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Publisher

Illinois Ornithological Society

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President's Message

Dear Members:

My wife and I have just returned from an enjoyable day in and around DeKalb. We focused first on the Vermilion Flycatcher at the Afton Forest Preserve, then the surrounding countryside where the first kiss of winter mixed with late fall migration. There were Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs overhead and juncos in the brush. And as the shadows lengthened, hundreds of geese gathered around a corporate retention pond beside the Aurora outlet mall – a discovery which delighted my wife – before peeling off in groups headed for their overnight roost. In the middle of all the Canadas were thirty to forty newly speciated Cackling Geese and a dark phase Snow Goose.

The point of this story is that we birders can enjoy our hobby for free wherever we find ourselves. We become accustomed to this. Virtually every weekend bird clubs run field trips at which all are welcome whether or not they are members of the sponsoring organization. Mostly these field trips are free.

Then along comes a field trip like our IOS Hawk Watch, a combination lecture on hawk ID and hawk watch led by Illinois' own hawk man Vic Berardi, a nationally recognized hawk expert who will talk hawks by the hour with anyone interested in learning more. The fact that we charged a modest fee drew some criticism. At least one of the vocal critics was not even an IOS member. So this message is intended in part to explain why we charge for field trips.

Our policy is to run fewer but better field trips. We target a key note bird like the Yellow Rail or run a pelagic during peak jaeger migration. We plan to enrich the field trip experience with companion lectures such as the recent Hawk Watch. Our goal is to attract new members and to raise some dollars to enable us to expand the educational and scientific part of our mission. All our field trip leaders are expert birders intimately familiar with the areas in which they lead our field trips. Invariably they scout their areas during the days leading up to the field trip. They are all volunteers who give selflessly of their time and knowledge.

Non-members are welcome. But our expectation is that if a non-member enjoys an IOS field trip enough to want to go on another that he/she will become a member. This is the other part of this message. IOS needs more members whose membership dues will allow IOS to exert statewide leadership for the birding community. We want to provide more funding for scientific and conservation efforts such as our support for the Great Lakes Common Tern colony. We also want to launch programs to reach and educate the next generations of birders in Illinois. For this we need the financial support of more members.

So when next you hear complaints from your non-joiner birding friends, tell them instead, to support IOS's mission by joining.

Good birding.

Michael Hogg

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