

## President's Message

### Blackbird Blitz

All those who enjoy sorting through blackbird flocks, raise your hand. We all probably remember a teacher or speaker using that rhetorical hook to get our attention, though the subject was certainly not blackbirds. But as I write this, I look around and don't see very many hands in the air! Who wants to count blackbirds if there's more interesting birds to be seen?

I encourage us all – who are, metaphorically speaking 'sitting on our hands' when it comes to blackbirds – to reconsider that position, beginning this March.

The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group (IRBWG) has been studying this species for a number of years, trying to determine why Rustys have declined 85-95% since the mid 1900's, according to the best available estimates! Quoting from their website <http://rustyblackbird.org/> "The Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) is a widespread North American species that has shown chronic long-term and acute short-term population declines, based both on breeding season and wintering ground surveys."

Though our state does not provide important wintering habitat for Rustys, the IRBWG believes Illinois is a key stopover corridor for the species as they travel north to their breeding grounds in the coniferous forests far to our north. The IRBWG reached out to IOS, asking us to organize, recruit birders and lead a three-year long effort, aka the Rusty Blackbird Blitz, to find out where and in what numbers Rustys are found here in Illinois, as they pass through during spring migration.

The first year of the Blitz will begin on March 1, 2014, and extend through mid April. I suspect this first season the major challenge to birders will be scouting locations where Rustys are likely to be. As we all know, they like wet woodlands, but are often mixed in with larger multi-species blackbird flocks during the spring.

IOS seeks one or two birders to coordinate the Blitz statewide; an alternate possibility: Dividing the state into three or more regions, with a corresponding number of birders acting as regional coordinators. If you're interested in being a coordinator on any level, please get in touch with me by email [bfisher928@aol.com](mailto:bfisher928@aol.com). We plan additional outreach, to make sure all Illinois birders are clued into the Blitz, and its importance in finding answers and solutions to halt/reverse the decline of this fascinating species. Check the IRBWG website for complete details on how the Blitz works.

Karen and I are planning to get out there this March. From past early spring birding expeditions around the headwaters of the Illinois River, we think we know a few likely spots. I'll bet you do as well. So please, raise your hand and shout, "I want to find and count Rustys!"

*Robert Fisher*

# MEADOWLARK

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### About Our Cover:

Matt McKim-Louder created the front cover drawing of a Wandering Tattler, a one-day wonder and Illinois' first state record in 2012. An experienced birder and scientist, Matt is pursuing his doctorate at the University of Illinois. He is studying Brown-headed Cowbird parasitism of the Prothonotary Warbler in southern Illinois. Matt is also a member of the board of the Illinois Ornithological Society and chairs the Grants Committee.

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