



Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary

Clark Street and Sheridan Road
Evanston, IL 60201

clarkstreetbeachbirdsantuary.org

Spring 2022

From the Sanctuary Stewards

This spring has been successful despite the very challenging weather. Our regular workdays started later than typical and those we did schedule were abbreviated because of the cold and wet April weather. The late spring has, though, been a boon to our bird monitoring, with more skilled birders going out regularly and seeing more birds per visit. This in turn has caught the attention of the larger birding community, attracting other birders to visit our site and post their observations on eBird. We give special thanks to Nancy Pinchar, our new bird monitor coordinator, who has built upon the strong foundations set up by Suzanne Checchia many years ago. The other good news is our relationship with Dr. Karen Glennemeier, our new consultant. See the article on Learning from Experts in this newsletter. It's going to be a busy summer!
~ Julie Dorfman and Jerry Herst



A Solstice Celebration

Mother Nature requires a break from spotting migrating birds and tending to plants during the colder months of the year, but we can still enjoy times at the beach. On December 22, 2021, twelve hearty souls gathered at Clark Street Beach to welcome the sun after the longest night of the year. We read poetry, we listened to music, and we sang

“Here Comes the Sun” as the sun rose through a low bank of clouds over the lake into a sparkling, cloudless blue sky. Adding to the magic of our gathering, a large flock of cormorants along with gulls and a small flock of geese welcomed the sun with us.

Bird Sightings

Bird monitors began spring migration monitoring at the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary during the last week of March. Many birds were already making use of the habitat and the surrounding areas. On April 6 one monitor spotted 26 bird species including 6 different sparrows and several different ducks as well.



Song sparrow, photo by Callan Fromm

Throughout April and May, monitors have seen migrating birds flying overhead. On April 23 one wrote that she had seen “huge flocks of some sort of blackbird; were too high and too quick to get a good shot or ID. Estimate [of 150 birds] is very conservative; if I'd stopped to try to get better counts, I would never have stopped counting! The flyovers were just constant.”

On May 5, 43 Willets were observed on the beach and at least 17 species of Warblers have been seen and recorded this spring (of the 30 total seen within the past 3 years).

You can see details on CSBBS bird sightings at eBird, <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L3615041>, including some fabulous photos. Thanks to all our monitors! And remember, you don't need to be an official monitor to enjoy the birds. You just need to keep your eyes and ears open.

Dig, Snip, Cover

One plant that has thrived at the CSBBS is one we'd rather not have: Bouncing Bet, also known as soapwort. This flowering Eurasian native was reported in Evanston in 1875. It's attractive, useful for making soap, and grows well in our habitat. So what's the problem? If we let this hardy plant just "do its thing," it will crowd out other plants that are more beneficial for the birds. So, this spring, we launched our "Dig, Snip, Cover" project, an attempt to compare approaches to limiting the spread of Bouncing Bet. Volunteers from Rotary International's Green Team spent a sunny May afternoon with our regular volunteers in the area just north of the Clark Street Beach House, where Bouncing Bet, always an early spring arrival, was already widespread.

We marked sections of the area with flags and treated different sections in different ways:

1. Dig – Using shovels or trowels, remove the above-ground part of the plant and as much of the roots as you can.
2. Dig and cover – Dig as above and then cover the area with a double-layer of landscape fabric to keep sunlight from reaching the plants.
3. Snip – Using snippers or fingers, remove the above-ground portion of the plant.
4. Snip and cover – Snip as above and then cover with landscape cloth.



We'll monitor the different areas and assess the effectiveness of these approaches. Stay tuned!

Rabbits! This past winter local rabbits chewed some previously untouched plants, including New Jersey teas and inland serviceberries, almost to the ground. One of our first tasks this spring was to put wire mesh cages around the stumps—and we are pleased to report that the plants are coming back!

Learning from Experts

We have learned much about plants and bird habitats in the seven years since the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary was established—through reading, talking with experts, and our own observations. Overall, we are pleased with the

transformation of a barren area of sand to what we see there today. However, some sections of the site have been perpetually problematic.

In February we put out an RFP, looking for a consultant to provide guidance for some high-visibility areas. As stated in the RFP, "We envision plantings that will thrive and sustain the birds and insects far into the future, as well as have four season interest. ... We strive to keep an element of wildness that is pleasing to both the wild inhabitants supported by our mission as well as the human community that supports its existence."

We reviewed submitted proposals, interviewed candidates, and selected Dr. Karen Glennemeier, a local restoration ecologist and President and Senior Ecologist of Habitat Research LLC. Dr. Glennemeier has worked with volunteers at other sites and is experienced in habitat restoration. She has visited the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary and has established a suite of suitable plants for each area we will be addressing this year. Plants are on order and will be installed in mid-September. Look for changes near the bump-out viewing areas, the sanctuary entrance, and the northwest corner near the Northwestern University Visitor Center this fall.

Also, this April we were honored to welcome Dr. Gerould Wilhelm to the Bird Sanctuary. He is the Director of Research at the Conservation Research Institute and co-author of the standard reference book *Flora of the Chicago Region: A Floristic and*



Dr. Wilhelm with the CSBBS stewards, photo by Kathleen Garness

Ecological Synthesis. Dr. Wilhelm encouraged us to continue to work to improve the biodiversity of the native flora in support of the native fauna, while recognizing that

the site has inherent limitations and will never become a pristine dune ecosystem. His comments were aspirational, and we are glad we had an opportunity to hear his perspective.