



Many opportunities exist to introduce children to birds. Here, a child was able to hold a Canada Warbler in the banding grip while participating at a recent bird-banding project led by Caleb Gordon of Lake Forest College. See *Meadowlark* Vol. 11 No. 4 for details. Photo by Blaire Skinner.

Children are naturally curious, and this curiosity includes the natural world around them. They are extremely observant and absorb information at an incredible rate. What a wonderful time to introduce them to the wonders of nature. A great way to start is through birding and a look into the fascinating lives of birds.

A classroom setting may be limited in helping children understand and experience the natural world; we should encourage children to learn outdoors. Many ways exist to stimulate their interest in learning about the many wonders of life right outside their door. One way to inspire children is by helping them identify common birds in their own backyards. We can answer questions they have about what they are seeing. Why aren't goldfinches yellow in the winter? Why don't robins eat seed? Where do chickadees go at night? We can impress upon them how important it is to help birds survive in their environment.

Introducing Children to Birding

by Pat Prichard

I was a rebellious kid of 11 (when introduced to the world of birds)...we spotted a clump of brown feathers on the trunk of an oak. It was a flicker...I thought it was dead, so I touched its back. It came instantly to life, looked at me with wild eyes and dashed away in a flash of golden wings. It was like resurrection. Ever since, birds have seemed to me the most vivid expression of life. They have dominated my daily thoughts, my reading and even my dreams. They have led me into the wider vistas of the natural world — and of awareness.

Roger Tory Peterson,
From "My Top 10 Birds",
"International Wildlife" magazine,
March/April 1996

Beyond our own backyards, there are many great natural resources in Illinois. The diversity of habitat throughout the state includes lakeshore, urban and suburban communities, ledges of skyscrapers, wetlands, bogs, fields, and forest. These provide convenient places for children to observe and learn. Many state parks, nature centers, forest preserves, wildlife refuges and the like are within a short distance of most of us. Whether it's Illinois State Beach in Zion, Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge outside of Carbondale, the open fields of the eastern-central part of the state or the Magic Hedge on Chicago's lakefront, opportunities exist for us to help children explore and learn about birds.

Those of us now active in birding need to plant the seeds for the younger generation. If we fail to do so, we jeopardize the efforts of

those who have made enormous strides toward the study and protection of birds. I would like to offer some resources that may be helpful in starting a youngster on the path to birding. (Please note that prices are approximate and are intended only for reference.)

Binoculars

Some excellent compact binoculars are available for young birders. Magnification should be kept to around 7x for smaller children (8x may also work as long as the binocular is compact). Higher magnification narrows the field of view, making it more difficult to find and follow birds. Images can also appear shaky at higher magnification, reducing the resolution. Key points when selecting a pair of binoculars are:

1. Does the binocular fit comfortably in the child's hand?
2. Can the child easily reach and use the focus knob?