



Illinois Ornithological Society

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Letter from the editor

For the good finds, bird your backyard

Like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, I often believe "there's no place like home" to find a good bird. The only time I've ever seen a Carolina Wren in northern Illinois has been in my backyard. One spring day, with windows open on my screened-in porch, I heard the distinctive "tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle tea" of the wren which perched on my feeder for a minute, then flew away.

A fairly regular bird out in the field could be a rarity in the backyard giving you a whole new perspective on that species. One crisp fall afternoon, several Swainson's Thrushes fed on ripening elderberries in my backyard. I watched as they tenderly plucked the berries from the bush, held them between their beaks for a few moments, then swallowed. Eastern Kingbirds have fed elderberries to their fledglings in my backyard in late summer.

In spring, I have heard White-throated Sparrows singing in my backyard. I have seen several Northern Orioles on a sugar maple, a Common Nighthawk ensconced horizontally on a black walnut tree in the neighbor's front yard, and a Fox Sparrow shuffling around near composted leaves.

For those few sweet moments, my backyard is transformed into a mini-nature preserve. Birding in the backyard (and front yard) brings home the realization that "rare find" can have many different meanings. Zealous birders trying to find fame in discovering a state first could retain the pure joy of birding if they spent a few moments birding in their backyards. They may even record a state first as Ann Minckler did when she saw Illinois' first confirmed Painted Bunting at her feeder a few years ago.

In this issue, we feature a compendium of backyard bird sightings and high counts compiled by Sue Friscia. You'll read about James Smith who has recorded 221 species of birds on his farmstead. One day, Smith tallied 1,000 Horned Larks; another day, he counted 250 Pectoral Sandpipers. The sighting that really gets my "envy" juices flowing is the account of six Worm-eating Warblers that once visited Judy DeNeal's backyard.

If you'd like to share some of your favorite back or front yard birding tales, please send a double-spaced typed written account to me for possible publication in a future issue of *Meadowlark*. The address is 967 Braeburn Road, Mundelein, IL 60060. That's where you could have seen four Yellow-headed Blackbirds feeding on corn my neighbor had scattered on the ground, four Wood Ducks perched on walnut trees across the street, a Brown Creeper gleaning insects from the bark of a silver maple . . .

Sheryl De Vore