



Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary

Clark Street and Sheridan Road
Evanston, IL 60201



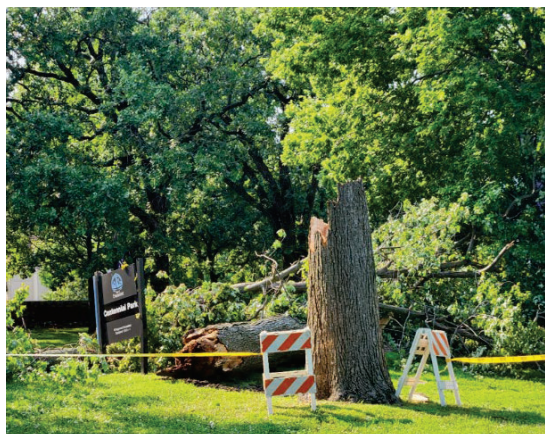
clarkstreetbeachbirdsanctuary.org

Fall 2026

From the Sanctuary Stewards

by Rob Linsenmeier, co-steward

Western Europe experienced its hottest summer on record in 2026, and a recent article in *The New Yorker* explained how European cities are rushing to provide more shade trees and other passive cooling mechanisms. In Evanston, we also had bouts of hot weather in 2026 as well as smoke from Canadian wildfires, but our trees, 31,000 on city-owned land alone, provided shade from scorching temperatures, as well as helping to clean the air and provide habitat.



Damaged tree and Centennial Park sign just steps outside our sanctuary.

Maintaining trees takes effort. Evanston has been recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City USA for 43 years, with the higher designation of the [Growth Award](#) for more than 20 of those years. Unfortunately, the city lost some large trees, including several in the lakefront parks, during the most dramatic of the summer thunderstorms on July 27. The forestry crew spent weeks cleaning up from the storm.

The Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary is dominated by grasses, forbs and shrubs, so you might not realize how many trees there are within that area: an American elm, a river birch, box elders, hawthorns, quaking aspens, staghorn sumacs (tall enough to qualify as trees), jack pines, and small oaks (mostly black oaks, but there are others too). Most of the trees, except the cottonwoods and jack pines, are toward the west side of CSBBS where the soil is

richer than pure sand. We were lucky during the recent storms. Many branches were down among the cottonwoods at the north end, and we will have to remove a damaged apple tree that predates the sanctuary, but nearly all of our trees survived.

This letter was not supposed to be about trees! It was supposed to be about thanking our volunteers, and finally we've gotten there. When it is too hot to work in the sunny areas, there is plenty of work to be done in the shade of those valuable trees. CSBBS would revert to a weedy mess without the volunteers' work to make the site both beautiful and healthy for native insects and migrating birds. Volunteers are rewarded by learning about the environment, seeing butterflies and swarms of dragonflies, and working with others who care about nature.



At last count, we had 86 individual volunteers this season (some for just an hour or two), as well as groups from Northwestern University Athletics, Rotary International, ZS Consulting, and COUR Pharma. We can always use more. Our regular work times are Wednesday 3-5 and Saturday 9-11. If you are wondering what to do on a Wednesday or Saturday, or would like to schedule a special workday for your group, let us know!

An Experiment with Mulch, Cardboard, Wood Chips--and Weeds

by Libby Hill, co-steward

Just north of the Clark Street Beach House and south of our Beach House Garden was a weedy, unattractive patch of land underneath the elm and river birch trees. This summer we decided to tackle the weeds and get the area ready for planting. A volunteer group of 23 employees from downtown Evanston's COUR Pharma pulled the weeds in just over two hours. The plan was to cover the newly weeded area with cardboard topped by 4 inches of leaf mulch, a time-honored method of getting rid of weeds and preparing for planting.

Half of the plot was covered with cardboard, donated by the U-Haul business on Dempster Street. Mulch from our diminishing stockpile was spread on top during one of our regular workdays; the plan was to order more mulch and complete the work on the next workday. Then came rainy weather and steamy heat and then the violent storm of July 27. While the storm didn't damage the bird sanctuary very much, city crews were busy cleaning up and the additional mulch wasn't available.



Libby and our COUR Pharma volunteers relax after some vigorous weed removal.



Mulch over cardboard at the top—and woodchips at the bottom.

This was an opportunity for a creative experiment. Is cardboard really necessary? Is it a good thing for the soil? This is a question debated among plant enthusiasts. What if we covered the remaining area, just about half of the project, with only wood chips, which were easily available from the city after the big storm had taken down so many trees. Would the effect on weeds be different or the same? We covered the remaining half of the area with at least 8 inches of wood chips.

When spring comes, we will see the results. Were the weeds under the cardboard eradicated more effectively than those under only wood chips? To be sure, this isn't the perfect controlled experiment. The two halves of the plot aren't identical. Still, it will be informative to see if it seems to make a difference that we used wood chips on one section of the plot and leaf mulch on the other. Maybe we will have at least some clues for community gardeners.

In spring, we will partner with Libby Shafer and her [Bees on the Block project](#) to spread the same number of seeds in both areas and see what comes up. Bees on the Block will provide the seeds, which will be of familiar species: nodding wild onion, columbine, purple prairie clover, partridge pea, Bradbury's monarda, black-eyed Susan, and a new plant for us, calico aster. All of these plants should grow in the sandy soil and partial shade under the trees.

Stay tuned for the results in 2027.

Which Species of Goldenrod?

by Rob Linsenmeier, co-steward



Tall goldenrod



Showy goldenrod

In late summer and early fall, goldenrods, with their bright yellow flowers, dominate the view across parts of the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary. Goldenrods are members of the aster family, and if you look closely at individual flowers, they have petals reminiscent of asters, which also bloom in late summer. Of the more than 100 goldenrod species, most are native to North America, and all serve as important nectar sources for bees and butterflies.

At CSBBS we have four or maybe five species. Most of it is the familiar tall goldenrod (*Solidago altissima*), but we may have some of its close cousin the Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*). These are hard to tell apart. Tall goldenrod spreads aggressively with both seeds and rhizomes throughout its large range, and we manage it at CSBBS so that it doesn't overwhelm other plants. It is sometimes incorrectly blamed for hay fever, but that is due to ragweed, a less noticeable green plant which sometimes grows near it. We do have a bit of ragweed at CSBBS, but it is easily and quickly removed.

We planted a second type of goldenrod, showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) in the garden north of the Clark Street Beach House and it is better behaved than tall goldenrod. Showy goldenrod is easy to identify because it has upright pyramidal heads, unlike the droopy ones of tall goldenrod.

In a few shady places, such as under the hawthorn near the entrance gate, you can find a third type, elmleaf or elm-leaved goldenrod (*Solidago ulmifolia*), distinguished when flowering by its horizontal branches of flowers. Finally, in the sand among the cottonwoods there is the delicate grass-leaved or flat-top goldenrod (*Euthamia graminifolia*), which blooms a little earlier and only gets about two feet high. It is in a different genus, but is still closely related. We did not plant grass-leaved goldenrod, but like the tall goldenrod, it volunteered on its own to live at CSBBS.



Elm-leaved goldenrod



Grass-leaved goldenrod

Volunteer Billy Siegenfeld photographed these leaves at CSBBS in 2025, too late for last year's newsletter.



Fall Bird Visitors—and Other Migrants Too

by Nancy Pinchar

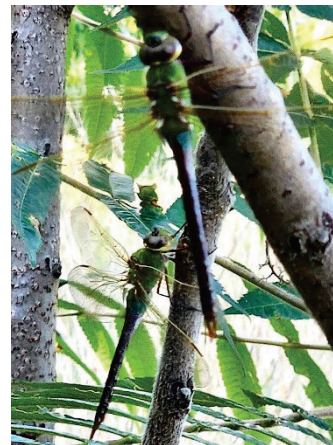
Each day offers a new mix of birds in the areas of the Bird Sanctuary, neighboring park and beach. Along with resident birds, various Fall migrating birds visit for a brief rest, and others may stay for days taking advantage of the insect and plant foods, and protected cover provided, in part, by our bird sanctuary.



Blackpoll warbler
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Recently we've seen many Swainson's Thrushes and Blackpoll and Palm warblers as they pass through, and sparrows will be next.

But there are other migrants too. At the end of August as we started our Fall bird monitoring, we observed waves of migrating Green Darner dragonflies; hundreds and hundreds swirled over the sanctuary and beach areas. These dragonflies migrate from the north and Canada to the south and Caribbean, stopping over to feed on insects in areas like the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary.



Non-bird Migrants:
Two Green Darner
dragonflies

Our resident birds also provide surprises. In the late afternoon during the last week of September, one monitor observed a Bald Eagle soaring over the beach and terrorizing a large flock of Ring-billed Gulls sitting on the beach. The gulls exploded up and off the beach, with one poor gull pursued relentlessly by the eagle into the far distance.

Stop by soon to discover something new at Clark Street Beach Sanctuary!

Tour the Sanctuary!

by Elizabeth Showalter

The Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary is surrounded by fencing, and typically only volunteers can go inside. This year, though, we introduced monthly tours of the sanctuary for community members. These tours serve two primary purposes: to provide an opportunity for visitors to enjoy and develop a deeper appreciation for the bird sanctuary and also to inspire potential new volunteers to get involved.

Tours were offered once a month from May through September. We welcomed a total of 25 guests (adults from young to old and one child), and we were excited to see several visitors join our volunteer list. A guest in September mentioned that she had heard about the tour from an earlier guest who told her she had to go! Each tour has been a fun opportunity to explore the sanctuary together and observe the seasonal changes, with different flowers and plants coming into bloom throughout the summer.



Tours are over for the season, but people can sign up to be notified about tours in 2027 here:
<https://forms.gle/9PLV5Kk332HPKZhH8>

Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary – Steering Committee Members

Susan Comstock	Rob Linsenmeier	Elizabeth Showalter
Al Gabor	Sarah Miller	Chris Steel
Jerry Herst	David Pelzer	Whitney Troy
Libby Hill	Nancy Pinchar	<i>Ex officio:</i> Joan Linsenmeier, newsletter editor
