



# Illinois Ornithological Society

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## **President's Message**

Illinois covers more than 55,000 square miles and stretches some 400 miles lengthwise and 200 miles east to west. That's a lot of territory. So it's not surprising the day-to-day experience of birdlife for an IOS member from one part of the state can be quite different from that of someone in another area.

The Internet, electronic mail, and that older form of technology called the telephone, shorten these distances between us. They also enable a widespread and close to instantaneous sharing of information about what's happening in bird life all over the state. Those who are plugged in to the Illinois birding community's electronic mail list serve, Illinois Birders Exchanging Thoughts or IBET\*, know how rapidly word spreads of the occurrence of a rarity, the current northern reach of spring migration, and what birds are concentrating where. The volume and scope of this information exchange is such that one can keep abreast of the current state of ornithological affairs in Illinois without even stepping outside the house, let alone traveling throughout the 55,000 square miles.

Nonetheless, Internet communications, or for that matter even telephone conversation, is not a replacement for face-to-face interactions between real, flesh-and-blood people. Nor is following bird life via the world wide web a replacement for direct sensory experience, outdoors with actual birds and the sights, sounds and smells of their habitats.

One of the benefits of our joining in the IOS community is the number of opportunities that IOS offers through field trips and its annual meeting to gather with others interested in birds and birding in Illinois. This contact between birders allows new friendships to blossom, and also strengthens old friendships. It enables us to exchange and share the varied experiences that come from living in different regions within Illinois, as well as neighboring states. Often, unexpected rewards rise out of the interactions at these gatherings.

IOS offers a range of field trips at a variety of locations distributed all over Illinois. The annual meeting, this year being held in May at Pere Marquette State Park outside St. Louis, is a superb forum for getting together with others who enjoy birding. What makes these IOS events special is that you meet people from all around Illinois, each of whom brings a unique perspective on our bird life. This statewide character is a key ingredient that definitely enhances one's experience of the activities.

Every year I look forward to IOS's annual meeting. If you've been to previous meetings, you know why I feel that way. If not, be sure to find out this year! See a part of Illinois you don't often get to, or share your local patch with visitors from afar. And strengthen your connections within the Illinois birding community. Illinois may be a big state, but IOS brings us close together.