



# Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary

Clark Street and Sheridan Road  
Evanston, IL 60201

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

Fall 2023

## From the Sanctuary Stewards

Last fall we informed you of our excitement at having a new steward to head the bird sanctuary, and last spring we informed you that those plans didn't work out as hoped. This fall we are happy to report that our reorganization of tasks has worked out beautifully. Everyone on the steering committee has stepped up to take on responsibilities, which include arranging workdays, managing watering, monitoring birds, and planning for additional planting. Spreading responsibility around has lightened the responsibilities of the stewards.

Rob Linsenmeier, who has been an extraordinary workday leader, has now accepted the role of co-steward. Libby Hill will remain a co-steward, and Jerry Herst will be a steward emeritus, continuing to serve on the plant committee and as treasurer.



South of the Beach House  
September 2023

The City of Evanston has contracted with the Smith Group to develop plans for several threatened lake shore areas in the city. Plans include installing an ADA access ramp to

the dog beach, probably going across the natural area south of the Clark Street beach house. This area includes plants of interest to scientists at the Chicago Botanic Garden who monitor rare and endangered plants. We are working with city staff, the Smith Group, and a recent graduate of the Northwestern University/ Chicago Botanic Garden program in plant ecology to help direct the ramp

away from "Plants of Concern" or relocate them away from the new ramp and disruption from its construction. Gratifyingly, the city staff and city council as well as the Smith Group are interested in finding solutions that meet the needs of the dog owner community, ADA provisions, and the natural habitat that we all care about.

The City of Evanston is also working with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to examine both Clark Street Beach and Lighthouse Beach. NOAA has brought in Dewberry Engineers, Inc. to collaborate on the project. We are happy to report that both NOAA and Dewberry are impressed with the work we have all done at the bird sanctuary and are not calling for any engineered structural interventions. Rather, they are proposing a dune management and monitoring plan that would suggest different actions should the lake level rise again or should dune accretion on the eastern edge of the bird sanctuary severely impact the sandy recreational areas at the beach. They will also advise us on signage that is ADA compliant. In addition, they have discussed Northwestern's tentative plans for extending their pier near Clark Street Beach. The plan is "in permit limbo" but further study may be needed to determine how this might affect sand migration and replenishment to the beach.

We are fortunate that our regular volunteers as well as volunteers from several organizations in the city and at Northwestern continue to help out at CSBBS. We look forward to a winter of planning and to resuming work in spring.

*~ Jerry Herst and Libby Hill*



## Bird Sightings by Nancy Pinchar

Thanks to all the volunteers who have planted and weeded, and watered and weeded, and lopped and weeded, our beautiful sanctuary. This habitat along the Great Lakes migration pathway provides an essential stopover landing site for birds to rest and refuel before continuing their journeys. The birds have flocked to it, and we have seen a fantastic variety of migrating and local birds within the sanctuary itself and on the beach.



Many thanks, also, to the bird monitors for daily reports, in all kinds of weather. You can see their reports at [ebird.org/hotspot/L3615041](http://ebird.org/hotspot/L3615041). We now have five years of bird count data for the spring and fall seasons. This spring, between late March and early June, our bird monitors observed 98 different species of birds at the sanctuary and in the beach area. These included 11 species of migrating warblers, 4 types of thrushes, 4 kinds of flycatchers and 10 varieties of sparrows. Many of these species are coming here again on their fall migration south.



Yellow-rumped Warbler

New resources and tools are available to help you learn more about fall migration along the Great Lakes and in the Chicago area. The “Bird Migration Explorer” is an interactive tool on the National Audubon

Society website ([explorer.audubon.org/](http://explorer.audubon.org/)) with information about types of migrating birds, migration maps by species, and challenges they face. Another fascinating resource is “Birdcast” ([birdcast.info/](http://birdcast.info/)), a series of tools developed by a science consortium, including the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, to monitor and predict bird migration. These modelling programs support the emerging scientific discipline of “aeroecology,” the study of ecological activities in the air. According to Birdcast, “The ability to forecast migration two weeks in advance has tremendous potential for bird conservation—from informing siting and operation of wind turbines to addressing impacts of light

pollution to providing information to mitigate bird collisions with aircraft and support biosecurity decision-making.”

Look for and enjoy the birds!

## Beavers and Cottonwoods: An Update

In Fall 2020 we shared the surprising, and dismaying, news that beavers had found their way into the bird sanctuary and cut down many cottonwood trees. Yes, beavers are part of the natural environment—but trees are an essential part of a bird sanctuary. So, as we reported in Spring 2021, we reinforced the wooden fence in that area of the sanctuary with metal mesh and installed mesh around each of the cottonwood trees remaining within the sanctuary. A City of Evanston crew then helped us with further fencing. Two updates:

\* Some damaged trees are recovering! New shoots are growing out of the stumps that the beavers left behind (see photo).

\* Some trees the beavers didn't damage have grown so much that we needed to either enlarge or remove their metal mesh



wrappings. A group of regular volunteers was delighted to have volunteers from the Evanston-based consulting firm ZS visit our bird sanctuary on a sunny October morning to help out with this project.

## Not Just a BIRD Sanctuary

When we give tours of the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary, we often ask our visitors these key questions:

\* How do you make a bird sanctuary?

\* What would make an area a good place for birds to stop?

Their answers generally fall into two categories. You'd provide food for birds to eat and places for them to shelter. Most answers involve plants: You'd want to have seeds and berries for birds to eat, trees and bushes for them to rest in, and maybe a densely planted area, or a brush pile, where they can hide. Looked at this way, what our volunteers do is to indirectly create a *bird* sanctuary by more directly creating a *plant* sanctuary for a range of native

plants. Consistent with this, our website states that our mission is “to provide a habitat for migratory birds” and then goes on to present our top goals, starting with our aim to “enhance and maintain habitat through native plant installation and removal of invasive vegetation.” As will be clear to readers of this newsletter and to anyone who walks by the sanctuary, especially when we’re there hard at work, the plants get a large share of our attention.

Visitors often suggest that in addition to providing seeds, nuts, and berries for birds, we might provide them with insects to eat. We respond that, yes, some birds do eat insects—plus another reason to attract insects is that they pollinate plants and thus help to produce more plants to support the birds.



Sometimes insect/plant relationships surprise us. We didn’t know our horsemint would attract large black wasps. These frightened some volunteers, but we soon learned that the wasps pretty much ignore us humans. Another surprise was the tidy little

circles that leaf cutter bees produced this fall in the leaves of some ash trees.

Sometimes we add plants specifically to provide a habitat for insects—and especially for butterflies.



Monarch Butterfly on Butterfly Weed (July 2023)

We intentionally included plants known to attract monarch butterflies, and it worked. We’re a *butterfly* sanctuary too!

Monarch Caterpillar on Common Milkweed (September 2023)



## Community Events

The Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary was a stop for two regional events this summer. Each June the Evanston Environmental Association hosts an Evanston Garden Walk, featuring several private gardens and one public space. Proceeds from the event are used primarily to provide scholarships for the Ecology Center’s summer camps. This June the public space selected was our bird sanctuary! Despite the threat of inclement weather, we hosted around 100 visitors, mostly likely a record single-day attendance for the sanctuary. Five CSBBS volunteers gave personal guided tours to individuals and small groups, walking with them around the outside of the site. Typical questions included, “What’s growing well now?” and “What birds are you seeing?”

The CSBBS was also a featured stop for Unplug Illinois ([www.unplugillinois.org/](http://www.unplugillinois.org/)) in July, the first time Evanston has participated. The public were invited to walk or bike to several parks and other sites to enjoy the

natural world and unplug from their electronics. We gave Ethan Johnson of the Evanston Ecology Center lists of plants and birds that were likely to be visible from the path outside the sanctuary during the summer, and Ethan prepared handouts with



Rob Linsenmeier—with a long stalk of white sweet clover.

photos. During the event, he staffed an information table in the park near our entrance. Rob Linsenmeier from the CSBBS team helped visitors find the flowering plants, invasives, and trees on the handout and explained the purpose and history of CSBBS. We hosted about 50 people. Families and individuals were excited when they found all the plants; several were most surprised by the prickly pear cactus. Our afternoon slot was not good for seeing birds, but visitors did not seem to mind. Instead, they enjoyed seeing the butterflies and the flowers while learning about the Clark Street Beach Bird Sanctuary.