



# WingTips

A Publication of the Lake/Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society ♦ January 2012

## 'Peeps' from the President

As I write this, the results of local Christmas Bird Counts are trickling in, and two of the most exciting finds occurred in the middle of the savanna at Fort Sheridan. There – on land that some developers are still hoping to turn into a golf course – counters found a LeConte's and a Henslow's Sparrow. Both were first records for the north suburban CBC since it began in the early 1900s, and the Henslow's was only the third CBC record anywhere in Illinois. The others date back to 1950-51 and 1964-65. It's a stark reminder of the vital importance of habitat in bird survival. If you care about birds (and I know you do), I urge you to support the efforts of organizations like Illinois Audubon Society and American Bird Conservancy that work to preserve hospitable environments for wildlife – avian and otherwise.

– Rena Cohen



## Eagles, Hummers, Snowys Oh My!

In the 'birds making headlines' department, it's been a busy few months. Take the two immature Bald Eagles raised by Dawn Keller and Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation in Barrington after they were abandoned after a storm destroyed their nest in Batavia. On November 17, Keller released the juvenile males at Starved Rock in Utica, IL. Keller chose the release site because of the large number of wintering Bald Eagles there. See for yourself—take part in the Bald Eagle Watch January 28-29! (See events on page 4.)

Then there's the erstwhile mystery hummingbird found in the backyard of Oak Park birders Eric, Ethan and Aaron Gyllenhaal. Using DNA testing on fecal and feather samples, a Field Museum researcher confirmed the hummer was a female Rufous Hummingbird (typically found in the far western US). The bird made news from local media to the American Birding Association blog.

Finally a Snowy Owl 'invasion' from Montrose to Winthrop Harbor has captured the imagination even of the non-birding public. The ethereal-looking bird raises its young in remote tundra wilderness. A Snowy Owl population boom last summer has likely driven the birds south to Chicago in search of food this winter, delivering thrilling views of the cousins of Harry Potter's pet owl Hedwig.



## Giving Barn Owls a Chance – January 17 Program

With their distinctive faces and soft, cream-colored plumage, Barn Owls stick in the memories of those lucky enough to see them. In recent decades, breeding Barn Owls have become locally extinct. The Lake/Cook

Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society plans to place nesting boxes in Lake County in hopes of attracting breeding Barn Owls to our area.

At our January 17 program, hear Dan Thompson, ecologist with the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County, talk about efforts to reintroduce this beautiful, state-endangered bird to Chicago's suburbs.

Admission is free and

open to the public.

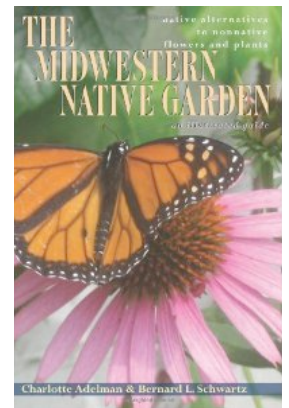
Tuesday, January 17 at 7:00 PM  
Heller Nature Center  
2821 Ridge Road in Highland Park  
Find more program information at:  
[www.LakeCookAudubon.org/birding\\_programs.html](http://www.LakeCookAudubon.org/birding_programs.html)



## Think Spring! The Midwestern Native Garden

Walking her dog one afternoon, Lake/Cook Audubon member Charlotte Adelman noticed the diversity of birds, butterflies and bees attracted to a field of coneflowers, blazing stars and black-eyed Susans. In contrast, she saw that neighborhood yards filled with hostas, red geraniums and day lilies lacked that buzz of activity. Her epiphany became her passion — turning her backyard garden of nonnative species into a colorful display of native plants that welcome beautiful and beneficial insects and birds. Then she and her husband Bernard Schwartz wrote a book to help others do the same.

Get inspired – read about *The Midwestern Native Garden* on page 2 ▶ ▶ ▶



### ***The Midwestern Native Garden, continued***

*Why landscape with native plants?* Here are but a few compelling reasons: Properly situated, native plants require little or no maintenance; they are hardy, disease resistant, reliably beautiful and easy to grow. Dwindling populations of native bees, butterflies and birds rely on these plants for their very survival. Growing native plants helps preserve our regional natural heritage – flora and fauna.

#### *Ready to start planning your own native garden?*

Charlotte and Bernard offer these tips: Choose a site and determine its soil and light conditions; then choose plants that suit those conditions. Select a variety of plants so you have flowers from early spring through late fall. Include some native grasses, too. These provide texture and color contrast and play host to skipper butterflies, who lay their eggs on native grasses and sedges. Don't get sidetracked by pretty (or cheap) nonnatives or cultivars – they won't provide the benefits that true natives offer. Space plantings, allowing room for them to grow and spread. Follow expert advice to get young plants off to a strong start.

#### *How long will it take for a new native garden to look good?*

In June 2010, Wilmette Boy Scouts, following Charlotte's plan, planted native flowers and grasses around a one acre detention pond at Wilmette's Centennial Park. The photo below was taken just three months later! In a few more years, the garden will be fully established, all the while attracting native birds, butterflies and human visitors with its colorful display.



Photo by Joe Bruner, Boy Scout Troop 2; September 2010

*Where can I learn more about native gardening?* A few books to get started: *The Midwestern Native Garden* by Charlotte Adelman & Bernard L. Schwartz, is filled with color photos and recommendations on native replacements for nonnative species; *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas Tallamy advocates native plants to sustain wildlife; and *Go Native! Gardening with Native Plants and Wildflowers in the Lower Midwest* by Carol Harstad offers selection tips for a variety of conditions and purposes. **Plan ahead** – The Lake County Forest Preserve Native Plant Sale is in May 2012 (dates to be announced).

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