



# Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary

Clark Street and Sheridan Road  
Evanston, IL 60201



[clarkstreetbeachbirdsanctuary.org](http://clarkstreetbeachbirdsanctuary.org)

Spring 2026

## From the Sanctuary Stewards

by Libby Hill and Rob Linsenmeier, co-stewards

Evanston is fortunate to have several areas in public parks and along the North Shore Channel featuring native plants that attract insects and birds. Several sites, including ours, are maintained by community volunteers led by volunteer Natural Area Stewards. The City of Evanston Greenways Division provides support by delivering mulch and water, maintaining fences, and removing waste when volunteers do pruning and pull invasive plants. However, these areas were not protected by city ordinance, so they could have been turned to other purposes.

In recognition of the importance and fragility of these areas, a Task Force was assembled in December 2025 to rewrite the weak city ordinance governing natural areas. On the Task Force were leaders of the Parks and Recreation Department, including the director, Audrey Thompson, representatives of the Public Works Agency, three Natural Area Stewards (the two of us plus Wendy Pollock), and representatives from the Parks and Recreation Board and Environment Board. Led by Matt Poole, Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation, the Task Force crafted an ordinance that defines Natural Areas as “public lands that are managed to provide habitat for diverse, regionally native plant and animal communities and associated benefits for humans.” It has guidance for Natural Area Stewards and the Natural Areas Officer designated by the city. Michael Callahan, a Deputy Director of Parks and Recreation and formerly city arborist, has been chosen as the Natural Areas Officer.



Coreopsis and Spiderwort at CSBBS



McCormick Boulevard between Bridge Street and Green Bay Road has a new honorary designation: “Natural Area Stewards Way”

Critically, the ordinance defines and protects six Natural Areas. In addition to the **Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary**, these are **Ladd Arboretum**, the canal edge of **Twiggs Park**, a portion of **Harbert-Payne Park**, the prairie and other small areas of **Lovelace Park**, and the **Morton Civic Center Garden**. They cannot be taken over and used for other purposes without another change to city code. (Other important natural areas, including the Jens Jensen garden at the Harley Clarke Mansion, the Eggleston Food Forest, and the canal edge of the Canal Shores Golf Course were not included because they are governed differently). The ordinance also defines a process for designating additional Natural Areas and incorporates a new understanding of shared responsibility for these spaces between the city and the stewards.

After review by the Parks and Recreation Board and the Environment Board, the ordinance was passed (unanimously!) by the Evanston City Council on April 27, 2026. Now we can be sure that the money and work that we and other volunteers put in at these areas will not be wasted or undone. As Evanston residents, we are proud of our city for taking these steps to protect and enhance our environment.

## New Plantings: For Insects, for Birds, and for People

By Al Gabor

At the end of May and the beginning of June, volunteers at CSBBS planted more than 200 plants. To support local organizations, the members of the plant committee (Libby Hill, Roger Hauge, Whitney Troy and Al Gabor) bought 65 plants from the District 65 One Fund PTA Native Plant Sale and 154 forbs and 3 shrubs from the Evanston Environmental Association. As always, we chose native plants—fourteen different species in all—that attract and support migrating birds by providing shelter and food and attracting insects that birds can feed on.

Why, after 10 years, are we still putting in new plants? In part to fill in bare spaces—where earlier plantings haven't spread as expected, where we removed invasive plants that outcompeted our earlier plantings, or where removal of trees by the city opened up new areas. Because most new plants would be near public walkways, a secondary consideration was their eye appeal, including how well they would work with plants already growing in the sanctuary. (Photos on this page are from earlier plantings; our new plants haven't bloomed yet.)



Columbine

We introduced Eastern beebalm, great blue lobelia, and aromatic aster to the Beach House garden just north of the Clark Street Beach House. This is our demonstration garden, designed to showcase how homeowners can add native plants to their own gardens. We also planted more butterfly weed. These plants support hummingbirds, Monarch butterflies, and bumble bees.

Wild columbine was flourishing in an area in our south section, near the western fence, so we planted more there, along with tall thimbleweed. We also planted wild strawberry for a nurturing ground cover. In what we call the Hobbit Gate Hill area (a bit south and west of the gate to the beach volleyball area), we introduced royal catchfly and added to the stands of butterfly weed, flowering spurge, and black-eyed Susan. After digging up weeds and grass under the nearby elm, we planted wild geranium near the existing creeping juniper.



Wild geranium

At the north end of the bird sanctuary, we introduced purple lovegrass. When this blooms in late summer, it should create clouds of small purple flowers, and it is also a host plant for the Zabulon Skipper butterfly. We also added some blue lobelia, royal catchfly, and three black chokeberry shrubs to this area.



Elm-leaved goldenrod

Along the western fence in the northern section of the bird sanctuary, we introduced some elm-leaved goldenrod and planted more wild strawberry, tall thimbleweed, and columbine to grow alongside the butterfly weed and blue vervain that were already growing there.

We also obtained plants from other sources. At the northeast edge of the remnant stand of woods, we planted prairie trilliums and white trout lilies from a volunteer's garden. The sandy soil might not be the most hospitable to these plants, so we enriched the planting area with leaf mulch. We also received donations of Jack pine whips from Natural Habitat Evanston (whips are young, unbranched saplings) and some whorled milkweed. We planted these towards the center of sanctuary, near the sandy beach. We're hoping that Monarchs will lay eggs on the newly planted milkweed—and that goldfinches and robins will stop by to consume Jack Pine seeds.

## Sparrows, Warblers, and More

by Nancy Pinchar

June is here and our Spring migrant birds have passed through Evanston and reached their summer breeding grounds in Wisconsin, Michigan, Canada, and beyond. Preliminary reports indicate that 107 species were identified during the monitoring period from the end of March through the first week in June.

The season was rich with 13 species of sparrows including a LeConte's sparrow, seen on April 21, foraging among bushes and grasses, a first for CSBBS and a rare sight. Can you spot it in the photo? These sparrows migrate to far northern breeding grounds with marshy grasslands and prairie where they can stay hidden in the dense foliage. Other sparrows included Swamp, White-throated, Fox, Savannah, Field, Chipping, White-crowned, Clay-colored, Lincoln's, and American Tree. Resident here in Evanston over the summer are the Song and House sparrows.



A hard-to-spot LeConte's sparrow  
(photo by Zeke Cordeiro)



American Redstart  
© Callan Fromm, CC-BY-NC-SA

Not to be outdone by the sparrows, 17 species of warblers were identified, including Wilson's, Black-and-white, Tennessee, Northern Parula, Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Blackpoll, Black-throated Green, Canada, Magnolia, Nashville, Redstart, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and Palm. Two warblers that may still be seen locally include Northern Yellow, and Common Yellowthroat.

Although we are primarily focused on recording birds found within the sanctuary, we also record birds nearby flying over the lake, on the beach, and in the park to the west. This helps give us an overall picture of how migrating birds are using this space. This season one of our monitors witnessed a huge flock of 205 Greater White-fronted Goose flying along the lakefront in March. In May, a pair of Dunlins were busy foraging along the shore. And flocks and flocks of Double-crested Cormorants streamed by from March through season's end.

Visiting CSBBS during the summer, you will find that the sanctuary is still busy with our resident birds such as Eastern Kingbird, American Robin, Northern Cardinal, and Red-winged Blackbird. The park area to the west is currently still host to a Baltimore Oriole and an Eastern Warbling Vireo. And the lake area (when not full of summer beachgoers) is busy with Ring-billed Gull, Caspian Tern, Barn Swallow and Killdeer.

So, it's been a great season for spring birds. And we'll be back for more in the fall.

---

### A reminder: CSBBS on eBird

Designated Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary bird monitors record their observations using a public database called eBird. They enter information on bird species found in or near the bird sanctuary during the spring and fall migration seasons, along with the specific areas in which the birds are observed. Other birdwatchers who visit the area include their own observations. You can explore the records online yourself, selecting specific time periods or species, looking at trends over time, and so on. Just go to [ebird.org/hotspot/L3615041](https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3615041).

## Libby Hill's Lifetime Achievement Award

by Joan Linsenmeier

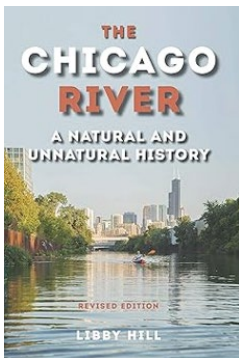
This April in Evanston, Earth Day extended into an event-filled Earth Week. A highlight was the Community Earth Day Celebration on April 18, sponsored by Climate Action Evanston. For Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary volunteers, an exciting part of that celebration was the awarding of two Steve Perkins Lifetime Achievement Awards: one to Janet Alexander Davis, recognizing her decades of work to advance economic, racial, and environmental justice in Evanston, and one to our own co-steward and visionary, Libby Hill.

Leslie Shad, Climate Action Evanston board chair and founder of Natural Habitat Evanston, introduced Libby. She noted that Libby “has an impressive list of accomplishments” and went on to describe many of them, including:

- Serving as steward at Perkins Woods since the 1990s, leading efforts to help the Forest Preserve in North Evanston “go wild.”
- Being the “organizing force of the Evanston North Shore Bird Club for more than 20 years,” coordinating and leading bird walks and bird talks for club members.
- Writing *The Chicago River: A Natural and Unnatural History* as well as numerous articles for the *Evanston RoundTable* on birds, trees, and our natural history.
- Working toward the development and passage of Evanston’s Bird-Friendly Building Ordinance.
- Building community among Natural Area stewards across the city.
- And, of course, having the vision to imagine a bird sanctuary at Clark Street Beach in an area that was mostly bare sand—and then collaborating with other advocates, City of Evanston staff, and hands-on volunteers to make it happen.



Libby Hill with Leslie Shad



Other speakers at the gathering observed that Evanston is a known leader in sustainability and resilience efforts and that this reflects the priorities, advocacy, and commitment of its community members. Clearly Libby Hill has, for decades, been a prime example of this. As she put it in her acceptance speech for the award, she is guided by the sentiment she recently saw on a sign at a rally: "There is no Planet B" so, she told us, we all have to do what we can to take care of our Planet A.

Hurrah for Libby!

---

## Our Wonderful Watering Crew

by Chris Steel

Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary has three key groups of volunteers who help out at the sanctuary: a birding team, a planting and weeding team, and a watering team. And yes, you can be on more than one team!

When volunteers on the planting team put in new shrubs, forbs, and other plants, these need special attention. An important part of that care falls to the watering crew. If you take a stroll past the sanctuary, you might see volunteers watering in a natural habitat. CSBBS is a fortunate to have easily available water. More than 10 years ago when the sanctuary was first established, the City of Evanston and the original landscaper installed a watering system—underground water pipes and posts for connecting hoses—across the two acres.

New plantings with their fledgling root systems get almost daily waterings; more established native shrubs and plants which have longer root systems rely on weekly watering. During long dry spells, all our plants get frequent watering.



Volunteer waterers sign up for an hour or more at times that fit their personal schedules. Some visit in the early morning, when the lakefront is quiet, to see the migratory birds stopping for a rest. Others choose late afternoon to be among the grasses and shrubs while watching the migratory birds feed.

As idyllic as it sounds, it takes effort to uncoil and drag a hundred-foot hose to water the new plantings and then recoil that hose when you are done. Although some plants needing water are out in the open, others may be tucked along the fences or under trees. Volunteers saturate the soil until it becomes moist without drowning the young plugs or forbs. There are moments when the water seems to dribble and stop. This signals a kink somewhere along the hose. The solution is to take a walk back to find the spot where the hose is bent or caught and to fix it; then comes another trek back to watering. Still, volunteers at some other natural areas have told us that they're jealous. They wish they had hoses installed across their areas too instead of having to carry water from one place to another.



There's another type of reward for watering as well, besides being near the lake, often at quiet times, and watching the birds. Thriving blooms of coreopsis, bright snowberries and waving blue-stem grasses throughout the April-to-October season are also among the rewards our watering crew volunteers reap.

---

## Join Us!

**Become a volunteer** - Interested in volunteering at the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary—to plant and weed, to birdwatch, to water, to help with our planning, or maybe all of the above? Let us know using the contact form at the bottom of the homepage on our website, <https://clarkstreetbeachbirdsanctuary.org/>.

**Take a tour** - We are also hosting tours on a few Saturday mornings for interested members of the community. You will learn about the history of the sanctuary, but mostly you will get to engage all of your senses and enjoy the beauty that this space has to offer humans and birds alike. Groups will be limited in size to protect the space and allow for a positive experience. Children are welcome, though the pace of the tour may be better suited to adults. The next tours will be on July 11, August 22, and September 19. Please [sign up online](#) if you are interested.

