



Southern Illinois Audubon Society

NEWSLETTER

January 2021 – Vol. 28 No. 1

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

Established in 1970

-Sadly, No SIAS January Annual Meeting-

Message from the SIAS president

Over the last ten months all of us have had to contend with the difficulties of limiting social interactions to avoid infection with the corona virus. Although the limitations on seeing family and friends is more important, one of the things we have missed is gatherings such as Southern Illinois Audubon meetings.

Since we are missing our annual meeting this month, we will be unable to vote for new officers. Responding to this unusual situation, the board has held an online zoom meeting and determined that all officers will be willing to continue to serve for at least until we are able to meet again in person. We have a new board member as outings chair, Kirsten Trimble, who was appointed with the approval of the board.

The annual meeting is also the time when yearly dues for SIAS are collected. Please check the amount that your level of membership entails and send in your check to our treasurer at the SIAS post office box: Southern Illinois Audubon Society, P. O. Box 222 Carbondale, IL 62901-0222. This action will maintain the integrity of our group over this time.

During the meeting we discussed when we might be able to gather in person; although the vaccine heralds some hope the consensus was that late spring would be the earliest possible time. We will be following published health guidelines regarding resumption of public gatherings.

Until we are able to meet again, all of you stay safe and healthy and get outside and see some birds!

-Joe Merkelach, president

Updates about some of our members ...

Clark Ashby continues his membership from his assisted living home on the water in Maryland. In a recent letter, he says, "Merry Christmas! I'm doing well, and they take good care of me here. I like to go outside when the weather is nice. Right now, I'm reading a book about Carbondale, Illinois." Clark and his wife, Rhoda, were founding members of SIAS 51 years ago. He is a SIU emeritus professor of plant biology and a treasured friend to us in SIAS. Please send him a note at:

Clark Ashby, 11750 Asbury Circle, Apt. #109, Solomons, MD 20688.

Clara McClure moved to Lopez Island near Seattle this month. She will be close to her daughter, Wendy, as well as in a familiar and beautiful environment. We will miss her very much and thank her for so many years of attendance at our meetings with her companion, Stan Harris (who died last year). We are grateful, too, for her leadership of local field trips to see and learn more about wildflowers. She would love to hear from you at

Clara McClure, Hamlet House, P.O. Box 172, Lopez Island, WA 98261.

Best wishes to you, dear Clara.

Kirsten Trimble has joined the SIAS board as Outings Chair. Yea, Kirsten! She has great ideas for combining our outings with the Carbondale Park District, where she serves as an elected board member. One of her hopes is that we can again visit Mingo NWR in southeast Missouri. Those outings, way back in the 1990s, were such fun. Thanks, Kirsten, we look forward to gatherings after the pandemic wanes.

-Laraine Wright

Treasurer's Report for 2020

by Laraine Wright, treasurer

Despite holding only two meetings in 2020, most of our members renewed their dues and contributed extra to cover our basic expenses. We thank you very much for your continuing loyalty while we await vaccines and the return to a fairly normal life again this year.

Our 2020 income was \$1,445. Our total expenses were \$1,094, mainly \$350 for affiliate dues, \$502 for the newsletter, and \$118 for the Post Office box. Beyond that, we had enough money in reserve to send \$1,000 to Friends of Crab Orchard toward its fund-raising project, with matching grant, to redo the Heron Flats area along Hwy. 148 south of the Visitors Center. We also gave \$100 to Heartlands Conservancy. (Every year we also contribute to Free Again. These contributions occurred in December 2019 for \$500 and early January 2021 for \$300.)

Of our 2020 income, \$490 came from donations. Without those we would have had to dip into our reserves to pay our affiliate fees (the Illinois Audubon Society, the Illinois Environmental Council, and North American Bluebird Society).

Therefore, we thank these members for contributing extra money with their dues: Clark Ashby, Phyllis Beck, Mary Dresser, Linda Dutcher, Judy and Joseph Groskind, Nelda Hinckley, Jeff Kessner, Greg Kupiec, David and Anton Kvernes, Richard and Cindy LaSalle, North American Bluebird Society, Lyle White, and Laraine Wright.

Our assets, all cash are \$5,561 as of the end of 2020, held in a checking account and a certificate of deposit at the SIU Credit Union, a member-owned bank headquartered in Carbondale. Friends, we will be back together again by fall, we are positive. We are now in our 51st year. A celebration!

Cypress Creek Acquisition Purchase of the Powless Tract

The cooperation of many partners resulted in the purchase of approximately 70 acres along the Cache River Diversion in Alexander county. This property is enrolled in the Wetland Reserve Easement program managed by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The remaining residual value of the Powless easement was secured through a signed purchase agreement with Ducks Unlimited. The land is currently being surveyed with hopes of scheduling a closing in December/January. The property will be donated to the Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge and provide recreational access to the Cache and Mississippi Rivers. This purchase was made possible with funding assistance from Southern Illinois Audubon, Ducks Unlimited, and Friends of the Cache River Watershed.



Seeing Birds

Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season motivated many folks to get out, get some exercise in nature, participate in citizen science, and see birds. CoVid-19 restrictions changed the way most birders assisted in counts.

Vicki L-M and I partnered in several counts but drove separately. We were still able to be outside together; we both wore masks and social distanced. As long-time team-mates, we had a well working system. The driver drives, the

passenger tallies. The driver observes the left, the passenger the right. These routines and others go out the window when you're in two separate vehicles. It was worth the tediousness and extra gas of two vehicle to be birding together. We all miss many things we currently can't do because of CoVid-19 restrictions. Not riding together with others while birding is one of mine. *-Rhonda R.*

Geoff LaBaron, Christmas Bird Count Director for the National Audubon Society, wrote in his report of the 120th CBC (last season, 2019), "When Frank Chapman published the results from the humble beginnings on December 25, 1900 — 27 people tallied birds and their combined effort in 25 locations across the continent — it was probably unfathomable to him that the brand new "Christmas Bird Census" would last well over a century, and grow to cover the entire Western Hemisphere and beyond. Not only has it lasted, it is growing!

In 2019, the 120th count season, 40 new counts were started, for a total of 2,646 counts. The counts had 81,601 total observers (71,040 in the field plus 10,561 feeder watchers), also up over the 119th Count's 79,000+ counters. Of the 2,646 counts, 469 are included from Canada, 1,992 from the United States, and 185 from Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands. Of particular note in the new counts from Ecuador is the Isla Santa Cruz, Galápagos circle—the first ever from the marvelous natural history classroom of Las Islas Encantadas where Charles Darwin first hatched his ideas about speciation and evolution.

LaBarron states that given all the effort, coverage, and species included in the 120th Count, it seems both surprising and worrisome that the total number of birds tallied in the 120th season dropped to 42,704,077 birds (39,062,097 in the United States, 3,017,077 in Canada, and 624,903 elsewhere). That total is around six million birds lower than the 119th season's also very low cumulative number, particularly given the greater number of counts and participants in the 120th season. One cannot help but wonder what's going on and what may be causing it. Plans are to do a future analysis of long-term CBC results, looking at species groups, numbers of birds, and the total effort each season, to look into where the largest declines seem to be happening.

One of the species highlighted in LaBarron's report was the sandhill crane. CBC results show that sandhill cranes are taking advantage of milder winters and less snow and ice cover, and are lingering into the CBC period far north of their "usual" southwestern and south coastal wintering grounds. Counts across the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic, and Southeastern states are tallying good numbers of sandhills with increasing frequency, and other sandhills linger even farther northward on occasion. It is an interesting situation with this species, where the breeding range is extending southeastward from east-central Canada, while the wintering range is extending northward, at least in the eastern two-thirds of North America.

Excerpts from: www.audubon.org/news/120th-christmas-bird-count-summary

Sandhill cranes were tallied on the Mermet Lake 120th CBC count, in the Kentucky part of the circle. On 12/30/20 they were seen in Massac County.

Some Southernmost IL 2020 CBC Results

The Crab Orchard NWR Christmas Bird Count (CBC) took place on 12/20. Compiler Vicki Lang-Mendenhall stated that this year there were more volunteers participating but less area to cover. Due to CoVid-19 restrictions, all closed areas of the refuge historically surveyed and making up a large part of the count circle, were off limits to counters. This doesn't seem to have hampered the count too much. The species total came to 100! This total included a merlin and a rufous hummingbird.

Full result of the Arklands/Pyramid St. Pk. count were not available as of this writing. Volunteer participation was low with only six birders helping. Vicki Lang-Mendenhall and Rhonda Rothrock were surprised to encounter a flock of red crossbills in the pines at the park. Northern birder Beau Schaefer came down to help, locating a barn owl in his area.

Vern Kleen, compiler of the Horseshoe Lake and Union County CBCs, reports that several regular observers for both counts did not participate this year and major territories were not covered at all. Thirteen birders helped with the Horseshoe Lake count, locating 101 species, 36,145 birds in all. The Union Co. count had 15 participants. They tallied 96 species, 37,680 birds total, including 140 trumpeter and 26 tundra swans.

It was a rainy day of birding for the folks who helped with the Mermet Lake CBC. The rain might have been responsible for the lower species total of 96, 53,011 birds. That said, the count tallied six late migrants including 2 gray catbirds, 2 Lincoln's sparrows, a house wren, and a common yellowthroat (warbler). Kelly McKay and Mark Vuckovich, who surveyed the Kentucky area of the circle, also located 2 western meadowlarks. In the compiler's opinion, best bird of the day went to Anne and Bill Parmley. Upon returning to their home just north of Metropolis, they heard then saw 38 sandhill cranes fly overhead.

The Middle Mississippi NWR CBC circle is located $\frac{1}{2}$ in north-western Jackson County (IL) and $\frac{1}{2}$ across the Mississippi in Perry County Missouri. Ten birders participated, six in Illinois and four in Missouri. It was a beautiful dawn and the great horned owls were cooperative. As there aren't any large bodies of water within the circle, duck species are always missed. Even with more birders than average helping, the count tallied only 78 species, 12,429 birds. A goshawk and a rough-legged hawk were two of the 71 species tallied on the MO side of the circle. The 65 species tallied on the IL side included a chipping sparrow.

Fourteen birders and 2 feeder watchers tallied 97 species, 52,495 birds, for the Jackson County CBC. It's a good species number for this count. New Year's morning started with rain, so some birders missed the owling hours. Birds of the day were a Harris's sparrow and 6 short-eared owls.

The Jackson County CBC has always been held on New Year's Day, since it first started on January 1, 1997. Steven Juhlin, SIAS Outings Chair at the time, suggested it to the board, who all agreed it would be a wonderful way to begin the new year. And I've felt that wonder on many a 3 or 4 a.m. pre-dawn New Year's morning. I've seen meteors shoot by through the stars as I've stood outside taking in the night sky while listening for the "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all" of a barred owl. The sometimes calm and quiet have been inspiring. Most moving is to catch the high whiny or haunting trill of a screech-owl as the new year begins. *-Rhonda R.*

**Trump
Auction
for Arctic
Oil Rights
Receives
Little
Interest**



Polar bears are particularly at risk of dying in oil spills. (Getty Images)

In the first week of January 2021, the Trump administration held the first sale for rights to drill for oil in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge - but it drew no interest from major companies. An Alaskan state agency emerged as the primary bidder at the auction, which has been heavily criticized by environmental groups. The sale raised less than \$15 million - far less than the government had hoped. Major companies, including oil giant Exxon, Shell and BP, have said they are focusing their spending on renewable energy, amid a huge slump in oil prices, in part triggered by the coronavirus pandemic. The wildlife refuge is estimated to hold some 1.1 billion barrels of oil.

Adam Kolton, executive director of the Alaska Wilderness League, said the sale was an "epic failure" for the Trump administration and the Alaska Republicans, who had backed the move as a way to create jobs and reduce American dependence on foreign oil "After years of promising a revenue and jobs bonanza they ended up throwing a party for themselves, with the state being one of the only bidders," he said in a statement. "We have long known that the American people don't want drilling in the Arctic Refuge, the [Alaska native] Gwich'in people don't want it, and now we know the oil industry doesn't want it either." Mr. Kolton said his organization would continue to fight in court to reverse the sale of the land, which is home to caribou, polar bears, and millions of migratory birds.

Opening the wilderness for drilling and development has been a long-term priority for Alaska Republicans, but development was expected to be costly since the area has minimal roads and infrastructure. After decades of controversy, the sale was finally authorized by the US Congress in 2017 as part of a major package of tax cuts. The auction came just weeks before Donald Trump is due to leave office on 20 January. President-elect Joe Biden had vowed to protect the refuge and environmental groups have also challenged the sale, that they say threatens land that provides a vital home to wildlife. A federal court rejected arguments by environmental groups seeking to block the auction.

At the auction, the Bureau of Land Management said it had received bids for 12 of the 22 tracts of land offered, covering more than 600,000 acres. The Alaska Industrial Development and Industrial Authority, a state agency, was the sole bidder on at least eight of the 12 tracts.

Excerpts from: www.bbc.com/news/business-55564483

Trump Administration's Environmental "Midnight Regulations"

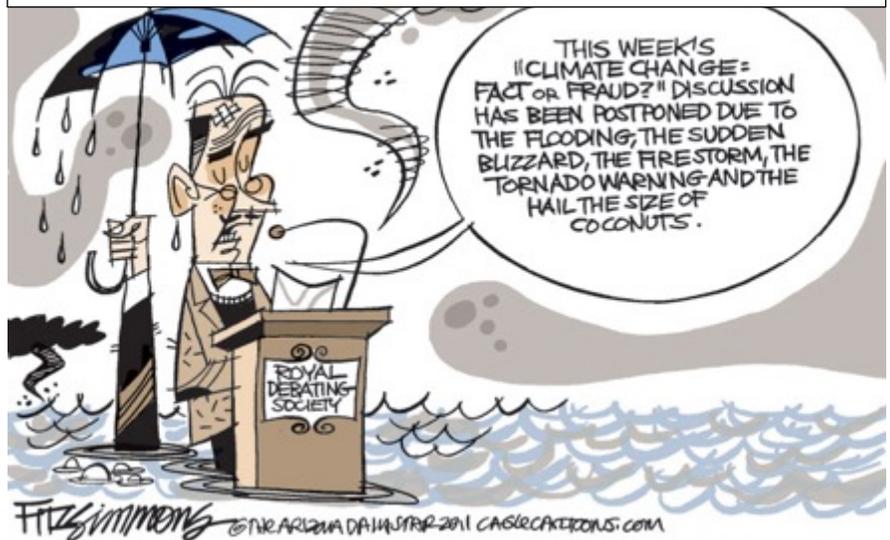
In December President Trump's political appointees finalized an array of last-minute federal regulations ahead of Joe Biden's inauguration, including rules that would make it harder to enforce environmental protections, tighten immigration, remove penalties for killing birds, and possibly eliminate food assistance for millions of Americans.

In February 2019, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) proposed a rule that would remove penalties for accidentally killing a bird, potentially shielding companies from big fines. The agency just announced its final decision. The final regulation clarifies that conduct resulting in unintentional (incidental) injury or death of migratory birds is not prohibited under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). This makes it clear that the USFWS will not prosecute landowners, industry, and other individuals for accidentally killing a migratory bird; that incidental take of birds resulting from an activity is not prohibited when the underlying purpose of that activity is not to take birds. Luckily, the Endangered Species Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, as well as state laws and regulations are not affected by the final regulation change.

On November 16, the Department of Energy sent to the White House a rule it proposed in August to loosen water efficiency standards for showerheads, days after Trump publicly complained about weak water flow in the shower. The rule would change the definition of a showerhead and is opposed by conservation, consumer groups, utility companies, and manufacturers. A separate rule that would loosen energy conservation standards for washers and dryers was also sent to the White House for final review in November. It's also opposed by conservation groups and manufacturers.

Two rules from the Environmental Protection Agency are awaiting final approval. Both would make it harder for the agency to use science as the main determining factor in the rulemaking process. The first would require a cost-benefit analysis for any proposed policy changes under the Clean Air Act, regardless of whether the environmental impacts outweigh the potential economic ones and could have significant long-term effects on policymaking at the agency. The rule would also prevent scientists at the agency from presenting co-benefits of a proposed policy change. So, if scientists propose a crackdown on o-zone levels and that decreased amount also reduces other kinds of emissions, those co-benefits will no longer be considered when evaluating if the rule change should become policy or not. "It's forced the EPA to present a more narrow type of analysis that therefore makes the benefits seem smaller too," said Brett Harti, government affairs director at the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental advocacy group.

This data was extracted from several sources but mostly from: www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/trump-administration-pushes-midnight-for-final-year-rulemaking/ar-BB1bGfJg?ocid=mailsignout&li=BBbnfcl



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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.



Cache Frog and Toad Survey Volunteer Orientation

Saturday, Jan 30th, 1-3 p.m. at the Cache Wetlands Center
Try a new venture by assisting in listening surveys of the frogs and toads of the Cache River watershed for the Illinois Natural History Survey.

Volunteers are needed for this citizen science project. Materials will be provided for the surveys that are conducted four times between February and June. Your choice of designated routes. Call the Center at 618.657.2064 for details.

Giant City State Park Winter Tree ID Hike

Saturday, Feb. 6th, 1-3 p.m., Registration Required

Join Jennifer Behnken, Community Forester for the MO Dept. of Conservation as she shares easy and fun tips to discover trees in winter. The hike will be along the 1-mile Giant City Nature Trail. Phone the Giant City Visitors Center at 618.457.4836 for complete details and to register.

To prevent the spread of CoVid19, bring a mask. If social distancing of at least 6 feet is not possible, masks must be worn.

Cache Monthly Nature Movie Presentations at the Wetlands Center

Squirrels – Thursday, February 11th at 2-3 p.m. and 6-7 p.m.

Rabbits – Thursday, March 11th at 2-3 p.m. and 6-7 p.m.

The Cache Wetlands Center is located at 8885 State Rt. 37 South, Cypress.

For more details, call 618.657.2064.

Plan to observe all CoVid restrictions in effect at the time of these events.

SIAS Board of Directors

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Rhonda Rothrock 618.684.6605 Or
woodthrusheola@hotmail.com
SIAS Webmaster: Jim Shofstall
SIAS email: siadubonsociety@gmail.com
SIAS Website: <http://www.siadubon.org>



Why don't anteaters get sick? They're full of anty-bodies!

**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*

Check the top right of your mailing label to see if your 2020 dues have expired. Thanks for renewing!