destroy eggs and kill the hatchlings of other species) that he removed their eggs when he found their nests and groused that at least three nests of each bird managed to survive on his property. So did 29 other species including red-headed woodpecker, alder flycatcher, both orioles, “Maryland Yellow-throat,” and screech owl.

Now I am looking forward to finally paying a visit to Ridgway’s much-loved property which today includes a lake, picnic tables, and trails. A short drive away is the Robert Ridgway Grasslands Nature Preserve (note the misspelling of his name).

What’s Happening in Southernmost IL...

...just as the ice and snow were melting, freezing temps come back

Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge Eagle Tours

February 1st & 2nd, at 8:00 & 11:00 a.m. & 2:00 p.m.

Registration required for these annual guided eagle tours. Ride along with Crab Orchard staff and volunteers for a drive through closed parts of the Refuge in search of our National Bird and Symbol. View the scenery and watch for other bird and animal life along the way. Vehicle spaces per trip are limited. Phone the Refuge at 618.997.3344 for all details or to reserve your spot!

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) 2025

February 14-17, at the times of your choice!

Spend time in your favorite places watching birds—then report them! In as little as 15 minutes notice the birds around you. Identify them, count them, and submit your counts to help scientists better understand and protect birds around the world. If you already use eBird or Merlin, your submissions over the 4 days count toward GBBC.

To participate, decide where you will watch birds. Watch birds for 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days, February 14th–17th Identify all the birds you see or hear within your planned location in your planned time and record your sightings.

If you are a beginning bird watcher and new to bird identification, the Merlin Bird ID phone app can help you identify birds you are seeing or hearing. If you have participated in the count before and want to record numbers of birds, try the eBird Mobile phone app or enter your bird list using your desktop or laptop at the eBird website:

<https://tinyurl.com/2swh5dy4> <https://www.birdcount.org/>

You can start entering bird lists at midnight local time on the first day of the count. Data entry remains open until March 1st, but the information you enter should only be from the four days of the Great Backyard Bird Count. If you already use Merlin or eBird, all entries over the 4 days count towards GBBC. No need to register or sign-up separately for GBBC.

SIAS 2025 Meeting Calendar

February 28th- Program speaker: Morgan Brown, Graduate Student at U of I Champaign-Urbana on Insect decline in Illinois Prairies.

March 28th- Program speaker: Heather Carey, Archaeologist and Heritage Program Manager for the Shawnee National Forest on the History of the Shawnee

April (date to be announced)- all day birding outing to be led by Laraine Wright & Kirsten Trimble

May (date & location to be announced)- SIAS annual spring picnic

June & July- No meetings in summer

August 22nd- Program to be announced

September (date & location to be announced)- SIAS annual fall picnic

October 24th- Program to be announced

Dec. 5th- Nov/Dec combined meeting. Program to be announced



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*Affiliate of the Illinois Audubon Society and
the Illinois Environmental Council*



Great Backward Bird Count
28th Annual * February 14-17, 2025
<https://www.birdcount.org/participate/>