

# Chicago's Birding Jewel: The Magic Hedge

by Jim Landing

Sitting along the Lake Michigan migratory bird flyway in Chicago is a small area of land, about 15 acres, that projects eastward into the waters of the lake farther than any other point north of the Loop. For this reason the Chicago Park District refers to the area as Montrose Point, since it is an extension, on its south portion, of Montrose Avenue. Just east of the Bath House there is a long row of shrubs interspersed with several trees that, in spring and fall, has become an incredible success story as an attraction to tens of thousands of migratory birds. From Asia, from Europe, from South America (the neotropical migrants), and from all portions of North America, they come to Montrose Point for rest, food, and shelter. They are joined there each year by thousands of birders, not only from the Chicago area, but downstate, throughout the Americas, and from across the globe. Montrose Point has, because of the presence of migratory birds, especially the neotropical migrants, become an internationally recognized birding area, and the Chicago Park District, by enhancing bird-friendly plantings at Montrose, is performing an act of conservation desperately needed for these birds, whose numbers are declining both in their breeding areas north of us and in their wintering areas south of us. Montrose Point now is being mentioned in most of the bird guides. What is this row of shrubs? Where did it come from and how did it get there? In real terms, how did this almost invisible section of Chicago become so famous that people interested in the natural world would travel thousands of miles to stand on it? It is a story worth telling.

## Politics and Montrose Point

We could begin a story of Montrose Point with the glaciers and the successive retreats of the Lake Michigan beaches, Glenwood, Calumet, Tolleston, and others. But that would make the story much longer, and most of it would not even be relevant. I will begin this tale on 15 February 1933 in Miami, Florida. On that day the Mayor of Chicago, Anton J. Cermak, rode in a parade with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who had just been elected President of the United States, but had not yet taken office. During the parade, a young



Jim Landing standing beside the Magic Hedge.

man, later identified as Guiseppe Zangara, appeared next to their automobile, lunged forward with a gun, and fired. Cermak had seen the young man, turned to protect the President, and took all the bullets himself, which toppled him off the car. As Cermak fell to the street he shouted Take the President away. Instead of retreating, Roosevelt ordered the car to back up, placed Cermak in the back and, with Roosevelt cradling him all the way, took him to the closest hospital. Anton J. Cermak, a Democrat and the first eastern European Mayor of Chicago, died on 8 March 1993. Franklin Delano Roosevelt never forgot this act of bravery and devotion, and always harbored a deep respect for Chicago, a city that fared very well under the New Deal because of it. The nation was in the throes of the Great Depression and Chicago politicians began to consider the idea of a Montrose Point.

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At that time, the natural Chicago lakefront had been substituted for a synthetic one from Indiana to Montrose Avenue. Early settlement went to the lakefront, so there was little park space left, and filling in