

Grand Prairie Bird Alliance



Volume 48 / Issue 4

A Chapter of National Audubon

An Illinois Audubon Affiliate

The mission of Grand Prairie Bird Alliance is to engage and promote activities that foster an understanding and appreciation of our natural world and that encourage others to join in this cause.

INSIDE THIS NEWSLETTER

- 2/3. What is BNWRD?
- 4. Spring Bird Walks and Fluddles Movie
- 5. Hummingbirds
- 6. Annual Summary
- 7. News
- 8. Calendar



Please find us on
FACEBOOK:
Grand Prairie Bird Alliance

WEB:
GrandPrairieBirdAlliance.org

EMAIL:
GrandPrairieBirdAlliance@
gmail.com

Annual Meeting

Please join us

DATE: Sunday, May 19, 2024

TIME: 1:00-3:00 p.m.

PLACE: Illinois Art Station
101 E. Vernon, Normal



The annual gathering kicks off with a bird walk starting from the Illinois Art Station grounds. The route will be fully accessible for those with mobility devices. Upon return to the Station, there will be a short presentation of the Grand Prairie Bird Alliance's year-in-review, a quick board election, and a few audience engagement activities. Light snacks and refreshments will be provided. Because we will be at the Art Station, you can also participate in various art activities for all ages throughout the event. Art Station staff will be on hand to ensure you have fun!

Do you have to be a member of the Bird Alliance to attend? No! The annual gathering is a great time to meet other folks who love birds, bird watching, and protecting bird habitat. We'd also love to hear your thoughts on programming and the Bird Alliance's goals in the coming year. We hope that you, your friends, and your family members will be able to join us for this event! Children are more than welcome.

Not required, but please help us better plan the event with an **RSVP** to grandprairiebirdalliance@gmail.com.

Parking is available at 607 S. Linden, with overflow parking available at the Town of Normal parking lot adjacent at 611 S. Linden. For those with mobility limitations, the circle drive parking area is available immediately adjacent to the Art Station's main entrance at 101 E. Vernon.

What is BNWRD and the Schroeder Nature Preserve?

Guest Columnist, Rhea Edge

It is exceptionally brilliant that we have so many places in McLean County with habitats for wildlife that also offer hiking trails and places for people to watch birds, insects and animals. One unexpected natural environment can be found near our water treatment facilities located in Heyworth/Randolf Township, Bloomington Normal Water Reclamation District (BNWRD). In typical natural ecosystems, streams pass through natural wetland areas allowing contaminants to be removed. Our BNWRD reclamation plant is special in that we have two experimental wetland areas working to help remove contaminants from our water in similarly natural ways without machinery, chemicals or people. Since wildlife, vegetation, and waterfowl all benefit from wetlands, it is great that decisions were made to include ecologically beneficial experimental water treatment projects in our own backyard. I am learning more about this from the Bloomington-Normal Reclamation District website, and you can too, but I have also had the opportunity to explore these areas many times with Grand Prairie Bird Alliance's (formerly John Wesley Powell Audubon) much admired mentor, Dr. Dale Birkenholz.

Through Dale Birkenholz' advocacy, BNWRD created the Schroeder Nature Preserve as it formulated this experimental wastewater processing system. The nature preserve was a way of opening this unique ecosystem to the public, as well as preserving it from further development. It is located along County Road 700 North, about 2 miles east of US Hwy 51.

We would hike the prairies and woodland areas around the site where Dale and BNWRD team members were removing invasive species and restoring natural habitats. Finding a mink roaming around Kickapoo Creek was especially exciting for Dale, the expert on mammals, (birds, insects, trees, plants geology and everything, really!) and this was my first time observing a live mink in an entirely natural environment. The Schroeder also features deer, beaver, and hilly areas for short peaceful hikes. As ardent birders we appreciated seeing any of the spectacular number of species found there. Every day in nature offers surprises with opportunities for new discoveries, learning and self-reflection. Here are some suggestions from my own birdwatching checklists.

Continued on Page 3



Dr. Dale Birkenholz, Emeritus ISU Professor of Biological Sciences and GPBA President Emeritus, Rhea Edge



**SCARLET IBIS GROUP by Rhea Edge
Beluga Press Studio and Gallery
Bloomington, Illinois**

Rhea Edge is a practicing environmental artist in her downtown Bloomington Studio and Gallery, Beluga Press LLC. Her large-scale environmental paintings and prints are based on travel and the study of threatened species, birds and habitats. In addition to being a college professor, Rhea served as President and Vice-President of Grand Prairie Bird Alliance for 17 years.

Birding by Habitat - BNWRD

Looking up: Bald Eagle, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered hawk, Turkey Vulture, Cooper's Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Sharp-shinned hawk, Osprey, Merlin, Purple Martin, Rough-legged hawk

Prairie & field: Eastern Meadowlark, Dickcissel, Grasshopper Sparrow, Bobolink, Eastern Bluebird

Forest finds: Indigo bunting, Eastern Wood Pewee, Eastern Towhee, Northern Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted titmouse, Downy woodpecker, Chipping sparrow, Nuthatch, Brown creeper, Yellow-bellied sapsucker, Red-headed woodpecker, Ruby-crowned kinglet, Oven bird, Brown thrasher, House wren, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Swainson's thrush, Northern Mockingbird, Golden-Crowned Kinglet, Eastern Kingbird, Blue Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, Yellow-breasted chat

Water world: Green heron, Great Blue Heron, Mallard, Belted Kingfisher, Pied-billed grebe, Wilson's snipe, Northern Shoveler, American wigeon, Blue-winged teal, Green-winged teal, Wilson's Phalarope, Trumpeter Swan, Stilt sandpiper, Yellowlegs, American black duck, American White pelican, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, White-rumped sandpiper, Short-billed dowitcher, Canvasback, Long-billed dowitcher, Redhead, Lesser scaup, Virginia Rail, Sanderling, Eurasian Wigeon, Red-breasted merganser, Hooded merganser, Lesser yellowlegs, Least sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, Northern waterthrush, Spotted sandpiper, Dunlin, Ring-necked duck, Herring gull, Snow goose, Ross's goose, Mute swan, Greater white fronted goose, Cackling goose, Semipalmated plover

Feeder-esque: American Goldfinch, Northern cardinal, Ruby-throated hummingbird, Orchard oriole, Baltimore Oriole, Dark-eyed Junco

Warbler Mania: Orange-crowned warbler, Golden-winged warbler, Magnolia warbler, Cape May Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Black & white warbler, Blue-winged warbler, Mourning warbler, Black-throated blue warbler, Blackpoll warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Canada Warbler, Chestnut-sided warbler, Yellow warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, American Redstart, Northern parula, Wilson's warbler, Common yellowthroat

Eyes Are on the Sparrows: American Tree Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Fox sparrow, White-crowned sparrow, Vesper sparrow, Swamp sparrow, Eurasian tree sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow

Catching flies: Least Flycatcher, Great-crested Flycatcher, Olive-sided flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Alder flycatcher, Arcadian flycatcher, Yellow-bellied flycatcher

Swallowing: Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Bank Swallow, Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow, Purple Martin.

Vireos: Warbling vireo, Yellow-throated vireo, White-eyed vireo, Red-eyed vireo, Bell's vireo, Blue-headed vireo, Philadelphia vireo

Owl-ness: Eastern screech owl, Short-eared owl, Barred owl, Barn Owl, Great Horned Owl.

Birding by Abundance

Red-winged Blackbird, European Starling, Common Grackle, American Golden plover, American Robin, House Sparrow, Yellow-rumped warbler, White-throated Sparrow, Canada Goose, Blue Jay, Palm warbler, Mourning Dove, American Crow, Brown-headed cowbird, House wren, Rock pigeon, Gray catbird, House finch, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Barn swallow, horned lark

Rare Birds for Here:

Eurasian collared dove, Double-crested Cormorant, Gray-cheeked thrush, Cedar waxwing, Scarlet tanager, Summer tanager, solitary sandpiper, Sora, Eastern Phoebe, Spotted Towhee, Black-crowned night heron, Common redpoll, Little blue heron, American Pipit, Northern Bobwhite, Sedge wren, Purple finch, Yellow-billed cuckoo, Le Conte's sparrow, Nelson's Sparrow, Henslow's sparrow, Lark Sparrow

References

- On episode #49 of the Building BN podcast, BNEDC CEO Patrick Hoban and Community Marketing Manager Whitney Chesher, sit down to speak with Tim Ervin, Executive Director of the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District (BNWRD).
- BNWRD website
- Schroeder website
- e-bird for McLean County

Eastern Bluebird by Photographer Vinay Mokashi



Spring Bird Walks and Program

Bill Davison, Field Trip Director

Spring migration is upon us. There is no better time to join GPBA for a bird walk! Walks are led by birdwatching experts at some of our favorite local parks in April and May. Bird walks are appropriate for all ages and all skill levels. There is no pressure to know anything about birds! We can give you some tips, or you can just walk along with us and appreciate us appreciating the birds. We have five pairs of loaner binoculars if you do not have any. If you have questions, please email us at grandprairiebirdalliance@gmail.com.

- **Sunday, April 20** - 8:00 a.m. - Ewing Park (1001 Ethell Parkway, Bloomington) with leader Pirmin Nietlisbach and Dave Thompson
- **Saturday, April 27** - 8:00 a.m. - Hidden Creek Park (Sycamore Street, Normal) with leader Lenore Sobota and Patricia Carlson
- **Sunday, May 5** - 8:00 a.m. - Location and Leader TBD. Check website or Facebook.
- **Saturday, May 12** - 8:00 a.m. - Fraker Farm with leader Matt Fraker ([directions on website](#))
- **Saturday, May 18** - 8:00 a.m. - Ewing Park ([1001 Ethell Parkway, Bloomington](#)) with leader Lenore Sobota
- **Saturday, May 25** - 8:00 a.m. - Ewing Park (1001 Ethell Parkway, Bloomington) with leaders Nina and Mark Swanson

Within Ewing, Hedge Apple Woods was designated an [Important Bird Area](#) for migration in 2016. Warblers, thrushes, sparrows, finches, raptors, etc., all are seen at these locations.

For more information see:

<https://www.grandprairiebirdalliance.org>



Join us on **Monday, April 22** for a screening of **FLUDDLES**, a documentary inspired by the Grand Prairie Bird Alliance! The movie will be at the Normal Theater (209 North Street). Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Movie starts at 7:00 p.m.

FLUDDLES chronicles the wildlife of agricultural wetlands of Illinois. Sometimes simply described as “big puddles,” fluddles appear in the spring and fall and provide habitat and forage for a diversity of waterfowl and shorebird species. FLUDDLES takes viewers on a journey to these secret, oft-fleeting wildernesses in a time when Illinois has lost 90% of its original wetlands. FLUDDLES features those who enjoy the beauty of wetlands while showcasing the movement under way to construct more wetlands, which provide critical habitat, reduce flooding and erosion, and help to ensure healthier waterways. The idea for the FLUDDLES documentary started right here in McLean County with Grand Prairie Bird Alliance board member Bill Davison, who inspired both the film and the excellent academic work that the Illinois State University Geography Department did to catalog fluddles in the area using GIS mapping technology.

Hummingbirds: *Fabulous Flying Jewels*

by Deanna Frautschi

Hummingbirds are often referred to as the flying jewels of the sky. There is only one regular jeweled visitor east of the Mississippi - the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. In the West, there are 16 varieties. Worldwide, there are over 350 species.

Having tracked the Ruby-throated Hummingbirds arrivals and departures in my central Illinois garden for 40 years, I have observed the first male usually coming by the end of April. Females arrive a week later. If you want them to stop during spring migration in the hope they will stay and have young in your garden, you should have feeders out by mid-April.

When you think of how small this bird is (wingspan 5 inches and body length 3.5 inches), weighing less than a penny, it's a miracle so many make it here from Mexico and Central America.

Only the males have the ruby reflective gorget (throat). Females are all white underneath. After they both arrive, the courtship is short. The female begins nest building and starts her family within a week of arrival. She lays only two eggs at a time. It takes about 2.5 weeks for the eggs to hatch and another 2.5 for the young to fledge.

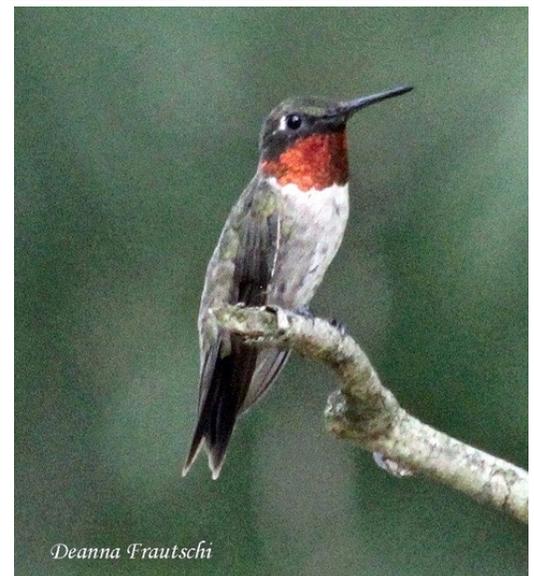
Hummingbirds' first preference is natural nectar from flowers. However, they quickly come to feeders when there is too much competition from birds and insects competing for the nectar or flowers are not plentiful. Humans have helped them in their travels by supplying feeders along their journey.

Making your own nectar is simple. Mix four cups of water with one cup of sugar. Heat and stir on stove or in microwave to dissolve sugar well, being careful not to boil or burn the sugar. Cool. Fill feeders. Store any extra in fridge for refilling.

The flat, saucer-like feeders are preferable as they do not drip, are easy to clean, and have a place for the hummingbirds to perch. These feeders make observation easier and can be placed close to your home. Hanging them on shepherd's poles or under eaves is fine.

There are many flowers that attract hummingbirds, but those that have reddish, orange, or pink hues and are tubular are preferred. Plant selections include cardinal flowers, sage, honeysuckle vines, columbine, salvia, Agastache, penstemon, and monarda (bee balm).

Developing hummingbird habitat takes time. Like all wildlife, they need food, water, and shelter. Water can be offered through a bird bath, pond, or fountain. A variety of trees and shrubs will provide shelter and nesting locations. Since nests are golf ball size, you may never see one. If you do, consider yourself lucky and minimize any disturbance.



Deanna Frautschi is a Master Naturalist, life-long nature advocate, and photographer. She has served on the boards of the McLean County Greenways program, ParkLands Foundation, and Miller Park Zoological Society. She and her husband have reforested five acres of cornfield over a 45-year period and certified their property with the National Wildlife Federation and Illinois Audubon Society.

2023/24 ANNUAL SUMMARY

Thanks to all who contributed to an excellent year for birds in Central Illinois! With your support, the Grand Prairie Bird Alliance was able to accomplish so much in 2023/24. Here are some highlights:

1. We secured a \$5,000 grant from Nicor to support native habitat restoration. We used the funds to plant a high-quality woodland seed mix and a diverse selection of native trees and shrubs at Ewing Park in Bloomington and at Hidden Creek Park in Normal. This follows on the heels of an incredible amount of invasive plant removal at Ewing Park thanks to Master Naturalist volunteers, so we should see the habitat transform quickly. The birds will appreciate the new and improved food sources and native cover.
2. We announced our donation of \$5,000 toward a major water feature to be built by the Town of Normal adjacent to the Constitution Trail and the Connie Link Amphitheatre. This area already attracts many birds, and the addition of a water feature and native species - particularly in the area cleared by Ameren - will be a major benefit for our bird friends.
3. We held several educational events, including those at Junior Ranger Day and Nature Trails Day.
4. We continued to partner closely with the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District on their management of the Schroeder Nature Preserve. In addition to helping BNWRD acquire a grant to improve habitat, we worked with Ameren to reroute a proposed, major electrical transmission line slated to be built directly through the preserve. It will now be located entirely off site.
5. We worked with Unit 5 to build and install 30 birdhouses throughout the nature play park at Colene Hoose Elementary School. Unit 5 was particularly helpful in installing bluebird box posts and a tall post for a screech owl box. After-school students assisted with the installation.

And of course, 2023 was the year that we transitioned to our new name - the Grand Prairie Bird Alliance. Overall, feedback on the new name has been very positive. Look forward to seeing our new logo in 2024!

Grand Prairie Bird Alliance Receives Grant

Wayne Hochstetler, Treasurer

Grand Prairie Bird Alliance was awarded a grant from the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation (IPCF) to further the conservation projects of our alliance. This grant, which is from the IPCF's Nature and Environment Fund, is specifically designated for native planting at Ewing Park. This grant, in the amount of \$2,920.00, will allow us to continue our efforts to re-establish native plants at Ewing Park. This effort has been an on-going project for the past couple years, in cooperation with the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department.

Bill Davison, a member of the Steering Committee of GPBA, and who has been overseeing this project, said, "We truly appreciate the ICPF's support of local conservation initiatives that will benefit generations to come. The funds will help continue the legacy that Hazel Buck Ewing envisioned for what is now Ewing Park. We will purchase native woodland wildflower seeds, which will fill the park with color from spring through the fall. I'm personally looking forward to seeing bluebells, columbine, and Dutchman's breeches."

Planting will commence this spring, with results showing up over the next several years. This planting will specifically target the Hedge Apple Woods area of the park. Be sure to get out and enjoy this renovated area of Ewing Park.



EASY BY NATURE by Bill Davison

A friend sent me a provocative text on a recent Sunday morning. "There is a baby owl on the ground at the corner of Fell and Virginia. Mama owl is present." I immediately reached out to friends, and fifteen minutes later, my arborist friend Nate, our local raptor expert Given, and I were standing on a sidewalk, assessing the situation. Things quickly became complicated, and I briefly lamented this change to my Sunday plans. Then, I saw the Great-horned Owl nestling on the ground, and I was transfixed.

She was a serene white ball of fluff rippling in the breeze. Despite the dire situation, she appeared to be at ease. She sat perfectly still on her oversized feet and calmly watched us. The thin coat of white down barely concealed her tiny muscular body. She was 10 inches tall, and her bright yellow eyes tracked our every move.

A storm rolled in from the west the night before, and high winds blew her out of her nest in a tall white pine tree. Her parents were perched nearby, watching us. (For the full essay with photos see <https://billdavison.substack.com/p/rescuing-an-owl>)



Those Who Serve

Patricia Carlson, Secretary and Editor

Thank you to **Christina Schulz** who is stepping down from the Board of Directors this spring. Christina was instrumental in steering us through Strategic Planning and serving as both a Steering Committee member, as well as Membership Chair. Her management and organizational skills set the course for our future and she helped us roll out our new name to the community. Christina also oversaw moving us into better e-communications with our members. With two teenagers soon to depart to college, we will excuse her for now!

We hope to see you all at the **Annual Meeting on May 19** (see page 1). We will be introducing **Dr. Pirmin Nietlisbach**, ISU Department of Biological Sciences, as Education Chair, a new Membership Chair, and Members at Large. We look forward to their contributions as we grow and strengthen our offerings to the community.

If you are interested in becoming more involved in GPBA please send us your email to grandprairiebirdalliance@gmail.com and share your interests.

GRAND PRAIRIE BIRD ALLIANCE
P.O. BOX 142
NORMAL, IL 61761

Officers 2023-2024

Steering Committee

Mercy Davison, Bill Davison,
Christina Schulz

Secretary

Patricia Carlson

Treasurer

Wayne Hochstetler

Committees

Conservation

Angelo Capparella, Chair
Bill Davison

Education - vacant

Editor

Patricia Carlson

Field Trips

Bill Davison

Membership

Christina Schulz, Chair
Pete Steadman

Programs

Given Harper

Publicity

Mercy Davison

Youth Director

Bode Thompson

Ambassadors

Karen Kohnke
Francesca Lewis
Tania Barreto

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

SAVE the DATE

Apr 13, 20, 27 BIRD WALKS: Saturdays and Sundays, 8:00 a.m.
May 12, 18, 25 Please see page 4 for details.

Apr 22 Mon MOVIE: 7:00 p.m. FLUDDLES, Normal Theatre, 209 North St.
Please see page 4 for details.

May 19 Sunday ANNUAL MEETING, 1:00-3:00 p.m. Illinois Art Station, Normal
101 E. Vernon. See page 1 for details.

If you are receiving this by mail, you can help us save resources by sending us your email and requesting our e-newsletter: grandprairiebirdalliance@gmail.com

Grand Prairie Bird Alliance board meetings are held from August to May, except for December. There are many volunteer opportunities. Members are always welcome and encouraged to join in a variety of committees, whatever amount of time you can give. To find out how to become more involved in your chapter contact any of the officers listed at the left of this page at grandprairiebirdalliance@gmail.com