



President's Message:

As I write this, spring seems far away – in both directions! It's the tail end of October, and a major low pressure system is howling into Illinois from Kansas, bringing with it some extremely powerful northeasterly winds, bitter cold, and perhaps our first snow of the season. Predicted wave heights in Lake Michigan are up to 20 feet! Should the long range forecasts prove to be accurate, we're about to experience the second winter in a polar vortex weather pattern, causing most if not all of the Great Lakes to freeze over, leaving only very limited open water for wintering waterfowl, loons and grebes.

So what does that have to do with spring? Even with all the complexities of bird migration, it distills down into a simple fact: All those birds that went north to breed have to head south to survive, so they can come back north next year to breed once again. For many species of waterfowl, plus some loons and grebes, the south end of Lake Michigan is their winter destination when they head south in late fall. To both scaup species, Long-tailed Ducks, the three scoter species, mergansers, Horned Grebes and a fair number of loons – both Common and Red-throated – Lake Michigan is a tropical paradise. Well, that might be a slight exaggeration, but large numbers of these birds spend most winters foraging for fish, invertebrates and submergent vegetation

If the big lake freezes, so will the smaller lakes and impoundments farther south in Illinois. Last year the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was scheduled to do another winter waterfowl survey of all the Great Lakes, part of a multiyear study. It was canceled because there was little to no open water, and hence, no waterfowl on the Great Lakes. Some long term climate change models suggest the polar vortex might become the rule rather than the exception, with unpredictable but perhaps negative effects on the many waterbirds using the Great Lakes as their winter home.

When the next issue of Meadowlark arrives in your mailbox early next year, a new IOS member will author the president's letter. This is my last letter as president.

The nominating committee is gearing up to present a slate of officers and directors to the IOS Board, for a vote in January 2015. The lifeblood of IOS is our dedicated membership, the effort and support you provide and the volunteers who lead field trips, serve on committees and promote IOS initiatives such as the Illinois Young Birders, the IOS grants and the seasonal reports.

For me, it's been an exciting and I think productive five years as president, participating in the changes that carry IOS forward and strengthen this group's ability to perform its mission. I offer my heartfelt thanks to the IOS leadership team who have worked with me over these last 60 months. There are too many names to mention, but you know who you are. I'm grateful for your support and hard work on IOS's behalf.

Robert Fisher

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TKAde@aol.com

Printing

CityWide Printing,

Des Plaines, Illinois