

WILDLIFE PRESERVATION FUND GRANT #05-012w

The Illinois Audubon Society began the Junior Bird Feeder Challenge program in 1997 to introduce Illinois school children to bird watching. Classes set up feeders in their schoolyards and keep track of the birds that visit from November through February. Thanks in part to a grant from the Wildlife Preservation Fund, lesson plans aligned with State Learning Goals were developed for the 2003-04 school year. These lesson plans, plus a full color bird identification poster, tips on beginning bird identification, tally and report forms are included in the packet classes receive when they register.

Several Illinois Audubon chapters have gotten involved with school classes participating in the program by visiting classes, providing feeders and seed, and helping teach bird identification. The Junior Bird Feeder materials are also used by the Will County Forest Preserve District and Thorn Creek Nature Center in their programs for children. Home schooling families as well as public and private schools use the materials to supplement science and math lessons. The generous gift of copies of the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* by Kay Bock Allen in honor of her father, Arnie Bock, made it possible to reward classes that sent in reports of their sightings. Reporting classes were entered in a drawing, and lucky classes received the books. A total of 16 field guides were given to classes in 2004 and 2005.

There were 50 teachers registered for the Junior Bird Feeder Challenge this year. However, there were more teachers and groups using the materials since I.A.S. chapters distributed packets, packets were given out at several events (including an ENTICE workshop), materials are available for downloading at the I.A.S. web site, and many returning teachers don't bother to register. The total number of students participating is greater than the 1,500 reported on registration forms.

What birds do participating classes see at their feeders? The "usual suspects", of course -- starlings and house sparrows are the most common. Mourning doves, cardinals, and other year-round resident birds are frequent visitors to feeders. Occasionally a class will see a Cooper's hawk keeping an eye on the feeder birds. Schools that are lucky to have a wooded area close by see different birds than urban classes. But even if the students only see house sparrows, they have a chance to observe and learn about wildlife.

We anticipate more teachers and home school families will download Junior Bird Feeder Challenge program materials from the Illinois Audubon Society's web site in the future. The Champaign County Forest Preserve District will be using the program next year with area classes and the Rockford Girl Scout Council is offering the program to troop leaders. The Spring Art Contest has seen decreased participation, possibly due to the abundance of poster contests sponsored by state and local groups. This part of the Junior Bird Feeder Challenge is being discontinued.

Thank you to the IDNR Wildlife Preservation Fund for helping to introduce Illinois students to bird watching and, hopefully, wildlife appreciation.

THE ILLINOIS AUDUBON SOCIETY
JUNIOR BIRD FEEDER CHALLENGE
THE BIRDING NEWS
MARCH 2005

TOP 10 BIRDS AT FEEDERS THIS YEAR

Starlings and House Sparrows topped the list again this year. Not only did every reporting class see them, most reported LOTS of these species! Mourning doves and Cardinals were also seen by all reporting classes. Other frequent visitors were Blue Jays, House Finches, Juncos, Gold Finches, American Crows, Tree Sparrows, and Downy Woodpeckers.

OTHER SIGHTINGS

- Classes at Highland Upper Elementary in Highland and Arthur Elementary in Arthur each saw a Cooper's Hawk.
- Students at Saint Mary School in Trenton saw a crane flying overhead. They and the students at Saint George School in New Baden reported seeing Brewer's Blackbirds.
- Mrs. Nowak's class at St. Christopher School in Midlothian had 40 ducks.
- Third graders at New Central School in Havana reported a Cedar Waxwing and Indigo Bunting.
- Several classes reported White-crowned Sparrows, Fox Sparrows, and Song Sparrows.
- Other birds seen included Cowbirds, American Robins, a Pine Siskin, Northern Mockingbird, Common Redpoll, Pigeons, and an Evening Grosbeak.

LACK OF BIRDS

Several classes lamented a lack of birds at their feeders. Birds tend to eat early in the morning, so perhaps they'd finished breakfast by the time school began. Sometimes it's a matter of luck -- if everyone is concentrating on an arithmetic test, the feeder is unwatched. Other factors might be the feeder, the type of seed offered, and the availability of water. Once a few birds find a feeder, the "bird telegraph" system usually spreads the word and more come. Of course, a busy school yard, lack of cover near the feeder, or the presence of potential predators might also be the cause.

Classes that sent in their reports were entered in a drawing for a copy of the *National Geographic Field Guide to North American Birds*. Congratulations to the winners:

- Barbara Marbut of Mulberry Grove elementary School
- Melissa Rush of Arthur Elementary School
- Dawn MacMillan of Highland Upper Elementary School
- Val Pearson, Administrator, Bridges Academy in St. Charles
- Leslie McClintock, Urbana Middle School

AFTER WINTER/SPRING ART CHALLENGE

Only one school submitted entries for the spring art contest. Interest has been declining, so this is the last year for the program. These students from Bridges Academy in St.

Charles received prizes:

Grade 2:

First place to Madison Conley for "An American Redbird"

Prizes to Lauren Conley for "Dipping for Lunch" and Wyatt Shodeen for "Blue Jay on Guard"

Grade 3:

First place to Cali Rutledge for "Squirrel Making Plans on a Sunny Morning" (The squirrel was making plans to visit the bird feeder!)

Prizes to Collin Schmitz for "Redtail Returned from Fishing" and Nick Schutz for "Shadow Hawk"

Grade 4/5:

First place to Jake Mazanke for "The Movement in the Sky"

Prizes to Michelle Mann for "The Birdly Evening" and Luke Totman for "Soaring"

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Illinois Audubon Society's *Junior Bird Feeder Challenge!* I hope students had fun learning about the birds that call Illinois home in the winter.

I hope all of the participating teachers will register for the 2005-6 season. Materials are available to download at the Illinois Audubon Society web site: www.illinoisaudubon.org. You can register using the enclosed form or e-mail adamswildlife@juno.com. **PACKETS WILL ONLY BE SENT TO RENEWING TEACHERS WHO REQUEST THEM.**

Have a great spring!

Susan Shaw

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