



Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary

Clark Street and Sheridan Road
Evanston, IL 60201



clarkstreetbeachbirdsantuary.org

Spring 2025

From the Sanctuary Stewards

by Libby Hill and Rob Linsenmeier, co-stewards

One of our goals at the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary is education about natural areas, and while we were not working at CSBBS over the winter, we were still active in education. In January we went to the Civics Fair at Evanston Township High School to explain our goals, describe our activities, and recruit volunteers. In March we gave a presentation at the Chicago-area Wild Things Conference (the third time that CSSBS has presented there). Our focus was Community



Libby watching Rob install a handmade gate for accessing a fenced area of new plantings

Engagement, and we shared our approaches to involving and educating the Evanston community. These included our ongoing relationships with local companies, churches, and school groups, our collaborations with the City of Evanston, and our work with the Lincolnwood Garden club to design the Beach House Garden—as well as our frequent conversations with passersby who see us working and wonder what we're up to. In April we set up an information table with games for kids and families at the Earth Day event organized by the Evanston Ecology Center.

Coming up: On July 12, we'll participate in Unplug Illinois Day (www.unplugillinois.org). The stewards of Evanston's Natural Areas, in cooperation with the city's Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department, are sponsoring a bus tour of eight natural areas on land owned by the city. Volunteers at each area, including ours, will explain the uniqueness of their site.

Now that we're working outdoors again, we've already hosted, and educated, two groups of helpers – from Rotary International and from the Northwestern University branch of Scholars of Finance. Four new educational signs along the perimeter of the bird sanctuary provide another way to engage and inform people walking by.

We also welcomed two new Steering Committee members this winter, Elizabeth Showalter and Whitney Troy. Elizabeth is a dedicated volunteer who regularly participates in our workdays and helped at the cold and windy Earth Day event. Whitney, whose day job is as a horticulturalist at Morton Arboretum, helps out at the bird sanctuary and has also taken on some communication tasks for us.



Whitney planting a chokeberry

Of course, this newsletter is another form of education and outreach. We expect you will learn some new things by reading it, and we welcome your feedback!

Learn with Birding Podcasts

By Nancy Pinchar

Podcasts about birds and birding are some of the best resources for learning about birds. Depending on the podcast, the topics may range from discussions of individual bird species and their field identification and history to the latest science and research, environmental issues, reviews of books, and funny birding stories.

One very special podcast is “Birds of a Feather Talk Together,” a locally produced program. Each week there is a lively and informative discussion about birds between two bird experts and two newer birders, all sharing a great enthusiasm for and appreciation of birds.



Regulars on the show are John Bates, Shannon Hackett, RJ Pole, and Amanda Marquart. John is the Rowe Family Curator of Evolutionary Biology at the Negaunee Integrative

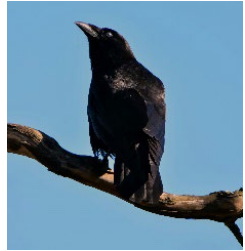
Research Center of the Field Museum of Natural History. He is also a volunteer bird monitor at CSBBS and often leads field trips for the Evanston North Shore Bird Club in Spring and Fall. Shannon is Associate Curator in the Department of Zoology and Head of the Field Museum's Bird Division. RJ and Amanda host the podcast and bring interesting bird topics and questions to focus on in each episode.

Two recent episodes discussed the epic migration of Blackpoll Warblers and the secret life of Mourning Doves. Over 90 episodes are now available, beginning with the very first one, on the extinction of the Ivory Billed Woodpecker. For more about the podcast and how to listen to and/or view it, go to: youtube.com/@BirdsofaFeatherTalkTogetherPod

Another fun and informative program is the American Birding Association's weekly podcast hosted by Nate Swick. He is the author of “A Beginner's Guide to Birding” and “The ABA Field Guide to Birds of the Carolinas.” Although this is a national program, each region of the US is regularly discussed, and there are often Chicago area

highlights and guests. A typical program begins with a listing of recent rare bird reports, followed by an interview with a guest, or panel of guests, on bird and conservation topics. In May, for example, the programs included “This Month in Birding,” in which panelists presented recent research on crows' use of geometry and warbler foraging strategies. Another episode was an entertaining interview with birder, author, and cartoonist Rosemary Mosco about her new book *The Birding Dictionary*, a humorous guide to bird and birding terminology. To check out the current podcast and past programs, go to:

www.aba.org/podcast



If you only have a minute, give a listen to “BirdNote”-- a two-minute daily podcast that describes itself as a “show that combines rich sounds with engaging stories, to illustrate the amazing lives of birds.” The subjects are wide-ranging (e.g., rescuing a baby robin, bird song IDs, and how to be a better wildlife photographer) and often surprising (birding on a skateboard?). Find these episodes and more at: www.birdnote.org/listen/birdnote-daily

All of these programs and more are available on podcast platforms at no charge. Check out a birding podcast today and have fun learning something new about birds while doing the dishes!

Bark-eating Bunnies?

If you have been following events at the bird sanctuary for a while, you may remember our adventures with beavers. In 2020, after rising lake waters damaged the fence, beavers entered the north section of the sanctuary, where they cut down and removed some cottonwood trees.

Yes, beavers are part of the natural environment—but trees are an essential part of a bird sanctuary.



So, we reinforced the fence and installed mesh around trunks of remaining cottonwoods. This kept beavers away from the trees—and we were happy to report, two years later, that new shoots were growing out of some stumps they'd left behind.



Damaged bark on a shining sumac

Now, something else is chewing our trees. This time it's sumac trees (some sources call them small shrubs), and the culprits are rabbits. Sumacs benefit many animal species. Birds eat their seeds, butterflies are drawn to their nectar, some people use their berries to make a lemony beverage, and the berries are also processed for medicinal purposes.

What about rabbits? During winter, when food is scarce on the ground, rabbits go for the bark of certain trees and shrubs. This past winter they were particularly attracted to the staghorn sumacs and shining sumacs growing in our bird sanctuary. If rabbits eat just some bark on one side of a plant, the plant will survive. But if they eat all around, or "girdle" the stem, that interrupts the flow of the nutrients and water needed by the plant and supplied through the phloem and the cambium just under the bark. If this happens, the plant will die.

So, what to do? Like beavers, rabbits are part of the natural environment, and chewing on sumac is a natural survival strategy for them. Still, we don't want to lose the sumacs, and unlike with the neighborhood beavers, we can't just fence the rabbits out of the bird sanctuary. In fact, we strongly suspect that some of them live *inside* it. We often see them there when we're working—and even spotted one energetic rabbit squeezing between the wires of "rabbit-proof" fencing! For now, we're just hoping the chewing doesn't destroy the trees, and we're relieved that new shoots (the reddish leaves in the photos) have appeared alongside many of them. Come fall, we may follow the second part of our beaver plan and fence individual trees.

Fun fact: Some staghorn sumac plants have definitely been nibbled, but the damage to shining sumac is greater. Evanston rabbits seem to have a preference for shining sumac.

Spring Planting

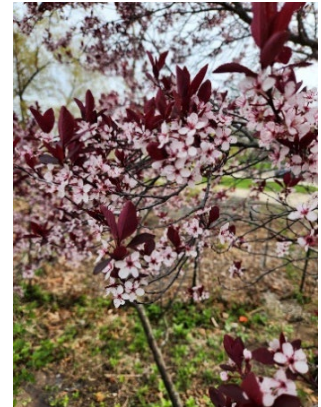
A major activity at the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary in late April and early May was planting new shrubs – more ninebarks and sand cherries, which we know from past experience will be successful. We also added four plum trees, three in a relatively bare area. We planted two shrubs that we have not tried before, black chokeberries and snowberries.

Black chokeberries are edible, but very tart. Snowberries, as the name suggests, are white, and are said to taste like wintergreen, but are considered toxic for humans. Of course we didn't plant them for people to eat; both are great for birds. We are also curious to see what insects they attract.

On a wet Wednesday and sunnier Saturday in early June, we added more flowering plants in several sections of the bird sanctuary. Again, many are ones



Rotary International volunteers planting shrubs.



Newly planted plum tree

we've had success with before, including butterfly milkweed (a favorite of monarchs), wild bergamot, and wild columbine. Some are close relatives of old favorites, including a different variety of black-eyed Susan and two species of penstemon: calico beardtongue and hairy beardtongue. Both

beardtongues attract a range of pollinators, and both are also said to be rabbit (and deer) resistant., something we're definitely looking for this year.

Where does the strange label *beardtongue* come from? According to background information at theplantnative.com/plant/penstemon, the name was given by Europeans who colonized North America, and it “comes from tiny, delicate hairs on the flower’s stamen [but] to see this ‘hairy tongue,’ you might need to get out a magnifying glass or use the zoom on your phone.” The site adds, “Why [they] decided to focus on a tiny detail and not its gorgeous runway of flowers is a mystery.” At our site we’re looking forward to enjoying the flowers.



Wild geranium

Speaking of spring planting, the plants we installed in our Beach House Garden, just north of the Clark Street Beach House, last spring are doing really well. The first plants to bloom this spring were the wild geraniums. Come take a look.

CSBBS, Local Birding, and Northwestern Publications

This Spring Meryl Li, a reporter for Northwestern University’s student-run newspaper *The Daily Northwestern*, interviewed several members of the Steering Committee for the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary and visited our site. She then prepared a long article on CSBBS history, goals, and challenges as well as our accomplishments and satisfactions. The article is available online at dailynorthwestern.com/2025/05/29/city/clark-street-beach-bird-sanctuary-offers-migrating-birds-a-temporary-home. We encourage you to read it—and we’re grateful to Meryl for spending the time to learn so much about our work and for sharing what she learned with *Daily Northwestern* readers.

In Winter 2025 the *Northwestern Magazine* included an extensive article titled “Bird Watcher” focused on the experiences of a dedicated birder, Collin Porter, who graduated from the university last year. It features striking photos of birds he spotted on or

near the Northwestern campus, his commentary on them, and an interactive map of *Hot Spots for Birding on Campus*. Because the Northwestern campus is adjacent to our bird sanctuary, many of the birds the author reports on are ones spotted in or near the sanctuary too. In fact, the bird sanctuary is shown on the interactive map, along with tips on birds to look for there. You can read the article, admire the photos, and enjoy the author’s excitement about and appreciation of the avian environment along Evanston’s lakefront at magazine.northwestern.edu/features/collin-porter-campus-bird-watching-photography-birder-birdsongs-avian-species

Box elder trees were already thriving within our borders when the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary was established by the City of Evanston in 2015. Their spring awakening seemed especially striking this year.



These two photos were taken a month apart. On April 23, 2025, groups of small flowers hung down from mostly bare box elder branches; 31 days later, the branches were covered with green leaves and reddish seeds.

