



ILLINOIS ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

President's Message

The Birds of Illinois and Climate Change

It's Election Day as I write this, and one subject has been conspicuous by its absence in all the pre-election frenzy. That subject is the reality (or unreality) of climate change.

In late October I was a panelist in a session during an all day Illinois State Bar Association seminar on Wildlife, Renewable Energy and Climate Change: Critical Legal Issues.

Our panel discussed Lake Michigan Offshore Wind Energy Development: The Advisory Council Report is In; Unanswered Questions as to Impacts on Wildlife Remain. The three panelists (myself included) had been appointed by Gov. Quinn to serve as part of a 26 member Advisory Council, charged with producing a report detailing the feasibility of (and obstacles to) placing wind turbines in Illinois' Lake Michigan waters. That report was issued in June 2012 and is available for review at: http://www.cityofevanston.org/sustainability/renewable_energy/LMOWEFinalReport62012.pdf

My focus was on pointing out the issues of concern relating to passerine birds migrating over the lake, as well as waterfowl wintering on the lake. Those same concerns are reflected in the above report, and I hope I held my own as an advocate for the birds and bird conservation during the panel discussion.

That being said, some of the other sessions provided reminders of the significant impacts, short and long term, which may affect our state's community of birds. One powerful image, referenced by several panelists, was the change in climate here in Illinois should the various models for climate change prove to be accurate. Illinois' climate in 2100 is projected to be much the same as that of east Texas today. Does that mean we'll have Painted Buntings gracing our feeders? That'd be nice, but it also may mean many of our current regularly occurring species will no longer be present in the state.

So what's being done? Happily, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, along with numerous state wildlife agencies have been collaborating since 2000 on developing Wildlife Action Plans. Recently, The Climate Change Wildlife Action Plan Guidance Document provided voluntary guidance for state fish and wildlife agencies wanting to incorporate the impacts of climate change on wildlife and their habitats into WAPs. Here in Illinois, efforts via the IDNR, TNC and other groups resulted in ongoing revisions to the Illinois WAP, focusing on implementing adaptive management strategies to lessen the impact of climate change on all our state's wildlife.

This takes funding, and that's where we can help, by advocating for the birds and other wildlife to our elected officials, starting by demanding they stop the bleeding, and provide significant transfusions of dedicated funding back into the IDNR budget.

Who knows, hurricane Sandy's impact on the East Coast may once again get climate change on the table in our political arena. Tom Skilling, the well-known meteorologist for the WGN network of stations, actually referred to planetary warming in describing recent weather patterns. If Tom says it, will the public and the politicians listen? Will the funds be there to help our wildlife cope and survive with our help? I hope so!

Robert Fisher

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