## **DuPage Birding Club**



#### **Next Meeting**

#### **Member's Night**

March 14, 2019 7:00 p.m. Social Time 7:15 p.m. Speaker

Faith Lutheran Church 41 N. Park Blvd. Glen Ellyn Basement

6:00 p.m. Pre-meeting dinner

Potbelly Sandwich Shop 552 Roosevelt Rd. Glen Ellyn

## **Drummings 2019**

## **President's Message**

Greetings, fellow DBC members,

It looks like I'm back for a spell to serve as your 2019 Club President, a role I'm rather looking forward to. After a hiatus of a few years, returning to the Club's Board feels familiar, exciting, and fun. I think we have a lot to be jazzed about as the New Year kicks in.

First of all, it's going to be a good year for the speaker program. For those who joined us for Scott Weidensaul's fascinating January presentation on Project SNOWstorm, you know we are starting strong. More than 230 people enjoyed Scott's engaging and lively presentation. Our March 14 meeting will feature another crowd-pleaser, the annual Members' Night bonanza of great trip reports, photo journeys, and birding encounters. DBC VP Denis Kania is lining up compelling learning opportunities for our speaker programs throughout the rest of the year, including some mini-tutorials on specific bird IDs and a special workshop or two.

Field trip organizers Kathy Mineck and Jessica Walters (and all the field trip leaders) are providing outstanding opportunities to enjoy our winter residents and special visitors right now. Don't let the cold deter you—there are still great birding opportunities out there. Winter birding helps hone your ID skills with our residents and keeps your skills fresh for March, when the waterfowl start returning...then April with the early passerines...and then May, glorious May—and the birding world bursts with goodness! Our Field Trip coordinators manage 80+ field trips a year, meaning that you can go birding with knowledgable field trip leaders every week of the year.

I'm happy that we are sponsoring the Gull Frolic February 16 as well as Wild Things on February 23, as I believe contribution to the community is an important part of our charter as a club. Our Outreach program is a way we show our support for the birding community and advocate for birding with the public. Outreach managers John and Kathy Hebert need volunteers and invite you to join them as they respond to requests from area organizations, schools, and special event coordinators.

Finally, I'm jazzed about the Board and Committee Leads that are currently leading the DuPage Birding Club. Not only are they really nice people, but they are bringing fresh thinking, commitment and energy, and great execution skills to the work to be done. I think you will sense a vibe of innovation and creativity in our programs this year. We have a proud 34-year legacy as one of the premier birding clubs in the Midwest, and we're going to make this one of our best years yet. I invite you to join the fun.

Stay warm,

Diann

## In Case You Missed It – January 10, 2019

#### **Caught in the SNOWstorm**

Upwards of 230 DuPage Birding Club members and other local residents (including a hefty contingent from Kane County Audubon) converged at the warm and amenable Cantigny Visitor Center to learn about snowy owls from someone who knows them as well as anyone—<u>Scott Weidensaul</u>, one of the founders of Project SNOWstorm, an owl monitoring project without parallel.

DBC President Diann Bilderback kicked things off, welcoming everyone and adding a call for volunteers to staff DBC tables at two February events—The Gull Frolic and the Wild Things conference. Those interested can email.

DBC VP Denis Kania took it from there, highlighting <u>upcoming meetings</u> and whetting our appetites for snowy owls by giving six lucky winners a limited edition Kania print of a saw-whet owl. He then introduced Scott, an expert on bird migration and author of many books, including *The Peterson Reference Guide to Owls of North America and the Caribbean*.

How did Project SNOWstorm start? The winter of 2013-14 saw the largest invasion of the snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) into the eastern United States in memory, with snowies appearing way down in Florida and off the coast in Bermuda. Seizing the day, Scott led the almost-overnight formation of a coalition of scientists and monitors that continue to track this Arctic raptor in 15 states. Collaborators, now numbering 45, range from vets and pathologists to ornithologists and banders from dozens of organizations. Project SNOWstorm is crowdfunded.

After describing how the owls are fitted with harmless, solar-powered GPS-GSM transmitters that use cellphone networks, Scott dispelled some of the conventional wisdom about these birds—it's not lack of resources that sends them south, it's too much. More food (lemmings and such) during breeding season leads to more hatched eggs, and to avoid overcrowding many snowies head south.

Why SNOWstorm in four initial caps? SNOW is the alphabetical code for snowy owl, an abbreviation of a bird's English or scientific name used as shorthand. In this case, SNOW represents SNowy and OWl.

One thing Project SNOWstorm has learned is that each snowy owl is an individual. Some stay close to their chosen territory, while others with wanderlust roam far and wide. Some stick to the same habitats each year, others do not. Even sex differences —females are darker than males, young birds darker than adults—are more tendency than rule.

Seen close up, it is quickly apparent that these birds tend to be infested with feather lice more than other birds (or at least they appear to be so because of their whitest of plumages). A new line of inquiry has been opened to study these and other snowy owl parasites. Although usually found in robust health, snowy owls face a variety of hazards living near humans—windmills, rodent poison, mercury. Airplanes may be their number one danger, as snowies are attracted to living on or near the wide-open spaces of airports. Efforts are made to relocate such owls for their safety.

Studying these nocturnal hunters from birth to dispersal to breeding to death has created puzzles that have been answered from the very same research. Scott shared the story of one owl whose transmission made it appear to be walking north to Canada. After some thought and investigation, it was found to actually be riding slow-moving ice floes in search of ducks (aka food) that crowd into gaps of open water. This behavior has been observed more than once, and "ice owl" might be a more appropriate common name for this species, said Scott.

Scott concluded by inviting the entire audience to come along for the wild ride he's been on these past five years. Go to <a href="https://www.projectsnowstorm.org">www.projectsnowstorm.org</a> to track individual owls (there are 75 being monitored now), see what's new, review historical results, gather teaching materials, donate, or to even get directly involved.

After answering a bunch of audience questions—where we learned the global population of snowy owls is about 28,000, that snowies are in great peril from climate change, and the status of tracking Illinois owls for Project SNOWstorm (not yet)—Scott stayed to chat while signing copies of his books. The DBC could not have enjoyed better weather or a better speaker for our first meeting of the year. A big thank you to all who made Scott's visit possible and helped to make it such a success. See you at Members' Night in March!







A standing room crowd at our January meeting was fully entertained by Scott Weidensaul's presentation. A few lucky attendees receiving Denis Kania's Saw-whet Owl prints.

# **Volunteers Wanted**

We are looking for volunteers to help man the Club's table at the Gull Frolic on Feb. 16 and at the Wild Things Conference on Feb. 23. If you are attending either of these events and would be willing to spend an hour helping the club please contact our Outreach Coordinator John Hebert at <a href="mailto:JHebert@Dupagebirding.org">JHebert@Dupagebirding.org</a>

## IS THAT A SHOEBILL OR IS IT THE GRAIL?

### **Denis Kania**

For anyone visiting Uganda, a trek with chimpanzees and mountain gorillas has to be a part of your itinerary. Definitely a must see activity, it is a very rewarding experience. For any birder a trip to Uganda has to include an effort to see the Shoebill. This is a very large bird that is related to storks but has a huge bill that looks a lot like a Dutch wooden shoe. There are not too many places that you can find the Shoebill. Their range is rather limited and their habitat requirements are quite restrictive. They are found in South Sudan, but not many people are vacationing there these days. The next best location is in Uganda.

The trip to Entebbe, Uganda requires a flight itinerary of over 24 hours. Our route on Turkish Airlines took us through Istanbul before a short stop in Kigale, Rwanda and finally Entebbe, Uganda. We arrived at 4:00AM for a day of recuperation and casual birding around the compound of our guest house. It was hard to relax knowing that my most sought after bird in the world was potentially foraging in papyrus swamps less than an hour away. It is one of the more accessible places to search for the Shoebill but certainly not guaranteed.

I marked time while reacquainting myself with old friends like Ross' Turaco and Black-headed Gonolek as well as some new ones in the form of Gray Plantain Eater, Gray Parrot and Double-toothed Barbet. Even with jet lag the next morning couldn't come soon enough. I had booked a private tour of the Mabamba Swamp on the shores of Lake Victoria to increase my chances of seeing a Shoebill before leaving Uganda.

This story began long before the grueling flight itinerary that brought us to Entebbe. When I was just a young boy back in the early 60's, my family visited Brookfield Zoo as an annual summertime activity. I can remember my first encounter with a Shoebill. I didn't realize yet that I was a birder, but I photographed that Shoebill as I found the bird to be a very interesting subject. I can still remember how the bird was posed and the basic habitat cell that held my subject. Fifty plus years later I once again was interested in finding and photographing one of the most bizarre birds in the world.

The big day finally arrived, and four of us set out for our search in the Mabamba Swamp. It is a vast area to search, but the local guides know the area very well. Our first sighting eased the anxiety but was not very rewarding. A distant Shoebill in flight provided the checkmark but hardly compared to the mental image I was carrying with me. After a lot of effort on the part of our guide and boatmen, a Shoebill was found foraging in the papyrus beds but again at great distance. I once again had my Shoebill photo, but I'm not sure it was any better than what I was able to capture in the low light of the Brookfield Zoo bird house with the family Kodak Hawkeye camera.

Fortunately, there were more Shoebill opportunities to come later in the trip. When we visited Murchison Falls National Park, we found Shoebills two days in a row with much more satisfying views and better photographic opportunities. The last individual that we found was no more than 40 yards away and completely unobstructed by any vegetation. When all was said and done, we had found five Shoebills and the last encounter far exceeded anything I could have dreamt.



That could be the end of the story, but it gets more interesting. Shortly after returning home, I ran into David Willard, Collections Manager Emeritus of the Field Museum. Some of his research had taken place in Uganda, so we had some stories to share. I told David all about my life encounters with Shoebills. I told him that my only regret was that when my mother passed away, the family photo albums went in several directions, and I could not locate the photo that I remembered taking way back in the day. I had found my Shoebill, but there was something more spiritual missing that the recent find could not satisfy

David, with that friendly warm smile of his, had great news for me. The Shoebill that I photographed in the 60's had become a part of the Field Museum collection when it died. David told me I could stop by the Field Museum anytime to reacquaint myself with my long lost friend and, if I would like to, I could even take a new picture. How could I pass up an opportunity like that?



I always felt that compared to many birders I really started my birding late in life. I was 30 years old before I picked up binoculars for the fun of looking at birds. I've come to realize that some of my earliest memories in life are centered around bird sightings. I can remember stumbling upon my first Snowy Owl when my family lived on the south side of Chicago. I can remember stepping out of a car to get a better look at some Great Blue Herons taking flight like Pterodactyls. The problem was that the car was still moving. And, of course, I remember my first and best encounter with the magnificent Shoebill. Maybe I've been a birder a lot longer than I thought.

My Shoebill searches both near and far have finally satisfied my quest. But truth be told, when we looked at the catalog label on the Shoebill that I held it said that the bird was collected in 1959. That would have meant that the oldest that I could have been when I snapped the shot was four years. So, I know that was not the case and thus not the bird. But, I am satisfied that I have connected with this species better than I could ever have imagined.

## **Spring Meeting Schedule**

### March 14 – Members Night

Come out to see where DBC members have been birding in the past year. Each presentation will have about 10-15 slides and a short story. In the past, our members have been really creative in their photographic and video presentations. Some programs will give you a glimpse of a far away place and some might be bird antics right in our own backyard. In the past they have been both informative and entertaining. It's always a fun night! Submissions for members night will be accepted starting on February 16. Watch for a DBC email blast with detailed instructions for submissions!

**Special Start Time:** Social time will start at 7:00 as usual, however, the meeting will begin at 7:15 so that we can squeeze in another presentation or two. All the more fun!

## April 11 - A Little Bird Told Me

Criss-crossing the world has given Denis Kania an opportunity to witness conservation efforts that are very impressive considering they are taking place in developing countries with limited financial resources. Denis will talk about some of these amazing projects. We will also explore how choices that we make here at home have significant impact half way around the world. Lastly, Denis will talk about initiatives closer to home that give us all an opportunity to make the world a better place for birds. It all started with the pursuit of a little bird.

#### Mini Tutorial – The Waterthrushes

Starting with the April meeting we will be incorporating mini-tutorials before the main presentation that are meant to provide timely information on field identification or interesting birding locations. This meeting we will be discussing the finer points of visually identifying the waterthrushes.

## May 9 - Birding Haunts you Should Know

It's Spring and birding will be reaching a fever pitch. It's sometimes hard to decide where to spend your birding hours. This meeting we will have some of our birding experts share their experience with their favorite birding sites in DuPage County. The sites featured will include Fermilab, presented by Dave Spleha, Springbrook Prairie Forest Preserve presented by Joe Suchecki and Waterfall Glen Forest Preserve presented by Vicky Sroczynski. Come find out where some of your target species can be found, best trails for exploring and, best time of year to visit.

**Mini Tutorial** – The thrushes including Veery, Gray-cheeked, Swainson's, Hermit and Wood Thrush will be discussed with field identification in mind.

## February 2019 Field Trips

The coming months are the time to see winter birds. Some species are only seen this time of year. There are opportunities for all types of birders to participate and enjoy the season. We encourage everyone to enjoy birding in a safe manner. Please wear warm clothing and winter footwear, and be prepared for winter weather and winter trail conditions.

This trip list, any trip changes, additions or cancellations, and lots of other club information is on our DBC website at http://www.dupagebirding.org

Participants are welcome to contact the trip leader if they have questions. Our field trip leaders can help you find the trip's starting location if you need additional directions.

Interested in being a field trip leader? It's easy! Let us know your favorite birding spot and a time when you can lead and we will add it to the list. You do not have to be a birding expert, you just need to be comfortable at a specific site. Contact <a href="mailto:dbcfieldtrips@dupagebirding.org">dbcfieldtrips@dupagebirding.org</a> for more information.

# Saturday, February 9, 7:30 am McKee Marsh, Winfield

This site remains one of DuPage County's premier birding spots. Walk around the marsh with us to check out winter birds. Meet at the visitor parking lot on the north side of Mack Road (Mack is south of Roosevelt and north of Butterfield), located between Winfield Road and Rte. 59 in Warrenville. Be sure to dress for the weather.

Leader: Kyle Wiktor, (H) 708-544-1336, (C) 708-506-5186 kylewiktor@msn.com

## Saturday, February 16, 7:30 am Elsen's Hill - West DuPage Woods, Winfield

One of our best-known warbler locations can be a productive winter site as well. We will be targeting a few winter specialties including finches, sparrows and wrens. We'll meet at Elsen's Hill parking lot. Take Winfield Rd. to Gary's Mill Rd. Go west on Gary's Mill Rd. to the Preserve parking lot entrance on the north side of the road. Dress for the weather. Depending on conditions the trails can be icy or muddy.

Leader: Mark Bavetz, mbavetz@dupagebirding.org

# Saturday, February 23, 8:00 am Morton Arboretum, Lisle

This will be a walk for new birders. We will walk slowly and allow time for all to look at the birds. We will be looking for winter birds, such as Red tailed hawks, Cooper's hawks, Black-capped Chickadees and more. Meet at parking lot #33 on west side. Go under the bridge to get to the west side, turn left to parking lot. Maps are available at the gates. The Arboretum is located just north of I-88 off Rte. 53. There is a per-person charge for nonmembers. Admission is \$14.00 per adult and \$12.00 for 65+. Note: The Arboretum does not open its gates until 7 am. Wear appropriate clothing and shoes.

Leader: Bonnie Graham 630-204-8750, Bgraham@dupagebirding.org

## Sunday, February 24, 8:00 am Mayslake, Oak Brook

Join us at Mayslake, a site with a nice mix of lakes, savannah and oak woods. We will look for winter residents as well as early migrants. Meet at the parking lot by the dog park on St.'s Road south of 31st St. just west of HWY 83. Wear appropriate footwear for snowy trails. Be advised that the trail may not be cleared.

Leaders: Steve and Kathy Mineck, 630-254-4077, kmineck@dupagebirding.org

## And don't miss out on these special February events!

DBC is one of the sponsors for the **18<sup>th</sup> Annual Gull Frolic** on February 16. This annual winter event is loads of fun and a good opportunity for spotting rare gulls. For information please visit their website at <a href="http://www.illinoisbirds.org/18th-annual-gull-frolic/">http://www.illinoisbirds.org/18th-annual-gull-frolic/</a>

Don't miss out: the 2019 **Wild Things Conference** will be held on Saturday, February 23, 9:00am-6:00pm. For information, visit <a href="http://www.wildthingscommunity.org">http://www.wildthingscommunity.org</a>

**The Great Backyard Bird Count** (February 15-18) is an opportunity to contribute from the comfort of your own home. Check out their website at: <a href="mailto:gbbc.birdcount.org">gbbc.birdcount.org</a>

#### **Other Birding Opportunities**

For additional birding opportunities check out the **Illinois Birding Calendar** at <a href="http://www.illinoisbirds.org/illinois-birding-calendar/">http://www.illinoisbirds.org/illinois-birding-calendar/</a>

Email us if you have questions about the trips or if you would like to lead a trip. Leaders do not have to be birding experts, just familiar with the location. There is no need to register for trips **unless otherwise indicated**. Visitors are always welcome. We do not charge fees for birding trips. Field trip information is also found at: <a href="https://www.dupagebirding.org">www.dupagebirding.org</a>

#### **Field Trip Coordinators**

Jessica Becker
Kathy Mineck
DBCFieldTrips@gmail.com











DuPage Birding Club P.O. Box 3381 Glen Ellyn, IL 60138

## **First Class**



## **2019 Meetings**

January 10

March 14

April 11

May 9

July 11

September 12

October 10

November 14