



# ILLINOIS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## President's Message

### Birding in 2032

As IOS celebrates its 20th Anniversary, no one can doubt how much birding has changed since the organization began in 1992. Remember those phone chains, set up to alert a whole group of birders when a rarity or vagrant appeared? My wife, Karen, and I remember. Since we were usually around to answer the phone, we typically had to call a half dozen (or more) of the people below us on the list, before we actually got a real person rather than an answering machine. That sounds like sour grapes (and maybe it was, just a little bit), but our phone frustration was balanced by the great birds we got to see by being part of the chain.

Not being a psychic, nor a futurist, I can only guess what our great hobby will be like in 2032. One thing is certain, the technology of electronic devices, and the software used to make those devices so easy to use, is advancing so rapidly, that abilities we haven't even thought of today will be commonplace 20 years from now. That's good as well as bad news for the hobby. For people like me, who are too lazy, or too technologically challenged, or who just don't want to increase our dependence on technology, there are still bells and whistles that will make our birding life easier. One of those will surely be scopes and binoculars with high-quality digital camera technology as an integral part of the optical devices.

Think about it: Digiscoping directly from your scope or binocs. No reason (or excuse in my case), to ever miss out on getting images documenting that rarity or vagrant, for all the world to see. IORC and other records committees will undoubtedly be overjoyed in not having to spend time reading lengthy diatribes about why the bird I was watching was a Plain Chachalaca and not just an odd barnyard chicken. Yet this good news has to be tempered just a bit. Some birds will still be challenging to ID, even with 100 photos, as witness the *elaenia* sp., found by the Gyllenhaals in Humboldt Park. If only it had vocalized...

We already can instantly access a whole library of songs and calls using a smart phone or an iPod. Many who read this remember dragging around a tape player, then trying to find the right track to be sure that was a Kirtland's Warbler singing in the jack pines. How long will it be until birders will just use a high-quality microphone, probably built into their smart phone, hear a song, hold up the device to record it, engage the voice recognition software, and in a few seconds, there's the ID on the display?

Leaving aside the issue of the overuse of playback to call in birds, there's another real downside to song recognition software. Birders won't have to learn the songs and calls, and my personal view is that this is a step backward. Birding by ear is still one of the best ways to increase your skill and ability.

Bird life will also most certainly change in the next 20 years. We're already seeing many traditional 'southern' species advancing farther north, due to climate change. Look at Blue-gray Gnatcatchers for example by checking Tara Beveroth's article in this issue. Scissor-tailed Flycatchers nesting at Midewin in northern Illinois? I'll bet it happens. There is a downside to climate change. Less adaptable species might become rarer or even disappear completely. And can we stem the tide of habitat loss, not just here in Illinois, but globally?

Those questions relate directly back to technology. If better technology means easier entry into birding, then more birders, coupled with their ability to instantly connect, means more voices speaking in support of the birds, influencing public policy and corporate behavior to the benefit of the birds. IOS and other organizations will be vital in spreading the word, and the word is bird. That's where I'm going right now -birding! See you out there in 2032!

— Robert Fisher

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Kathy Ade

TKAde@aol.com

### Printing

CityWide Printing

Des Plaines, Illinois