

## Letter from the Editor

### "Common" sense in birding

The winter has been long, snowy, and cold. But we birders have been cheered by the presence of White-winged Crossbills, Common Redpolls, and even a few Hoary Redpolls, keeping our binoculars at the ready to see where and when we might find another winter finch. (And we actually have a couple of exciting birds up here in northern and central Illinois that those deep Southern Illinois birders had to drive north to see!)

While I adore spring, I must say that as the Red-winged Blackbirds start singing in the back yard and House Finches start fighting with their voices for territory, I'm getting sad. You see, I've been extremely blessed with sometimes up to 120 Common Redpolls at my nyger feeders and on the ground, and eating snow on the top of my garage – nearly all winter!! They are still here in March as I write this note, and I've had White-winged Crossbills in both the Douglas fir and the Colorado blue spruce in my yard.

Just as with the record Great Gray Owl invasion in Minnesota several years ago, there might not be a crossbill/redpoll invasion like this for decades. One can get almost complacent and ho-hum about driving through an Illinois suburban neighborhood filled with conifers and finding a couple more pink birds with white wing bars prying open cones for the protein inside.

One can get complacent about almost any "common" bird. The robins are back, declares a non-birding friend, to which a birder, myself included, feels compelled to say, "Yeah, yeah, but did you know they are here year-round and they're not really harbingers of spring?"

One of my favorite birders – you all know who he is – has been going out nearly every day this fall and winter to get his White-winged Crossbill fix. I admire that passion. I admire the joy that comes with seeing yet another pink bird in a tree, and observing its behavior.

And I've found in the past few years that just watching a cardinal fly, a gull take a curve in the wind, a finch preen, can still bring me joy – especially in these difficult economic times when we begin to remember that the best things in life truly are free.

Sharing the joy of watching a "common" bird with a beginning birder is so fulfilling. I took a 10-year-old boy out to Illinois Beach State Park this winter and found him a Common Goldeneye. You would think he had seen an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, he was so excited.

While you're out reveling in spring migration and tallying species on the annual spring bird count, perhaps you've got a moment to show a newbie birder his or her first Indigo Bunting or even an American Goldfinch male all decked out in his handsome new nuptial plumage.

*Sheryl DeVore*

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**Note:** The Index to *Meadowlark* Volume 17 will be published online at [www.illinoisbirds.org](http://www.illinoisbirds.org)

## About Our Cover:

Jenny Vogt created the front cover drawing of a Red-winged Blackbird. A commercial and fine artist, Jenny was just elected as the new president of the Illinois Ornithological Society. Visit [jennyvogt.com](http://jennyvogt.com) to learn more about her art and design work.

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