



Climate Change Impacts Local Birds

Local citizens track numbers and restore habitat

Data from hundreds of Chicago region bird monitors (and thousands more around the country) have recently demonstrated that global warming is more advanced than most people think. The National Audubon Society's new report tracks the seasonal movements of birds to demonstrate that global warming is already disrupting our environment – not just in the arctic – but right here in Illinois, and has been doing so for the past forty years. The short-term impacts on specific birds will vary, but scientists warn of a serious long term toll on birds, other wildlife and the health of the environment that sustains human prosperity and well-being. The report also states that diverse and healthy habitats will be most resilient to our changing climate.

The turkey vulture, eastern bluebird, the gadwall (a duck), the American robin and the hermit thrush are all moving their winter ranges north into the Chicago region. At the same time, the rough-legged hawk, northern goshawk and pine siskin are shifting their ranges away northward and are being seen less frequently here.

“This national report also shines a light on this region's grassland birds,” said Orland Grassland volunteer Pat Hayes. “They're the one group that isn't moving north. They have no northerly habitat to go to. Their numbers are down more than 90%.” The south suburbs' grassland forest preserves make this area a hotspot for rare grassland birds including the bobolink, meadowlark, and short-eared owl.

“All the little prairies are living on borrowed time unless we expand the size and quality of our local grassland forest preserves,” said Packard. “These rare populations of prairie butterflies, turtles, orchids and grasses are all interdependent.” In other words, the bird populations are “mine canaries” that provide early warning of deeper problems.

Ten years of data from the local bird monitors of the BCN Census shows a northward expansion of some of the state's summering birds. Local nature lovers are also tracking some animals that are not as mobile as birds and may adapt even less well to changing climates. The Calling Frog Survey, the Illinois Butterfly Monitors' Network and the Dragonfly Monitoring Network are all collecting data about vulnerable wildlife.

“The Chicago region is home to some of our nations' most threatened birds. Their grasslands, shrublands, woodlands and wetlands are degrading or being converted to other uses. They face threats on their migratory paths. Now it appears that global warming will create new and unpredictable challenges. These birds will need healthy, diverse habitats to survive the coming decades,” said Judy Pollock, Audubon Chicago Region's Director of Bird Conservation.

Citizen action throughout the Chicago region is combating these threats. At scores of local projects, volunteers fight back a torrent of invasive species and spread diverse native seeds, bringing back the complex ecosystems that our wildlife will come to rely on more and more as the climate changes.

For more information, see www.bcnbirds.org/trends07 and www.habitatproject.org.

Illinois Birds with Significant Northern Movement over 40 years

State	Species	Distance moved to north continentally over 40-yr (miles)	Center of abundance is North or South of state	40-yr State cumulative population change	40-yr Continental cumulative population change	State trend relative to continental trend
Illinois	Rough-legged Hawk	178.7	North	-80.4%	-2.4%	lower
Illinois	Northern Goshawk	71.9	North	-61.5%	-3.2%	lower
Illinois	Pine Siskin	288.2	North	-34.2%	48.9%	lower
Illinois	Pied-billed Grebe	63.6	South	890.5%	61.1%	higher
Illinois	Ruddy Duck	13.5	South	689.1%	17.3%	higher
Illinois	White-crowned Sparrow	21.7	South	481.6%	-17.5%	higher
Illinois	Northern Pintail	91.0	South	201.8%	-62.0%	higher
Illinois	Turkey Vulture	53.2	South	5326.1%	577.7%	higher
Illinois	Gadwall	148.9	South	7406.0%	631.3%	higher
Illinois	Eastern Bluebird	114.5	South	4593.5%	311.5%	higher
Illinois	White-throated Sparrow	109.1	South	1993.4%	-6.6%	higher
Illinois	Hermit Thrush	91.4	South	4108.2%	67.6%	higher
Illinois	House Wren	34.1	South	3279.9%	32.2%	higher
Illinois	Eastern Phoebe	47.9	South	9893.4%	226.2%	higher
Illinois	American Robin	206.0	South	4767.0%	22.1%	higher
Illinois	Black Vulture	51.9	South	324431.4%	1238.4%	higher