



# the Sand Bluff Birder

the official newsletter of the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory—online edition

March 2024

## President's Message

Hello fellow Bird Lovers,

There are signs of spring in the air. Northern Cardinals and House Finches are practicing their songs, Red-winged Blackbirds are trickling in and Sand Hill Cranes are showing up in pairs. It's time to shake off winter's cold, leave our burrows and get outside.

Now is the time to pull out our birder's journal and start documenting the return of our beloved feathered friends. Journal writing helps us remember field marks, behaviors, sightings and locations; and of course, good times with our human kindred spirits.

Enjoy!

———Ivy Otto, President SBBO

## European Songbirds Imported to Oregon and British Columbia

———Thelma Bottum

With the influx of European immigrants, especially from Great Britain, in the late 1800's to the northwest United States and southwest Canada came realization of how much they missed the song and game birds of their homelands.

**IMPORTED SONG BIRDS.**—The recent effort of the state board of horticulture to raise a fund for the importation of song and insectivorous birds to Oregon, is reminding that in May, 1889, European song-birds were imported by a society into Oregon and set free near Portland. Since then the songsters, which are useful in the orchards as well as ornamental and entertaining, have done well and increased largely in numbers. The imported stock consisted of ten pairs of black-headed nightingales, eight pairs grey song thrushes, fifteen pairs black song thrushes, twenty-two pairs skylarks, four pairs singing quail, twenty pairs black starlings, fifteen bullfinches, three of which were females and twelve males; the rest of the females had died on the way over; forty pairs goldfinches, forty pairs chaffinches, thirty-five pairs linnets, forty pairs ziskins (green finches), twenty pairs cross beaks, one pair real nightingales (the rest died on the way), and several pairs of red-breasted English robins, the European wren species, forest finches, yellowhammers, green finches. It is now no uncommon sight in the vicinity of Portland and in different parts of Oregon to see skylarks caroling far up in the air, thrushes singing among the trees, and finches and linnets near the homes, also singing as sweetly as in their native haunts. Near Portland the songs of nightingales have been heard after dark during all summer. Nothing could be more cheerful than the sweet music furnished by the wild song bird, and it is a rarity in Oregon. There are many in this state who would give liberally to any society contemplating further importations of sweet singers.

The dark, thick forests seemed lacking in bird song except for the croaky calls of the ravens and as the settlers cleared land to grow crops and fruit trees, they were convinced that they should import birds from "home" to eat the insects threatening their crops and for pure enjoyment of the birds they missed so much. Moving species from their native habitat never seems to have the desired result in the new habitat.

The Portland Society for the Importation of Songbirds raised \$1,000 (\$33,340 in 2024) in a first effort and imported over 525 birds of multiple species in May 1889 which were released around Portland. The experiment was considered a success, so another \$1,000 was raised for a second shipment to arrive in March 1891. Many of the birds died in transit across the Atlantic or only survived a few years. The most successful species was the Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*). In June 1891, the legislature passed a law to protect birds within the state of Oregon. In May 1900, the U.S. Congress passed the Lacey Act placing the protection of birds under the Department of Agriculture with regulations published as "biological survey No. 29, Protection and Importation of Birds under Act of Congress approved May 25, 1900." Although a wonderful law, it did not save the imported birds who were taken from their native habitat.

Farmers and orchardists on Vancouver Island, BC also privately raised funds to import European songbirds between 1860 and 1914 with limited success. The Natural History Society (NHS) of British Columbia under sanction of the government imported English songbirds in 1903 and 1913. Beginning in 1901, the government pledged \$500 if the NHS could raise matching funds; a list of "useful birds" included skylarks, goldfinches, robins, siskins, nightingales, and bluetits, but, in June 1903, 100 pairs of goldfinches, 100 pairs of skylarks and 50 pairs of robins were ordered from an English aviary as the other three species were unavailable. The birds were transported by ship to New York, then by rail to Portland, OR then to Victoria, BC arriving in December 1903; only a few dozen skylarks, sixteen goldfinches and no robins survived the arduous journey only to be released into harsh winter conditions. The goldfinches were gone by 1908, but the skylarks adapted to the habitat and climate similar to southern England.<sup>1</sup>

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## Red-tail Hawk Encounters Since 1976 at SBBO

In the 57 years of raptor banding at Sand Bluff, Red-tailed Hawks have been encountered more than any other raptor species. Encounters are birds that are banded and then found by someone in different areas of the country and not re-trapped at Sand Bluff. Most are the result of collisions with vehicles and, in the early days, being shot by people protecting their poultry in farm settings. Because of the number of Red-tailed Hawks banded at Sand Bluff, our number of returns are higher than the smaller birds we band.



Our data goes back to the early 70's and covers a large area of the middle U.S. and one in Canada. Migrating Redtails from our area show a tendency to move south to the Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi area and states in between such as Kentucky and Tennessee. Southeastern encounters

were in Georgia and Florida, eastern encounters in Ohio.

When looking at the age of birds, most hatch year birds do not survive the first year, that may be from the lack of experience in hunting and avoiding dangerous situations. Those that survive the first year last a lot longer.

Our records show that the oldest bird was captured in October 1976 at Sand Bluff and found dead in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada in April 1997, over 20 years later. Others include one 19 years old and one 13 years old.

Longevity records of Red-tailed Hawks at the Banding Lab in Maryland has the oldest Red-tailed Hawk at 30 years of age or older and five or six over 21 years or more.

Hopefully the raptor population will recover in the next couple of years; disease has had an effect on our numbers banded at Sand Bluff. We will give updates as we receive more information on populations.



Photos provided by Thelma Bottum

\_\_\_\_ Mike Eickman, Station Master

### Skylarks, continued

In 1912, a second shipment of 436 birds was ordered consisting of 148 skylarks and 72 each of goldfinches, brown linnets, bluetits and robins which arrived in Montreal, Quebec on March 5, 1913 aboard the *Montcalm* and transferred to the Canadian Pacific Railway arriving in Victoria, BC on April 7, 1913. Unfortunately, nearly one third of the birds died in transit, but the general success was reported by the NHS to newspapers across Canada which then reached the ears of the Canadian federal government in Ottawa where the experiment met with much disapproval. The linnets, bluetits and robins disappeared by 1914, the goldfinches in the 1930s, but a population of skylarks thrived to around 1,000 birds in 1962 in certain agricultural areas. Thereafter, the numbers steadily declined due to habitat destruction, climatic conditions, and predation to a count of 20-65 birds in 2018. If there are any to be found today, it would be around the Victoria International Airport or Central Saanich bulb fields according to the Kevin Slagboom of *Birding in British Columbia* who noted less than 20 individual birds in Summer 2021.



<sup>1</sup>Mackie, Richard Somerset; #459 Skylark: old friend in a new land; January 17, 2019; <http://thebreview.ca>

### SBBO Annual Meeting

The 2024 annual meeting of the Sand Bluff Observatory was held February 10 at 10:30am at Rockton Township Center, Rockton, IL. Thirteen board members plus 3 guests attended. General business was conducted concluding with election of board members and officers. SBBO thanks Stacey Clark for her time on the board and as secretary. Anna Gray returns to the board. Officers for 2024 are: Ivy Otto, President; John Longhenry, Vice President; Deb Eickman, Treasurer and Anna Gray, Secretary.

By unanimous vote, the Board decided to host an Open House on Saturday, May 11, 2024 from 7:00 am to 1:00 pm. A planning committee will meet to determine what will be offered to the public as it will be a much smaller event than the former Birdfest due to the reduced number of volunteers. Details will be posted on the website and Facebook as the day nears.

Owl Night will be held on Friday, October 18, 2024. Further details will appear in the August newsletter, website and Facebook account.

Weather permitting, nets will be set up for spring migration on March 2 at 8:00 am.

## PLEASE HELP US ... in any way you can

Our non-profit organization survives because of private contributions of time and money from friends just like you. Please examine the list below and help us continue our important banding program by making your contribution!

Please return this form to: Sand Bluff Bird Observatory, P. O. Box 2, Seward, IL 61077 or donate through PayPal on our website: sandbluff.org

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enclosed is a (tax-deductible) contribution of      | <input type="checkbox"/> Enclosed is a (tax-deductible) donation of _____           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10.00 (Subscriber)                                | <input type="checkbox"/> in memory/honor of _____                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$25.00 (Donor)                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> for the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory Endowment Fund         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50.00 (Supporting Member)                         | <input type="checkbox"/> for the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory Scholarship Fund       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100.00 (Net Sponsor)                              | <input type="checkbox"/> I'd like to learn more about volunteering, please call me! |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$250.00 (Sustaining Member)                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Please contact me to schedule a program/tour for my group! |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Please do not share /publish my contact information |   |

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip + 4 \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (days) \_\_\_\_\_ (evenings) \_\_\_\_\_ (email) \_\_\_\_\_

The SBBO website "www.sandbluff.org" has been updated with more options. You can now make a secure online donation through PayPal by selecting the "Support Us" page when you click on the "list" icon in the upper right corner of the website's homepage. There is also a SBBO t-shirt in multiple colors and sizes available to order online through PayPal on the "Merchandise" page.

### 2023 Volunteers and Donors

The Independent Sector and Do Good Institute announced on April 29, 2023 that the value of a volunteer hour was \$31.80, up \$1.85 from 2022. But the value of Sand Bluff Bird Observatory volunteers goes far beyond a hypothetical monetary amount because this committed group is focused on the future of the organization. Whether a 30+ year volunteer or a fledgling beginner, the emphasis is willingness to adopt changes that increase the knowledge of migrating birds. This includes directives from the Bird Banding Lab, participation in the Motus network and funding scholarships for students pursuing the environmental sciences. So hats off to all our volunteers and to all the generous donors who believe in what we are doing!

## 2023 Donors

Northwest Illinois Audubon Society	Gary & Melody Henderson
Wild Ones Natural Landscapers, Ltd.	Garnett Johnson
Winnebago Country Retired Teachers Assoc.	Craig Junker
Bob Andrini	Colleen Kaney
Jane Anderson & Phillip Moore	Suzanne & Robert Kay
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Noel & Marleen Ferry	Dick & Debbie Trexit
Kara & Bob Gallup	Doug & Lisa Wheeler
Gayle Haab	9 Anonymous Donors



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P. O. Box 2  
Seward, IL 61077

**SBBO  
OPEN HOUSE  
SATURDAY  
MAY 11, 2024  
7:00am—1:00 pm  
More details on  
www.sandbluff.org  
or  
Facebook page  
soon  
\$\$**

## EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR CLASSES AND GROUPS

This spring, SBBO is allowing small groups and drop-in visitors to observe banding. Thursday or weekend mornings, groups of 10–15 can schedule a “group presentation” with a suggested donation of \$5 per person. Smaller groups may join the general visitors.

Call Kathy Hoel, 815-877-2938 or e-mail [kathyhoel6@gmail.com](mailto:kathyhoel6@gmail.com)/subject: SBBO group visit, for details and to reserve your spot. Allow 1½ hours to watch the banding process and visit the nets.



Photo by Thelma Bottum

### Here's How To Reach Us!

During Operating Hours: 815-629-2671

Mailing Address: Sand Bluff Bird Observatory  
P. O. Box 2  
Seward, IL 61077

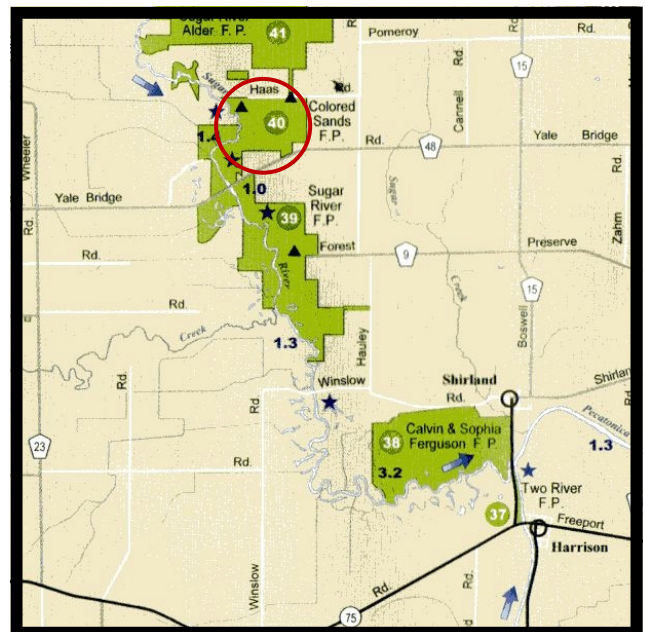
GPS Address: 10602 Haas Rd, Rockton, IL

Be sure to visit our website at: [www.sandbluff.org](http://www.sandbluff.org)



## ADDRESS CORRECTIONS

If you wish to cancel, subscribe or correct your mailing address for the Sand Bluff Birder, please e-mail: [bottum4548@gmail.com](mailto:bottum4548@gmail.com).



## OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

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Vice President.....John Longhenry  
Secretary.....Anna Gray  
Treasurer.....Deb Eickman