

the identity and numbers of the waterfowl and shorebirds as well as the weather conditions and time. I begin the route at the same time each day, 7:30 a.m. in the spring and summer, 9:00 a.m. in late fall and winter, and follow a set pattern to collect the data, which is recorded on data sheets and fed into a computer program to facilitate the tracking and computing of the numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds in the lagoons.

This monitoring procedure tracks the migrating patterns of the waterfowl as they enter and leave the garden, tracks the numbers of those that remain year-round, and records the numbers of different species that use the gardens. I also can identify the active and inactive sites for waterfowl in the lagoons. Waterfowl use some areas more than others, and activity levels and locations change with the seasons.

During the warmer months I travel in a golf cart, a quiet, unobtrusive way to gain a full view of the situation. In the winter, I use my car, which makes monitoring more cumbersome since I have to get in and out of the car wearing heavy clothing, carrying binoculars and writing materials.

The Botanic Garden attracts many varieties of waterfowl and shorebirds. The most numerous are the Canada Geese, which could be negatively impacting the water's nutrient content. Sometimes I count 2,000 geese in one day. Other days,

the Canada Geese number approximately 40. The Botanic Garden staff has been working to find ways to deter the geese.

Many duck species are attracted to the Botanic Garden although not in large numbers. The largest group is the Mallards. Pied-billed Grebes, American Coots, and Bufflehead arrived in fairly small numbers in the fall of 1997. The flock numbers grew to between 50 and 70 birds before they continued migrating. Some 22 Northern Shovelers remained at the garden for nearly three months. I observed them in their feeding circles until the lagoons froze.

Fewer in numbers but still observed were Common Goldeneyes, Blue-Winged Teals, Ruddy Ducks, Lesser Scaups, Gadwalls, American Widgeons, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, and Wood Ducks. Red-breasted Mergansers were common visitors, and one Hooded Merganser appeared in the winter of 1997/1998 for a short time.

Other birds observed were Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons, Green Herons, and Great Egrets. I also regularly saw Belted Kingfishers and Osprey, both dependent on the water for food. One Ross's Goose stayed approximately four days in November 1997.

Besides counting ducks, I enjoy observing bird behavior. I watched a Great Blue Heron with a large-mouthed bass that was one third its

size. I thought it would be unable to consume such a large fish, but after approximately 20 minutes of dunking, releasing, and catching it again, the heron positioned the bass so it easily slid down its throat.

I also watched a Red-tail Hawk dive at a Great Blue Heron that was fishing. The Great Blue simply lifted his large wing and waved off the hawk, paying no attention to his repeated dives.

The waterfowl monitoring will continue on at the Garden even after the two-year initiative is ended. The monitoring will continue to provide information on the nutrient load in the lagoons, information on species identification, and numbers relating to habitat preferences. With this information the Garden staff can plan habitat enhancements that benefit bird life.

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Editor's Note:

We hope those of you collecting data and doing research on birds in Illinois will share your information with the Illinois Ornithological Society. Please contact me for information on how to contribute to this new column: Sheryl De Vore, 967 Braeburn Road, Mundelein, IL 60060 sdevore@ais.net