



COMPASS

Navigating the world of birds and nature

VOLUME 25, ISSUE 2

MARCH/APRIL 2011

Exciting Illiana Winter Birding

By Carolyn A. Marsh
Chicago Audubon Society

*A coastal resident of the northwest Pacific region, the Slaty-backed Gull (*Larus shistisagus*) breeds from Siberia to northern Japan and winters from Japan south to Taiwan and east through the Bering Sea region to Alaska. Putting Alaska aside, the Slaty-backed Gull is still a rare find anywhere in lower North America. With that in mind, you can imagine the excitement that rippled through the birding world in our region when this bird was found hanging out around Lake Michigan in December of 2010 southeast of Chicago where the borders of Illinois and Indiana meet: Illiana. The following article and collection of quotes not only describes the excitement felt at the Slaty-backed sightings, but includes other delightful winter sightings as well: The Purple Sandpiper and the Black-legged Kittiwake Gull—species also rarely seen in this area. The enthusiastic joy expressed by the birders when describing these auspicious wintery sightings is, indeed, contagious.*

~ The Editor ~

It was the sighting of a rare gull that caused a surge of birding on the extreme southeast side of Chicago at the state line ...

In the afternoon of 29 December 2010, Jeff McCoy was gulling on the icy breakwall adjoining the State Line Energy plant in Hammond, Indiana. The open water from the plant's warm-water discharge draws fish and waterfowl in the winter months. Out of the hundreds of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls, he was able to single out a rare Slaty-backed Gull. With the assistance of Michael Topp, John Kendall and Amar Ayyash, the gull was tracked and photographed for the Indiana Bird Records Committee for confirmation as the second sighting of its kind on Indiana record.

The next day, dozens of birders from all over Illinois and Indiana congregated for hours in Calumet Park in Chicago in search of the rare gull. For most birders, it was a new Life list bird. It was particularly tense among Illinois birders as they



Slaty-backed Gull. State Line Energy plant, Hammond, Indiana. December 29, 2010. Photo by Michael Topp.

the excitement. The Harlequin Duck was sighted at various shoreline inlets and nine Trumpeters Swans (a high number) were seen at the bi-state Wolf Lake.

I was fortunate to observe all the birds mentioned and solicited the following vivid accounts and photographs from others about their memorable winter experience for the Compass newsletter.

In Pursuit of the Slaty-backed Gull

Walter Marcisz reported: I saw the Slaty-backed Gull at the State Line Energy plant at about 7:15 a.m. on 30 December 2010. But when I saw all of the slippery ice on the riprap, I decided it was not safe to walk all the way out on the breakwall, so I stayed close to the road and watched from there. After a while, David Johnson passed me as he was returning because he had to go to work. He said no one had any luck so he was going to check Calumet Park on the

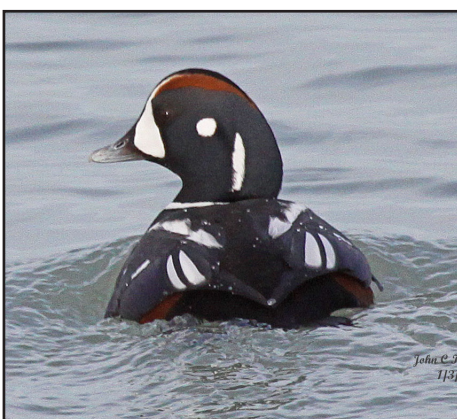
way out and he would call if he found the Slaty-back. Then Jeff Skrentny stopped to talk to me as he was leaving. While we were talking Dave called and said he located the Slaty-back off Calumet Park. So Jeff and I rushed to Calumet Park—ahead of the crowd—and the rest is as Amar wrote in his blog.

Amar Ayyash's blog:* I was very optimistic that the Slaty-backed would be seen in the morning. ... I walked down to the Calumet Park shore and began to chum: 1 Ring-billed Gull, 7 Ring-billeds, 20 Ring-billeds, 50 Ring-billeds ... It didn't seem like any of the gulls on the ice shelf were moving, but it was difficult for me to see what was happening with the naked eye. Birders began to stir up a little commotion so I thought perhaps some of the Herring Gulls on the ice shelf were responding. I then heard the famous cheer of Bruce Heimer: "YEAAH!" I'm very familiar with this cheer so I knew the bird was close. I got rid of all the chum and started to scan. The Ring-billeds came in like a plague and much of my view to the lake was obscured but I was looking too far out. Birders were cheering and high-fives were being exchanged. I yelled back to the group, "Are you guys seeing it?" Someone yelled back, "the second post." I looked to my right and the SLATY-BACKED GULL was standing in the open within 100 feet of me! Oh my, time to photograph ... I couldn't help but release my stored up energy. I screamed like a maniac, "ILLINOIS!!!!!!!" Birders responded with more cheers and clapping! It was *Illiana* at its best!

Continued on page 2



Group of birders (L to R): Carolyn Marsh, Bob Fisher, Karen Fisher and others looking for Slaty-backed Gull. The photographer who took this shot drove all the way from Milford, Illinois (Iroquois County) to take part in the sightings. Calumet Park, Chicago, December 30, 2010. Photo by Elliot Schunke.



Harlequin Duck. Whiting Park. Whiting, Indiana. January 3, 2011. Photo by John C. Kendall.

anxiously waited to see if it would fly into their state. Indeed, the Slaty-backed did glide into Illinois! Therefore, documentation would also be submitted to the Illinois Bird Records Committee for verification as the third state record!

The excitement continued into the New Year as birders from the region, including Ohio, scanned Illiana waters for birds seen only in winter time. The subsequent sighting of such hotline birds as the Purple Sandpiper and Black-legged Kittiwake increased



Slaty-backed Gull. Calumet Park in Chicago. December 30, 2010. Photo by Amar Ayyash.

In Pursuit of the Slaty-backed Gull

from page 1

Joe Lill reported: Upon arrival, I quickly jumped out of the car as other birders had the Slaty-backed in their scopes. I saw the bird, which was clearly on Indiana ice. I could see the pink legs which, combined with the black back and Herring Gull size, made for a probable ID of Slaty-backed. However, this was a Lifer for me and I needed to see the wings. Within a few minutes, Amar walked to the beach and started throwing bread on the ice. Unbelievably enough, the Slaty-backed got curious and flew in to see about the commotion. After entering Illinois, it hovered for a moment before landing, affording diagnostic looks at the “string of pearls” on the primaries. Within two minutes it headed back to Indiana, landing about a half-mile out.

I felt incredibly fortunate to have been at the right place at the right time!



Purple Sandpiper. Whiting refinery beach. Whiting, Indiana. January 7, 2011. Photo by Michael Topp (he is the Indiana birder who discovered this Purple Sandpiper!)

The Quest for the Purple Sandpiper

Mark Bowman reported: The Purple Sandpiper has been a nemesis of mine for some years. It breeds in the far northern Arctic and winters primarily along our northern Atlantic Coast. You only see its true purple coloration close up in the winter plumage. From a distance, the bird will have an elegant slate gray appearance contrasting with its orange-black bill and yellow-orange legs.

Purple Sandpiper reports over the past several years have come primarily from the Waukegan Harbor area in November and early December. Unfortunately for myself, I have failed to find them during my searches. I had essentially given up once again this year until I saw some internet reports coming from Whiting, Indiana.

On 10 January 2011, I met up with my brother Chris and his wife Jackie and we left about 6:15 a.m. from the St. Charles-Geneva area. We followed the directions given to us by Carolyn Marsh. Getting to this place is a little tricky but the directions were right on.

We pulled into the Whiting refinery at the beach where there is a water outfall into Lake Michigan and looked around. We noticed a fisherman out on the rocks with lots of gull activity, including some Greater Black-backed Gulls. We were excited! Now we had to find it! Chris and Jackie walked up the icy shore and I scrambled along the rocks toward the fisherman.



Purple Sandpiper and his shadow. Whiting refinery beach. Whiting, Indiana. January 10, 2011. Photo by Mark Bowman (Mark traveled from Geneva, Illinois to see and photograph the Purple Sandpiper.)

I looked around and saw nothing. I thought the fisherman may have scared it away. Suddenly, right over the fisherman's shoulder on a rock behind him, a small head popped up and ducked back down. My adrenalin was going. I searched the rocks and all of a sudden it popped out on a rock not 15 feet from me. Lifer 475! The little guy ended up flying right over by Chris and Jackie on the ice—Lifers for them also!

It was a great experience finally finding this bird, especially in such a cool place with steam coming up from the rocks.

Pat Durkin reported: Three of us were out there after our regular Saturday walk around Wooded Island in Jackson Park. We met Cary Hillegonds and he said the Purple Sandpiper was resting on the large rocks near the warm water pipe. This was a Lifer for all three of us. Cary also relocated the male Harlequin Duck in Whiting Park. We had a blast!



Black-legged Kittiwake Gull. State Line Energy plant. Hammond, Indiana. January 22, 2011. Photo by Ryan Sanderson.

It's a Black-legged Kittiwake Gull!

Randy Shonkwiler reported: This time of year, the Calumet area of southeast Chicago can be really exciting. My first stop is always the beach area at Calumet Park. On 15 January 2011, I arrived there around 7:27 a.m. I found the usual assortment of waterfowl with the uncommon winter addition of a male American Wigeon. There were quite a few gulls. Most were sitting on patches of ice, more or less 350 yards out. Scanning the gulls I found nothing but Ring-billeds and Herrings. So I proceeded to make a count of all the birds for my E-bird report. I counted gulls last, coming up with roughly 645 Ring-billed and about 20 Herrings. I then noticed that several gulls were now closer over by the Coast Guard station in the park.

I decided to do another quick scan of these birds in case I missed something. No, nothing but Ring-billeds and Herr... wait! What is that? ... a big patch of black on the neck of a small gull swimming around. The bird had a small black beak and a somewhat vertical black spot behind the eye in addition to the black collar. I thought it must be a kittiwake but my only experiences with Black-legged Kittiwakes were a couple of birds seen flying by in storming weather in Indiana and Michigan. I ran back to my car for my Sibley field guide to make sure. Yep, the first winter Black-legged Kittiwake! A state bird for me and the best look at one that I could hope for!

I knew I had to get the word out. I called Greg Neise, John Duran and the Amar Ayyash and the word was immediately relayed to IBET* and Illinois Birders' Forum. I'm just glad so many got an opportunity see and photograph this bird!

* Amar Ayyash's blog is [Http://anythinglarus.blogspot.com/2011/01/slaty-backed-adventures.html](http://anythinglarus.blogspot.com/2011/01/slaty-backed-adventures.html)

*IBET is Illinois Birders Exchanging Thoughts, a Yahoo list serv.

COMPASS
Chicago Audubon Society
North Park Village
5801-C N. Pulaski Road
Chicago, IL 60646-6057
www.chicagoaudubon.org
(773) 539-6793



Editor: Skipper Joy Wolters
Layout Design: Orca Graphics

The Compass is the official publication of the Chicago Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society. The Chicago Audubon Society, an Illinois non-profit corporation, has been granted tax-exempt status by the federal government. The Compass and the Chicago Audubon Society are not responsible for the accuracy of all information published or for opinions expressed in this publication.

Compass (ISSN 1097-7899) is published bi-monthly by the Chicago Audubon Society, 5801-C N. Pulaski, Chicago, IL 60646-6057. Distributed to membership (\$5 allotted from dues). Periodicals postage paid at Chicago, IL. Postmaster: send address changes to Compass, c/o Chicago Audubon Society, 5801-C N. Pulaski, Chicago, IL 60646-6057.

Report sightings to: (773) 539-6793

Report injured birds to Chicago Bird Collision Monitors: (773) 988-1867

Activity line: (773) 539-6793, press 1

Website: www.chicagoaudubon.org

Office Administrator: Skipper Wolters
(773) 539-6793, cas@chicagoaudubon.org
Office hours: Monday-Thursday 9:45 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Closed Fridays & Holidays.

OFFICERS

President: Roger Shamley, (773)

274-5362, drongo@comcast.net

Vice President: Chris Van Wassenhove,
(773) 477-4618, cmvwhic@gmail.com

Treasurer: Bobbi Asher, (708) 771-2085,
roberta.asher@comcast.net.

Secretary: Annette Prince, (630) 841-7110,
aprincebird@msn.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Awards: Alan Anderson (see Nominating below)

Birdathon: Joe Lill, (773) 631-3154,
trptjoe@aol.com

Conservation Chair: Carolyn A. Marsh,
(219) 659-7904, cmarshbird@prodigy.net

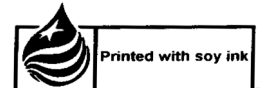
Education Chair: Roger Shamley, (773)
274-5362, drongo@comcast.net

Stewardship: Dave Kosnik, (847) 456-
6368, skokielagoons@gmail.com

Nominating: Alan Anderson, (847) 390-
7437, casresearch@comcast.net

Program Chair: Joe Lill, (773) 631-3154,
trptjoe@aol.com

Editorial: Skipper Joy Wolters, (773) 539-
6793, cas@chicagoaudubon.org



EAGLE OPTICS IS COMING!! EAGLE OPTICS IS COMING!!

Saturday April 2
10 am to 3 pm

North Park Village Nature Center
5801 N Pulaski Road, Building D

IF YOU'RE THINKING OF PURCHASING BINOCULARS, SCOPES, OR ANY OTHER KIND OF OPTIC EQUIPMENT, THIS IS THE TIME TO BRING ALL OF YOUR QUESTIONS TO THE EXPERTS AND POSSIBLY EVEN MAKE A PURCHASE! THE EAGLE OPTICS EXPERTS AND TONS OF EQUIPMENT WILL BE AT THE NATURE CENTER STARTING AT 10:00 A.M. ON APRIL 2. EQUIPMENT CAN BE PURCHASED ON SITE. (NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ASK QUESTIONS!)

AND A SPECIAL OPPORTUNITY TO BEGIN THAT SATURDAY ON A POSITIVE NOTE: PLAN ON JOINING A BIRDWALK FIELD TRIP AT MONTROSE POINT (MAGIC HEDGE) FROM 7:15 AM TO 9:30 AM. MEET AT 7:15 AT MAGIC HEDGE. GROUP LEADER WILL BE CHICAGO AUDUBON'S JEFF SANDERS. THE WALK WILL FINISH IN TIME TO BE OFF TO THE NATURE CENTER AT NORTH PARK VILLAGE FOR EAGLE OPTICS DAY. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS, YOU CAN CONTACT JEFF AT yellowstart5@yahoo.com
ALL LEVEL OF BIRDERS ARE WELCOME!



EAGLE OPTICS GENEROUSLY DONATES A PERCENTAGE OF ALL SALES TO CHICAGO AUDUBON PROGRAMS.

ANNOUNCING THE 2011 CHICAGO AUDUBON BIENNIAL ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS BANQUET AND SILENT AUCTION SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 5:30 P.M.

Chicago Audubon will hold its biennial Environmental Awards Banquet on Saturday, April 30, at the Silver Stallion Restaurant in Des Plaines. Please see Page 4 for directions to the restaurant. Refreshments will be served at 5:30 p.m. and dinner at 6:00 p.m. Details about the evening's speaker will be announced on our website (chicagoaudubon.org). The dinner is \$30 and entree choices are chicken, salmon or vegetarian. Mail your check, including your contact information and entrée choice to: Alan Anderson • 1633 Howard Avenue • Des Plaines, Illinois 60018.

Silent Auction: Thanks to a donation by the City of Chicago Department of Environment and the Chicago Park District, Chicago Audubon has received a dozen handcrafted decorative birdhouses that were entries in the 2010 *Tweet Home Chicago* competition. These unique birdhouses were designed by professional designers, artists, carpenters and high school students and were showcased at public venues throughout the city. Be sure to sign up at the dinner for your chance to take home a truly *Tweet* piece of avian real estate!

These birdhouses are two examples of the range of functionality and aesthetics achieved by the artists. Each birdhouse is made of recycled or sustainable materials.



We look forward to seeing you at the Banquet!

Chicago Audubon Environmental Awards Nomination Form

These awards honor those who have made contributions to conservation and birding in the Chicagoland area. We are asking our members and others involved in and/or who are interested in conservation to submit nominations for the 2011 awards. If you have any suggestions for nominees in any of the categories listed in the nomination form, you may use the form below or send your nominations by email to casresearch@comcast.net. You may also use the form on our website located at: www.chicagoaudubon.org. To submit your nomination by regular mail, fill out the form and mail to:

Alan Anderson • 1633 Howard Avenue • Des Plaines, Illinois 60018

Email submissions should be sent to: casresearch@comcast.net

In the email, state the name, organization, and category for your choices, following the criteria below. The Chicago Audubon Board of Directors chooses final Award recipients.

The Environmental Awards categories are:

Excellence in Environmental Reporting
Protector of the Environment—Educator
Protector of the Environment—Political Service
Protector of the Environment—Single Act (individual)
Protector of the Environment—Single Act (group)
Protector of the Environment—Avocation
Protector of the Environment—Vocation
Service to Chicago Area Birders

Your Name: _____
Your Address: _____
Your Email Address: _____
Award Category: _____
Name of Candidate: _____
Candidate's Title (if applicable): _____
Candidate's Address: _____
Candidate's Phone and/or email: _____

Separately, please explain why you think this candidate is worthy of the particular award. Please cite specific examples of his or her work in the past two years that relate to the award category. Include names and phone numbers or email addresses of other people that can attest to this candidate's qualifications for receiving an award. Thank you very much for your participation!

Bringing The Benefits Of Nature To Your House

1-800-342-3782
Over 95% of our products are manufactured in our factory in Chicago.

PLEASE RECYCLE
Our aluminum martin houses are manufactured from 100% recycled aluminum.

naturehouseinc.com
NATURE HOUSE IS A BRAND OF ERVA™ TOOL & MANUFACTURING CO.

ERVA® 3100 West Grand., Chicago, IL 60622-4324
Phone 1-800-342-3782 Fax 1-800-342-3781

Nature House products encourage the reciprocal relationship inherent between people and nature. Nature House is a brand of Erva Tool & Manufacturing Company, a manufacturer and distributor of nature conservation and nature related products.

Wrought Iron & Tubular Feeder Poles • Quick Connect™ Hooks & Hangers • Baffles • Bird Houses & Feeders and more!

Chicago Bird Collision Monitors

Bright lights from buildings, along with reflective or transparent glass in windows and lobbies, are hazards for birds migrating through Chicago.

Last fall more than 1000 collision-injured birds were rescued – all from a relatively small area downtown. With your assistance, more birds can be saved.

YOU CAN HELP BY:

- Joining **morning rescue teams**
- Monitoring buildings** where you live or work
- Transporting birds** to wildlife rehabilitation centers
- Supporting **collision prevention work**
- Assisting in **public outreach** and awareness programs



Visit www.birdmonitors.net or
call 773-988-1867

Calendar of Events

MARCH/APRIL 2011

Workdays Members Programs Birdwalks

Skokie Lagoons Workdays. 10:00 a.m. every second Saturday. These workdays are continuous throughout the year. The Chicago Audubon Society sponsors regular monthly workdays at Skokie Lagoons every second Saturday of the month. Activities include buckthorn cutting, brush pile burning, and other management activities. Wear work clothes. Meet at the Tower Road parking lot, east of the lagoon bridge. For further information, please call Dave Kosnik at (847) 456-6368. Everyone is welcome!

Montrose Point Magic Hedge Stewardship Workdays to be held on the following Saturdays from 9 to noon: March 12, April 9, May 14, June 11, July 9, August 6, September 3, October 1, November 5. (Most dates are the usual 2nd Saturday of the month except where major events or holidays occur.) Volunteers are needed to help with weeding, mulching, planting native shrubs and trees. We are also establishing a prairie! Wear work clothes. For more information about work dates, to sign up, and for directions, please contact David Painter: (773) 383-0721 or email at dvdpaint@yahoo.com. Everyone is welcome!

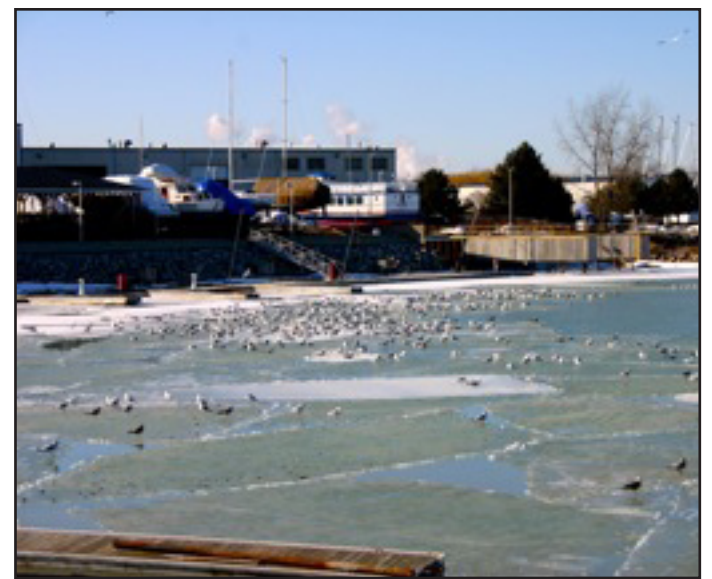
Wooded Island Birdwalks. Jackson Park. Every Wednesday at 7:00 a.m. and every Saturday at 8:00 a.m. These wonderful walks continue throughout the year up to New Year's Day. Bring binoculars, field guides, and dress for the weather. Many species are seen. Meet at Clarence Darrow Bridge, just south of Museum of Science and Industry. For details and directions, contact Pat Durkin at pat.durkin@comcast.net. Join the fun!

Wild Things. Saturday, March 5, from 8:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. University of Illinois at Chicago. A



The Gull Frolic of 2011. On February 19, people from all over the region came to Winthrop Harbor, Illinois to have a day of interesting talks, lots of socializing and gulls galore! A very popular event on a very perfect day! Keep it in mind for next year and be sure to register early. It fills up very quickly! Photos by Ann Garrett.

Gull Frolic of 2011



Chicago Wilderness Conference for People and Nature.

Wild Things will feature the region's best conservationists in a variety of large and small group sessions drawn from real-life experience. This will be a great day for anyone who loves nature, conservation, gardening, restoration or cares about the environment. The keynote speaker will be Curt Meine, conservation biologist and Aldo Leopold biographer. Annette Prince of Chicago Audubon and director of Chicago Bird Collision Monitor (CBCM) will give a presentation on the CBCM bird rescue program and bird safety, including recommendations for window-collision solutions. Registration for the Conference is \$40. Information, directions, and registration instructions can be found on the Habitat Project website at www.habitatproject.org. If you have any questions, contact chicagowildthings@yahoo.com or call 847-328-3910, extension 21. Don't miss this exciting day!

Eagle Optics Day! April 2, 10:00 am to 3 pm. North Park Village Nature Center. 5801 North Pulaski Road, Building D. The popular Eagle Optics day is back! See further details in this issue. Don't miss this event!

Montrose Point (Magic Hedge) Birdwalk. April 2 at 7:15 am. Montrose Avenue at the Lake.

Plan on joining a special pre-Eagle Optics Day birdwalk field trip starting at Montrose Point from 7:15 am to 9:30 am. All level of birders are welcome. Group leader will be Jeff Sanders of Chicago Audubon. The walk will end in time for everyone to head over to North Park Village Nature Center for our annual Eagle Optics Day! If you have questions or need directions, please contact Jeff at yellowstart5@yahoo.com -- and please remember, all of our walks are open to everyone. You are not required to be a member of Chicago Audubon. Come and join us!

Environmental Awards Banquet. Saturday, April 30. 5:30 pm. Silver Stallion Restaurant, Des Plaines. The Silver Stallion is located at 1275 Lee/Manheim Avenues in Des Plaines, between Algonquin and Oakton. Contact Alan Anderson at casresearch@comcast.net with questions. See article in this issue.

Chicago Audubon Birdwalks. Every Saturday in April and May at 8:00 a.m. North Park Village Nature Center. 5801 North Pulaski Road, Building D. Our popular Spring birdwalks will begin the first Saturdays of April and May.

Learn about birds and their habitats while walking through the early springtime woods surrounding the Nature Center. These walks are led by expert birders who will welcome questions from all levels of birders. For information or directions to the Nature Center, call the Chicago Audubon office (773) 539-6793. Everyone is welcome!!

Birdathon! 2011. Saturday, May 21. This year is the 12th anniversary of our annual Birdathon! fundraiser. Everyone is welcome to join a team and count birds to help with one of our most important annual events to raise money for Chicago Audubon projects and goals. Details and pledge forms will be published in the next issue and on our website (chicagoaudubon.org). Remember that all levels of birders are welcome! If you wish to join up or have questions, please call Joe Lill at (773) 631-3154. You'll have lots of fun!

Reminder to our readers:

To see all our newsletters in living color, go to our website: www.chicagoaudubon.org and click on the word "Compass" in the top row of links.

