



# Illinois Ornithological Society

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## **Letter from the editor**

*There's still much we don't know about bird behavior*

Several years ago on May 1, Rence Baade and I were driving home from a week-long trip birding Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Baade directed my attention to two immature Bald Eagles. We guessed they were third-year birds. But what most astonished us was that they seemed to be exhibiting adult courtship behavior. We thought the two eagles had actually locked talons, but neither of us knew that much about the behavior of immature Bald Eagles so we just enjoyed the show until they flew away.

Then six months ago Richard Bjorklund submitted an article for *Meadowlark* detailing his fascinating observations of subadult courtship in Bald Eagles, which you can read in this issue's Seasonal Highlights. While it was exciting to read an account that seemed to support what Baade and I had seen, it also made me realize how very little humans actually know about bird behavior. I also wonder how much bird behavior must occur right before our eyes, yet go unnoticed.

For instance, H. David Bohlen, one of the state's most respected birders, observed an interesting phenomenon regarding American Coot migration for the first time last winter. Bohlen watched these nocturnal migrants take flight at dusk one by one. His fascinating report is also in Seasonal Highlights.

Most recently, Donald Dann, an IOS member, sent me a note describing Herring and Ring-billed Gulls "hovering and picking caterpillars and other large insects off the tops of trees" on his Lake Michigan shoreline property. Dann asked, "Is this as uncommon as I think?" Tom Schulenberg at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago said the behavior is not only uncommon, but he also had never heard of it before. While gulls do indeed eat insects - California Gulls for instance eat crickets - the idea of a gull acting in fly-catcher-like fashion was news to Schulenberg who remarked it was too bad Dann didn't have a video recording of the observation.

So it seems there are not just rare finds and first state records to document in Illinois, but unusual bird behavior as well. This winter while you're missing the 100 species you saw in one day during migration, why not record bird behavior? You might learn something new about a common species and perhaps even contribute to science in the process.

*Sheryl De Vore*