

Letter from the Editor

As I write this, a Burrowing Owl, extremely rare in the state, has just been snatched by a Cooper's Hawk at Montrose Harbor, possibly, but not unequivocally due to flushing by overzealous birders. For the most part, contributors to the Illinois Birders Exchanging Thoughts, IBET, list forum have been civil and thoughtful about this unfortunate incident.

Might I encapsulate a few of the major points here, and add a few of my own?

I also wish to extend thanks to Sue Friscia, the list owner for providing this venue, which I hope can be one of sharing knowledge and open minds versus one of blame and disdain.

Here are the points I found most useful when examining my own conscience about how I should behave as a birder:

- Owls are nocturnal; disturbing them during the day has more repercussions than disturbing birds that are active during the day.

- An incident such as the one involving the Burrowing Owl should remind all of us – yes all of us because not one of us is immune from making poor judgment when it comes to seeking out birds – to think before we act.

- In these days when populations of birds are declining faster than ever before, we might consider taking just a bit more care when out in the field.

- Survival of the fittest is a biological tenet; however, this does not mean that we should wantonly chase down any rarity because it will probably die anyway.

- Watching the Cooper's Hawk take the Burrowing Owl is part of watching nature; it is a window to the behavior of birds, and much is still not known about bird behavior.

- Gathering data to benefit birds can sometimes require us to disturb birds or ecosystems. Recognizing that fact, we should proceed with respect and do our best to perform science without harm.

Will I think more about my own birding activities after this incident? I hope so. Will I be able to put the excitement of seeing a new bird species into perspective considering the type of bird it is and the situation in which it has found itself? Again, I hope so.

Here's to camaraderie in birding; good birds; open minds; and a greater understanding of how we can help wild creatures survive in a world in which their habitats are destroyed every single day.

See you in the field.

Sheryl DeVore

MEADOWLARK

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About Our Cover:

Kevin Sierzega created this issue's cover of an American Golden-Plover.

Kevin is an undergraduate at the University of Illinois where he is a member of the student chapter of the wildlife society. He is a fish and wildlife major, an avid birder, and an aspiring wildlife artist and photographer.

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