

Chapter Focus

Will County Chapter Illinois Audubon Society

May 2016

1. Formation of the Chapter: After World War II, Dr. George Woodruff, an ophthalmologist, wanted to take flying lessons. His wife objected and enlisted Dr. Gayle Hufford, head of the Joliet Public Schools to interest him in birding. Thus, the Joliet Audubon Society was founded. We have an original typed copy of their 1949 Christmas Census with six members participating. We were encouraged by Ray Mostek, IAS President, to become an IAS chapter and joined in Dec. of 1970. Founding members encouraged the construction of a nature center in Pilcher Park where we continue to have meetings today.

2. What is a great place to bird in the Will County Chapter area? We are fortunate to have a great system of forest preserves in Will County as well as in surrounding counties. The Des Plaines and Kankakee Rivers join to form the Illinois River just a short distance away and together with the Des Plaines Conservation Area, Goose Lake Prairie, and Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie offer abundant birding opportunities. Lake Renwick Rookery Nature Preserve near Plainfield, IL is also a favorite.

3. What motivates or inspires your Chapter to keep going? A long history of those who came before us and the desire to carry on the tradition of introducing the public to the joys of birding. Also, because of past achievements, the realization that we can make a difference in conservation causes.

4. What made a recent field trip or program particularly memorable?

Last May we conducted a meeting where we built bee nesting-blocks before a program on bees. Of course, any field trip where a new birder sees a “life” bird is great fun.

5. Name a signature species or popular migrating bird in your area. Bald eagles are becoming more prominent in the area, so we enjoy their more frequent appearance even throughout the summer. American white pelicans show up in surprising places and immatures hang around Lake Renwick into the summer.

6. Does your Chapter have a defining mission or goal? If so, what is it? To promote the appreciation and increased knowledge of wild bird life and the environments which support it, and to further the conservation of natural resources.

7. Any local conservation success stories? From 1982 until 1990, our Chapter worked to have the Lake Renwick Rookery set aside as part of the Will County Forest Preserve District. We succeeded and in 1992 it was designated an Illinois Nature Preserve. In 1997, another nearly year-long drive led to the preservation of Copley Nature Park which provided an overlook to Lake Renwick from Rt. 30. Townhomes had been approved for the site. Just last year, our Chapter worked to connect the Joliet Park District with IAS to successfully add 80 acres of property to Pilcher Park. Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and IAS made it all possible and people in our community are excited about the long-sought after addition to this INAI site.

8. What are the biggest challenges for conservation in your area? Even though development has slowed down in recent years, we live in an increasingly urban area constantly undergoing development and change. We are often faced with issues that threaten the natural resources of the region. For example, we have officially opposed the Illiana Expressway. Many of us volunteer at the Midewin

National Tallgrass Prairie, which would be negatively impacted by its development. A recently proposed Great Lakes Basin Railroad line would bypass Chicago and partially align with the Illiana route.

9. For the backyard birder to take it to the next level, how can membership in the Will County Chapter be beneficial? We have a very encouraging, down-to-earth membership that embraces the beginning birder. Joining the group and participating in field trips and meetings can open a whole new world to those who want to get outdoors and learn more about birds and nature.

10. Anything your Chapter is doing that is unique or different from other Chapters?

We were proponents for the preservation of the Lake Renwick Rookery and every breeding season about 25 of our members act as interpreters at the site. We have been volunteering there for 25 years and both our group and many of our members have been recognized by the Forest Preserve District of Will County for their service. We have supported Scouts in projects, providing funds for wood duck boxes along Lily Cache Creek near Lake Renwick and a new bird viewing blind at Pilcher Park. We also belong to the Bird Conservation Network in the Chicago Region.