



*One of the specialties of many bird clubs is taking birders on field trips. Here, David Johnson leads a group of IOS and Evanston North Shore Bird Club members on a "looney trip" in Lake County in early April.*

Both Evanston North Shore and the Chicago Ornithological Society are becoming more active on conservation matters and are alerting members often about potential threats to bird habitats. While the importance of birding versus conservation activities is not always clear-cut among all club members, the need for at least some official conservation activism is recognized by at least a few of the recreational bird clubs. Generally, the activism efforts center on local habitat preservation and improvement of protection for birds.

The 12 Illinois chapters of the National Audubon Society and the 17 chapters of the Illinois Audubon Society are at the more extreme end of the activism spectrum. Both the older Illinois Audubon Society and the National Audubon Society were founded because of the urgent need to protect bird species from extinction in the late nineteenth century. Chapters of both organizations have continued a very strong tradition of

conservation activism to this day, with a focus on bird preservation and habitat preservation. Hard core birders certainly belong to the many Audubon groups in the state, but conservation is definitely foremost on the agenda of all of the state chapters.

In fact, as Doris Westfall, a long-time member of the Vermilion County Audubon Society said: "We do so many other things, we don't have that much time for birding sometimes." Margaret Hollowell, past president of the National Audubon Council of Illinois said the conservation versus birdwatching question is "something we debate endlessly amongst ourselves. Are we bird watchers or are we conservationists? It's our perennial question. I think the active core of Audubon people are bird watchers. But there is also a very strong conservation camp. We have to think about this tension a lot when we decide what news to put into our newsletters, for example."

The Audubon chapters also have a strong habitat restoration ethic. Many groups and/or individual members are stewards of local natural areas. The Shawnee Audubon Society, part of Illinois Audubon, operates the War Bluff Sanctuary adjacent to the Shawnee National Forest, for example, and the statewide Illinois Audubon Society is currently involved in several appeals to purchase sensitive bird habitats. The National Audubon Council of Illinois has taken an active role in many campaigns involving habitat management in Illinois, with the most notable recent victory being the successful lawsuit against the National Forest Service because of its mismanagement of its own forest policy.

Space considerations prevent me from profiling individually the more than 30 bird clubs in Illinois. The most recent member directory of the American Birding Association includes information on local bird clubs by zip code region if you're