



CHICAGO AUDUBON SOCIETY  
5801-C N. Pulaski Road Chicago, IL 60646-6057

Periodicals

# COMPASS

*Navigating the world of birds and nature*

VOLUME 27, ISSUE 3

MAY/JUNE 2013

## Birdathon! 2013

Saturday, May 18



Yellow-throated Warbler.  
Photo courtesy of [ibc.lynxeds.com](http://ibc.lynxeds.com)

For the past fourteen years, the Chicago Audubon Society has held the Annual Dr. William S. Beecher Birdathon Cup Challenge as one of our major fundraising events. Dr. Beecher was Director Emeritus of the Chicago Academy of Sciences and one of the pioneering birders of the Chicago area. Some years ago, he honored Chicago Audubon by consenting to allow us to use his name for our annual fundraising event. Indeed this was a great honor! The word Birdathon combines the words birdwatching and marathon to describe a friendly sport which originated in England years ago. It involves teams of people competing to see how many different species of birds they can identify within a specified time limit.

Here is how this works: Birdathon teams will be combing the Cook County area on Saturday, May 18, identifying as many species as they can within those days. If you are a member of a group of birders who would like to compete on that day, we encourage you to contact us immediately. In addition to experienced teams, new birders are encouraged to participate. If you are a "lone birder" or just not very experienced at this time, we will help you find a team that is suitable.



Northern Parula.  
Photo by Pam Higginbotham.

Prospective competitive teams and interested individuals with some birding experience, please contact Joe Lill at 773-631-3154.

The team that totals the most species identified in the designated time period will gain possession, for one year, of the coveted Beecher Cup. Two teams competed for the 2012 title: Field's Flickers (John Bates, Nick Block, Nathan Goldberg & Jason Weckstein) participated on May 12. They sighted 148 species. Steel Belted Kingfishers (Mark Agnor, Joe Lill, Jeff Sundberg & Kris Sundberg) participated on May 13. They sighted 146 species.

All funds raised through Birdathon pledges go toward Chicago Audubon programs. In the present economic climate it has become more important than ever that each local Audubon chapter raise more of their operating expenses on their own. Our efforts in education, preservation, restoration and advocacy continue to be well received, and we look forward to continuing our goal of creating more awareness of the natural environment that surrounds us all.

As you can see on the form, you have a number of pledging options—you may pledge a flat amount (as many have done in the past), or pledge an amount per total species identified by your favorite team, or pledge an amount based on the total species count of all teams, which last year was 163. Please contact Joe Lill at [trptjoe@aol.com](mailto:trptjoe@aol.com) with any questions and start forming your teams! Again, our office phone is 733-539-6793, if you wish to pledge by credit card on the phone. The form on this page can also be used to make a credit card donation, or you can go to our website to make a donation ([chicagoaudubon.org](http://chicagoaudubon.org)). All pledges are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. More than ever before, your pledge is essential and greatly appreciated!

### Good birding!

Joe Lill  
Chicago Audubon  
Birdathon Coordinator

### Competition Categories

#### Open

The traditional Big Day challenge; all species identified between midnight on May 18th and midnight on May 19th can be counted.

#### Dawn-to-Dusk

All species identified between 5:00 a.m. and 8:30 p.m. may be counted.

#### Site Big Day

A team chooses one site (a city park, a forest preserve, etc.) and then birds the heck out of it! This is the perfect choice for a team that can only bird for a few hours.

#### Muscle-powered (on foot)

Once the clock starts, all species must be identified without using any other mode of transportation.

#### Muscle-powered (bicycle)

Once the clock starts, all species must be identified without using any motorized form of transportation.



Yellow-throated Warbler.  
Photo courtesy of [songbirdgarden.com](http://songbirdgarden.com)

### Registration

To register a team (or ask any questions), please contact Joe Lill at [trptjoe@aol.com](mailto:trptjoe@aol.com). This is an important fundraiser for Chicago Audubon programs and goals. Come join the fun!!!

### Birdathon! 2013 Pledge Form

My tax-deductible gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed.

#### OR

I am happy to pledge \$ \_\_\_\_\_ per species.

Team I am sponsoring (optional): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Street address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone number Email

Make check payable to **Chicago Audubon Society**

**OR** pay with credit card:

Visa  MasterCard  Discover

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name on card

\_\_\_\_\_  
Card number Expiration date

You may also charge a donation or pledge online by visiting the Birdathon link on our website, [www.chicagoaudubon.org](http://www.chicagoaudubon.org), or you may call our office at 773-539-6793 to make a charge on the phone.

**Mail your completed form to:**

Chicago Audubon Society • 5801-C North Pulaski Rd • Chicago, IL 60646





Chipping Sparrow. Photo by Gregg Lee.

## The sweet little Chipping Sparrow

The Chipping Sparrow is a slender, fairly long-tailed sparrow with a medium-sized bill that is a bit smaller than other sparrows. It has a bright reddish-brown (rufous) cap which provides a splash of color and also makes adults fairly easy to identify. They have frosty under parts, pale faces, and a black line through the eye. In winter, the coloring becomes a subdued buff brown, with darkly streaked upperparts. The black line through the eye is still visible during winter, and the cap is still a warm reddish brown, but more subdued.

Chipping Sparrows are common all across North America wherever trees are interspersed with grassy openings and in open woodlands. They feed on the ground where they hop or run through grasses searching for seeds and take cover in shrubs. They frequent parks, roadsides, backyards—just about everywhere. They prefer singing from the tops of small trees (especially evergreens) and often flock in loose groups that flit upward from the open ground. When singing, they cling to high outer limbs and their “chipping” song trills throughout the spring woodlands and suburbs.



Chipping Sparrows. Photo at left by Doug West. Photo above by Michael Ho.

## Is it a Raven or a Crow?

People often say it's difficult to tell a Raven from a Crow. Perhaps this will help a little:

The major difference between the Common Raven and the American Crow is the size.

same length, so that when the Crow spreads its tail, it opens like a fan. Ravens, on the other hand, have longer middle tail feathers, so that it appears wedge-shaped when opened.

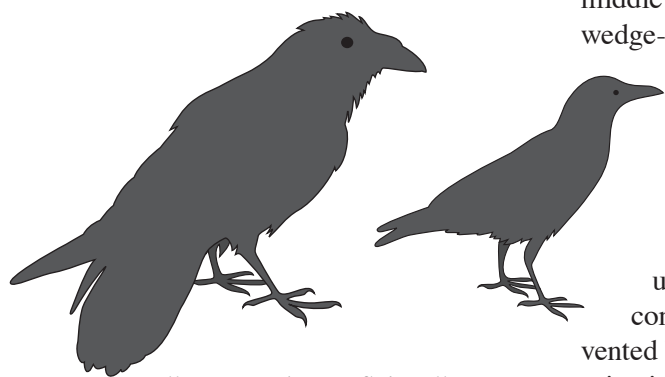


Illustration by Joy Schmoll.

One intriguing similarity between the two species is their intelligence. Ravens are among the smartest of all birds, and have gained a reputation for solving ever more complicated problems being invented by ever more creative scientists.

Crows also have a well-earned reputation for intelligence and are known to have amazing long-term memories.

In family life, the Raven male brings a few sticks to the nest-building effort, but most of the collecting and building is done by the female. The branches and other materials (sometimes including wires and bones) are piled on the nest platform or wedged in a tree crotch, then woven together in a basket. The whole process takes about 9 days and results in a nest that can be as large as 5 feet across and 2 feet high. From year to year, nests are often reused, although not necessarily by the same birds.

The Raven is fifty percent larger than the Crow. Of course that's easy to say in print but not so easy to see in real life. And what would be the chances of both birds standing next to each other at just the right time so you could actually see the difference! Ravens are not just a little bigger than Crows. They are approximately the size of a Red-tailed Hawk. They often travel in pairs or alone, while Crows are seen in large groups. Flocks of Crows, which are called Murders, often number in the hundreds and even larger. (Yes, the name given a flock of crows is “a Murder of Crows.”)

Also, if you watch either bird's tail as it flies overhead you will see that the Crow's tail feathers are basically the

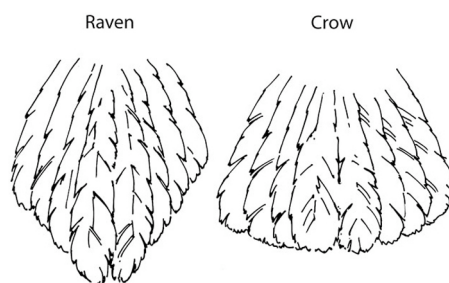


Illustration courtesy of naturemappingfoundation.org

As you can imagine, the nest of the Crow is much smaller. But the biggest difference in the nest-building process is that the male and female work together throughout the entire construction. Often they are joined in building the nest by young relatives, including their own offspring from past years.



Illustration courtesy of baynature.org

## COMPASS

CHICAGO AUDUBON SOCIETY

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

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Closed Fridays and holidays

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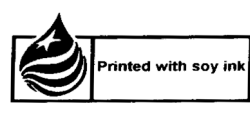
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Red-winged Blackbird (m).

Photo by Martin Kopecky.

## The Red-winged Blackbird Our Harbinger of Spring

♪  
conk-la-ree!

When you hear that call, you know spring is trying hard to return to the North. One of the most abundant birds across North America, the Red-winged Blackbird is literally everywhere—along roadsides, on telephone wires, in fresh and saltwater marshes, perched atop cattails, and all across the country in farm fields, pastures, and meadows.



Red-winged Blackbird (f) at her nest.  
Photo courtesy SerenitySpell.

and a medium-length tail. They often show a hump-backed silhouette while perched and males frequently sit with the tail slightly flared. In size, the female resembles a large, dark sparrow, with subdued streaky brown coloring, paler on the breast and often show a whitish eyebrow. The males sit on high perches and sing their unique song all day long, while females usually stay lower, searching through vegetation for food and quietly weaving their remarkable nests.

So if spring hasn't already arrived when you hear the Red-winged Blackbird song, it will be coming soon!

♪ conk-la-ree!

The male Red-wings have scarlet and yellow shoulder patches which they will puff up or hide depending on how confident they are feeling at the moment. They have stocky, broad-shoulders and a slender, conical bill,



Red-winged Blackbird (f) feeding chick.

Photo by Jamie Felton.

Chicago Audubon Program  
*The Natural History of Madagascar*  
Thursday, May 2 at 7:00 p.m.

This is one of Chicago Audubon's special programs and, as always, it is open to members and non-members. It will be held at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 North Pulaski Road, Building D. Socializing and light refreshments at 7:00 p.m.; the program begins at 7:30 p.m. Josh Engel of the Bird Division of the Field Museum will be the program presenter.

Nearly half of Madagascar's 250 species of birds are found nowhere else in the world, nor is the majority of its other wildlife. Josh has led many birding and natural history tours to that remote part of the world. His presentation will highlight the extraordinary birds and other wildlife found only there, with a beautifully illustrated virtual tour through the spiny desert, across the grasslands and deep into the rainforest. Please plan on attending this wonderful program. Bring family and friends. For information or directions, call our office at 773-539-6793. Everyone is welcome!



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.

Photo by John Komendy.

## The tiny Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

The Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is a very small beautiful long-tailed songbird of the deciduous forests and scrublands. They measure just 3.9 to 5.1 inches and weigh in at less than an ounce. Adult males are blue-gray

choose a horizontal tree branch. Both parents construct the nest and feed the young and may raise two broods in a season. They actively forage in trees or shrubs, mainly eating insects, insect eggs and spiders. They hover over foliage (which is called



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher nesting.  
Photo by Jim Burns.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher.  
Photo by Scott Simmons.

on the upperparts with white underparts. They have long slender bills, long black tails and an angry black unibrow. Females are less blue and without the unibrow. Both sexes have a white eye ring.

The Blue-grays build cup-shaped nests similar in construction to hummingbird nests and usually

gleaning) or fly to catch insects in flight (which is called hawking). The tail is often held upright while defending territory or searching for food. By flicking their white-edged tails from side to side, they often manage to scare up hiding insects. The Blue-gray's call is a soft but emphatic "spee."







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

Each year Chicago Bird Collision Monitors recover more than 5000 birds that have suffered collisions in the downtown area.

With your participation our rescue and prevention efforts can be expanded and more birds can be saved.

**YOU CAN HELP:**

- Join a **morning rescue team.**
- Monitor a building** where you live or work.
- Transport birds** to wildlife rehabilitation centers.
- Support **collision prevention** work.
- Assist in **public outreach** and awareness programs.

For more information:  
[www.birdmonitors.net](http://www.birdmonitors.net)  
 773-988-1867

**IMPORTANT NOTICE TO OUR READERS**

There has been some confusion about the difference between a National Audubon membership and a Chicago Chapter membership. A National membership by itself does not financially support the Chicago Audubon Chapter. National Audubon and the Chicago Chapter (and all other chapters) have entirely separate budgets (except for a small yearly stipend from National). In other words, the Chicago Chapter has always carried the burden of all costs of producing and mailing this newsletter and other types of mailings that we have been sending to both the Chapter members and the National members in this area. Because of this

separation in budgets and because we need local support, we are asking that you consider becoming a Chapter member at this time. Chapter membership will not only help with our immediate need to reduce costs related to the newsletter, it will give direct financial assistance to our local programs and goals and enrich the energy and support of the Chapter membership base. If you would like to become a Chicago Audubon Chapter member, please fill out the form below and send it to our office.

*Chicago Audubon Society does not rent, lease, trade, or otherwise disclose any membership information whatsoever.*

**Chicago Audubon Membership Form**

You may mail in this form or you may charge your membership online using our secure website, [www.chicagoaudubon.org](http://www.chicagoaudubon.org), or call the office at 773-539-6793 and charge your membership over the phone.

Your name \_\_\_\_\_

Street address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Minimum yearly membership: \$25

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**Calendar of Events May/June 2013**

**Birdwalks, Workdays, Special Events**

**MAY 2—CHICAGO AUDUBON PROGRAM: The Natural History of Madagascar.** The Program will be held at the North Park Village Nature Center, 5801 North Pulaski Road, Building D. Socializing and light refreshments at 7:00; program begins at 7:30 p.m. Josh Engel of the Bird Division of the Field Museum will be the program presenter. Nearly half of Madagascar's 250 species of birds are found nowhere else in the world, nor is the majority of its other wildlife. Josh has led many birding and natural history tours to that remote part of the world. His presentation will highlight the extraordinary birds and other wildlife found only there, with a beautifully illustrated virtual tour through the spiny desert, across the grasslands and deep into the rainforest. Please plan on attending this wonderful program. Bring family and friends. Our programs are always open to non-members as well as members. *For information or directions, call our office at 773-539-6793. Everyone is welcome!*

**MAY 18—BIRDATHON 2013! The 14th Annual Beecher Cup Competition (and more!!!)** This is the year! The Chicago Audubon Society Birdathon will be expanding the possibilities for involvement; maybe one of these categories will fit you and your

friends. The goal is to see how many species can be identified on Saturday, May 18th, 2013. The team with the highest number of species will take home the coveted Beecher Cup. This year, for the first time, we're adding a number of choices. Put together a team and compete in the category of your choice! *See Page 1 of this issue for details.*

**WOODED ISLAND BIRD WALKS. JACKSON PARK. Every Wednesday at 7:00 a.m. and every Saturday at 8:00 a.m.** These wonderful walks continue throughout the year. 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](mailto:pat.durkin@comcast.net). Everyone is welcome!*

**SKOKIE LAGOONS WORKDAYS. 10:00 a.m. monthly, every second Saturday.** These workdays are sponsored by Chicago Audubon and are continuous throughout the year. Activities include buckthorn cutting, brush pile burning and other management endeavors. 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!*

**Reminder to our readers:**

The Compass can be read and enjoyed in color on our website, [chicagoaudubon.org](http://chicagoaudubon.org). Just click on the word "Compass" in the top row of links on the homepage to visit our archives. Don't miss these wonderful birds in living color! For historical value, we have added a link to the very first Chicago Audubon newsletter. This link is sitting on top of the Archive list. Enjoy!

*Clymene Moth. Photo by Roger Shamley.*