

# CHICAGO'S BIRD AGENDA 2006



City of Chicago  
Richard M. Daley  
Mayor



Department of Environment  
Sadhu A. Johnston  
Commissioner

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Cover photos:  
House Wren, Cooper's Hawk, Whimbrels, Great Egret, and Goldfinch



**The Peregrine Falcon, Chicago's Official Bird,  
on a Wacker Drive building ledge  
Photo credit: Mary Hennen**



Chicago is home to approximately 300 species of birds. Our city's open green spaces are an excellent habitat for many species that breed here and make an attractive stopover point for approximately eight million birds migrating between their summer and winter homes.

With our unique geography and diversity of birds comes a responsibility to protect these species. This Bird Agenda, which builds upon the Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan, commits to take strong actions to preserve bird habitat, reduce hazards to birds, and support desirable bird species.

Birds are a vital part of the earth's ecology. The survival and well-being of birds serves as an indicator of the overall health of our environment. When we improve our city for birds, we also improve it for countless other creatures, including bats, butterflies and ourselves.

Birds are important natural assets that enhance our community in many ways, providing benefits from education and outdoor recreation to scientific understanding of our environment.

As you will see throughout this Agenda, the City and its partners have already taken many steps to improve bird life in Chicago, but we need to do more. Please join me as we continue to make Chicago a great place for birds.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard M. Daley". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Richard M. Daley  
Mayor

## Bird Agenda Partners: Working Together to Protect Birds

Because birds cross geographic boundaries and ecosystems, protecting the species that live in or migrate through Chicago is a collaborative effort. Achieving our objectives involves cooperation among city and state planners, environmental organizations, and federal conservation agencies.

The Bird Agenda Partners include:

- Audubon of the Chicago Region
- Bird Conservation Network
- Birds and Buildings Forum
- Chicago Audubon Society
- Chicago Bird Collision Monitors
- Chicago Department of Environment
- Chicago Department of Planning and Development
- Chicago Ornithological Society
- Chicago Park District
- Forest Preserve District of Cook County
- Illinois Natural History Survey, Illinois Department of Natural Resources
- The Field Museum
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



*Black-and-white Warbler*



*Birders at Deadstick Pond in the Calumet area. Photo credit: DOE*

## Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan

In February 2006, the Chicago Plan Commission approved the *Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan*, a strategy to enhance the health and diversity of wildlife within the city. Developed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development and the Mayor's Nature and Wildlife Committee with support from over 30 conservation organizations, the Plan is now part of the City of Chicago's formal planning and development initiatives. The Chicago Park District's and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County's Boards of Commissioners have also directed their staff to work closely towards achieving the objectives of the Plan.

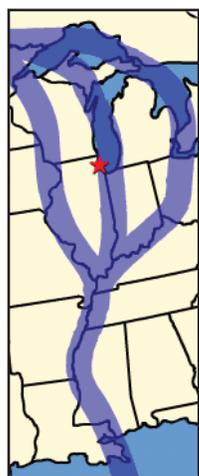
Based on an inventory of city land, the Plan identifies over 4,800 acres of existing prairies, savannas, dunes, woodlands, wetlands, and riparian edges and 920 acres potentially suitable for restoration. The Plan lays out a framework to protect and expand these individual sites and the landscapes surrounding them.

The *Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan* recognizes that one of the important roles Chicago plays for nature and wildlife is for birds, and this Bird Agenda builds upon the recommendations of the Plan by taking strategies for bird conservation a step further and coordinating their implementation.

## Making Chicago a Greater Place for Birds

Chicago is a great place for birds. Chicago is located on the Mississippi Flyway, which is part of a larger migration route that extends from the Mackenzie Valley in northwest Canada, along the Great Lakes, and down the Mississippi River Valley. Each year, more than 250 species of migratory birds use this flyway to travel between their winter homes in the southern U.S. and Central and South America, and their summer homes in North America. With Lake Michigan to the east and farmland to the far west, Chicago's green spaces—especially those with native plants and trees—provide a variety of plant life and habitat for resting and refueling.

Native birds—about 50 species—also find a range of suitable habitats to breed and call home in Chicago. Habitats that support breeding bird populations include shrublands, woodlands, wetlands and marshes, lakes, ponds, and rivers. Migrant birds use all of these places, as well as just about any green space in the city, even backyards. Chicago residents and community groups can take steps together with the City and Bird Agenda Partners to make the City an even better home and stopover point for birds.



Migratory and native birds are important to Chicago in many ways:

- Birds connect all of us to the environment. For many Chicagoans, birds provide daily contact with wildlife.
- Birds are an irreplaceable part of the earth's natural systems, playing a major role in pollination, and consuming mosquitoes and other pests.
- Birds are an excellent indicator of the overall health of an ecosystem.



Birding at Washington Park Photo credit: Brook Collins/Chicago Park District

Birds face serious challenges. Many species are in decline because of habitat loss or modification, collision with human-made objects, and competition with other species.

When Chicago signed the *Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds* with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in March 2000, the City pledged to prepare a custom-tailored action plan that includes plans for habitat creation, protection, and restoration; education and outreach; reduction of hazards to birds; and management of invasive, exotic, or nuisance species. Many actions have already been carried out under this treaty. This Agenda proposes additional actions to continue to work toward our pledge.

We have three main areas of focus that make up our Bird Agenda:

- Creating and Maintaining Habitats for Birds
- Reducing Hazards to Birds
- Managing Nuisance Species

## ISSUE

The city of Chicago has a surprisingly large role to play in conserving habitat for birds. Millions of migrant landbirds use the city's parks, open spaces, backyards, and natural areas as critical refueling stops during their migration. In our city's wetlands and woodlands, rare and declining birds nest and raise young every year. Migrating shorebirds and wintering ducks use our beaches, marshes and lakes. The Bird Agenda Partners, recognizing the importance of appropriate habitat for these hundreds of species of birds, will create Habitat Guidelines for Priority Chicago Bird Communities, providing specific recommendations for creating and preserving the habitat at targeted sites illustrated in the map on this page.

Chicago is made up of the following habitat types, all of which can support bird life.

**Woodland/Forest (1,772 acres in Chicago<sup>1</sup>):** An area possessing more than 50 percent tree cover.

**Wetland (535 acres in Chicago):** An area saturated with water for a sufficient part of the year that supports emergent reeds, grasses and other aquatic plants.

**Riparian/Water Edge (290 acres in Chicago):** A transitional area between dry and wet environments.



Woodlands at the North Park Village Nature Center.

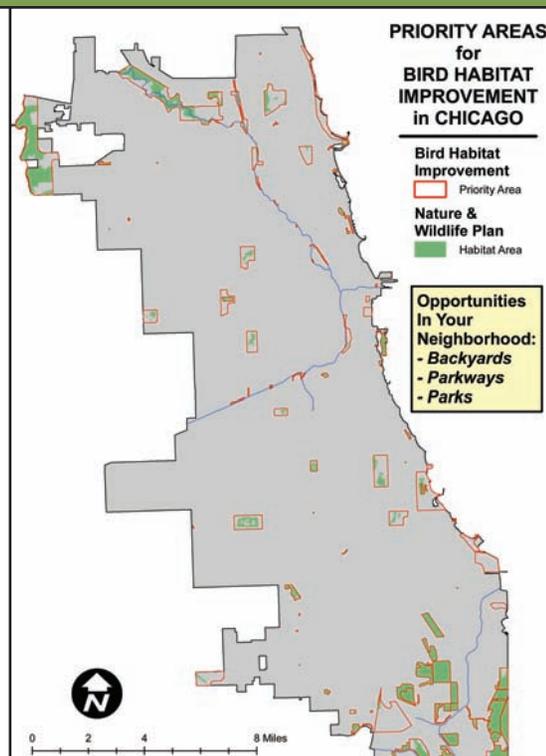
**Beach/Dune (22 acres in Chicago):**

A hill or ridge of sand piled by the wind that supports plant life.

**Prairie/Grassland (170 acres in Chicago):** An area dominated by grasses or one possessing less than 10 percent tree cover

**Savannas (36 acres in Chicago):** An area with 10 to 50 percent tree cover and a native grass and wildflower understory.

**City neighborhoods:** Parks, yards, city streets.



Map created by Chicago Dept. of Environment with data from Dept. of Planning and Development.

Native Prairie Garden at North Park Village Nature Center.



<sup>1</sup> Acreage and habitat type definitions are further described in the Chicago Nature & Wildlife Plan.

## RECENT ACTIONS

Below is a sampling of actions that our Bird Agenda Partners have recently taken toward creating and maintaining habitats for birds in Chicago:

- The City of Chicago and the US Fish and Wildlife Service signed the Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds in 2000, formalizing the City's commitment to ensure that the millions of migrating birds that pass through Chicago each season have the best possible "visitor" experience.
- The Chicago Park District created the Lakefront Bird Habitat Guidelines, which were adopted by the Chicago Park District Board of Commissioners in 2001, to protect and promote bird habitat in Chicago's lakefront parks.
- Audubon of the Chicago Region conducted a study of 23 sites in Chicago to determine which tree and shrub species are being used most frequently by different bird species, to inform future open space plantings.
- The Chicago Park District created four bird sanctuaries on Chicago's lakefront, including McCormick Bird Sanctuary in Burnham Park, Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary, Bill Jarvis Migratory Bird Sanctuary in Lincoln Park and Paul H. Douglas Nature Sanctuary (Wooded Island) in Jackson Park.
- The City of Chicago, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Chicago Park District, the Calumet Initiative, and many partners are developing and implementing restoration plans for 4,800 acres of open space in the Calumet area on the South Side of Chicago which will improve bird habitat.
- The City of Chicago developed Chicago's Nature & Wildlife Plan. The Plan provides the foundation for this Bird Agenda,

and lays out a new zoning designation, Public Open Space 3, which allows for acquisition and protection of habitat sites.

- The Bird Conservation Network compiled and posted green papers on improving bird habitat.
- The Forest Preserve District of Cook County initiated habitat restoration at Dan Ryan Woods, Beaubien Woods, Eggers Woods and Powderhorn Woods.
- The Chicago Audubon Society held work days to improve bird habitat at important bird nesting and migratory sites throughout the city.
- The Field Museum tracked bird populations according to habitat in Calumet and suggested next steps for maintaining or improving important bird populations.
- The Illinois Natural History Survey researched habitat options for encouraging birds of prey to nest in the city.



*Great Blue Heron*



*Black-throated Blue Warbler*

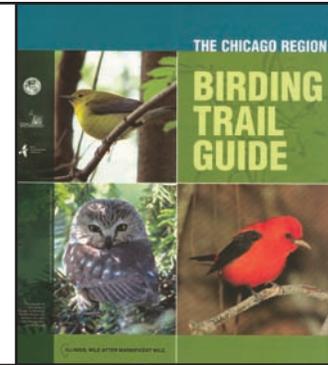
## PROPOSED ACTIONS

The Bird Agenda Partners have committed to carrying out the following actions:

- Create “Habitat Guidelines for Priority Chicago Bird Communities” to promote specific preservation, management and protection strategies at specific sites in the city.
- Collaborate with public land managers to discuss guideline priorities and implementation.
- Educate private landowners about ways to modify existing landscapes according to Habitat Guidelines.
- Plant trees, shrubs, and other plants that are preferred by migratory birds in parks and other locations.
- Educate homeowners about how they can make their backyards bird-friendly.
- Develop and implement a public outreach program for homeowners on backyard habitat.

### Birding Trails in Chicago

The Chicago Region Birding Trail Guide features 70 of the best places to view birds in the Chicago area. Please see the Resources section at the end of this Agenda to find out how to get your own copy of this and other birding guides.



*Common Nighthawk*



*Black-crowned Night-Heron*



*The Calumet area. Photo credit: Department of Environment*

## WHAT CHICAGOANS CAN DO

Chicagoans can help create or improve habitat for birds:

- Create multi-layered areas in home garden with trees, shrubs, and ground covers. Each layer will support different species of birds. Many trees provide shelter and flowering or fruiting trees attract insects on which many birds feed.
- Use a wide variety of native plants in the garden including those that produce seeds and berries, as well as flowers that provide nectar and attract insects.
- Maximize the area in gardens devoted to native plants, which are good sources of habitat and food (see below); minimize the amount of turf grass, which provides little to no habitat value.
- Let seed-bearing plants and dead tree snags stand through the winter to provide habitat, food, and shelter.
- Let leaves remain under shrubs and trees, and make compost heaps and brush piles. The leaves and piles can be used as nest material and serve as safe havens for birds.
- Avoid using chemical pesticides, which can harm birds and the valuable insects they eat such as dragonflies.



Backyard bird habitats. Photo credits: Greencorps Chicago

### Design a Habitat to Attract Birds

You can attract birds to your neighborhood or backyard by planting certain varieties of trees, shrubs, flowers, and grasses. Here are a few examples.

**Autumn berry producers:**  
Spicebush  
Virginia creeper



Northern Parula Warbler

**Flowering trees and shrubs:**  
Cherries  
Hawthorns



Baltimore Oriole

**Nectar producers:**  
Columbine  
Jewelweed



Canada Warbler

**Native flowers and grasses:**  
Sunflowers,  
Coneflowers, Black-eyed  
susans, Little bluestem,  
Joe Pye weed, Wild rye



Red-winged Blackbird (female)

**Trees that provide food for migrant birds:**  
Oaks  
Elms



Baby Green Herons

## ISSUE

Bird collisions with glass are likely the primary hazard to the 8 million birds that migrate through Chicago in the spring and fall. After studying the issue for decades, ornithologists have concluded that birds simply do not recognize glass as a barrier.

During the day, birds can fly head-on into windows, confused by the reflection of trees, clouds, buildings, or skyline in building glass.

At night, ornamental lighting on skyscrapers and high-level windows confuse migrant birds flying high on their twice yearly migration. Especially during cloudy, foggy or rainy weather, these lights cause them to fly into building towers and windows.

At dawn, birds collide with lit windows at mid-level floors, and ground-level lobbies and atriums as they settle from the sky to the ground to rest and refuel.

Birds can become entangled in a variety of things that people have in their yards, including rodent glue traps, landscape netting, holiday lights, and soccer nets (especially at night). Litter in parks and beaches such as fishing line, string or ribbon and plastic six-pack rings can pose a hazard to birds as well.

*Researchers suggest that 1 to 10 birds are killed annually by collisions with a typical building<sup>1</sup>; and that 1,000 birds are killed annually by collisions with a glass-covered building<sup>2</sup>.*

<sup>1</sup> Klem, Daniel. Muhlenberg College.

<sup>2</sup> Stotz, Doug. The Field Museum.



*A Great Horned Owl caught in soccer netting.  
Photo Credit: Chicago Bird Collision Monitors*



*Reflections of buildings or natural features confuse birds. Photo credit: Birds & Buildings Forum*



*A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker found on a Chicago Loop sidewalk after hitting a building.  
Photo Credit: Chicago Bird Collision Monitors*

## RECENT ACTIONS

Below is a sampling of actions that our Bird Agenda Partners have recently taken toward reducing hazards to birds in Chicago:

- Audubon of the Chicago Region and the City of Chicago successfully encouraged owners and managers of downtown skyscrapers to turn off decorative and atrium lighting to protect birds during migration season as part of the “Lights Out!” program.
- The Chicago Ornithological Society and the City of Chicago co-hosted “Birds & Buildings: Creating a Safer Environment,” a conference that brought together architects, landscape designers, building owners and managers, scientists, government, and members of the birding and conservation communities to share their experiences designing and retrofitting bird-safe buildings.
- The Birds and Buildings forum established itself as a non-profit organization to raise awareness about bird collisions with buildings and to encourage building owners and architects to create a safer environment for birds.
- The Chicago Bird Collision Monitors brought 900 injured birds to rehabilitation facilities in the Fall 2005 season, their highest number of successful rescues since they were established in 2003.
- The Chicago Park District in cooperation with Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation hosted the opening of Chicago’s first triage center for injured birds at its park on Northerly Island in 2006.

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

The Bird Agenda Partners have committed to carrying out the following actions:

- Continue to collect and analyze data on causes of fatal bird collisions.
- Expand Chicago’s “Lights Out!” Program to encourage downtown building managers to turn off lights or draw blinds in perimeter rooms, offices and conference rooms after 4 a.m. and until full daylight, during the migratory season.
- Work with the local chapter of the US Green Building Council to incorporate promotion of bird safe design practices into their outreach.
- Review city lighting codes for high-rise construction sites and further promote operation and design elements that protect birds where feasible.
- Create and distribute bird-safe design guidelines for architects and designers, which will include using existing bird-safe glass that is fritted, angled, or non-reflective.
- Develop bird-safe glass that is transparent to humans but not to birds by working with glass manufacturers to design the glass and building owners and the conservation community to test demonstration projects.



Two photos of the Chicago skyline taken before and after 11 pm on the same fall night in 2003. Photo Credit: Eric Fogleman

## WHAT CHICAGOANS CAN DO

Chicagoans can help reduce bird collisions with buildings at the home and office. The key timeframes each year are during migratory seasons from mid-March to early June and late August to late October:

- During the day, reduce reflections on windows by using blinds and/or artwork.
- At night, turn off lights or close blinds, especially in perimeter rooms of homes and offices.
- When renovating, install windows that birds can see—glass that is non-reflective, or glass with visible details such as frits and/or distinct dividers between panes (ideally leaving reflective space no bigger than 2" x 4").
- Encourage your office or apartment building to join the Lights Out program.
- Reduce entanglement risk to birds by properly disposing of fishing line, netting and six-pack holders, and take down outdoor netting such as soccer nets and novelty spider webbing when not in use. Check holiday lights and other potential entanglers regularly; you could save a trapped bird!

### Cats Indoors! Campaign

"Cats Indoors! The Campaign for Safer Birds and Cats" seeks to educate cat owners, decision makers and the general public that free-roaming cats pose a significant risk to birds and other wildlife and pose a threat to human health as a transmitter of disease.

The domestic cat, even when well-fed, instinctively hunts and captures prey. *Studies show that urban cats kill at least four birds per year.*<sup>1</sup> Even "belled" cats do kill birds and other wildlife. Once caught by a cat, because of the likelihood of infection, few birds survive, even if they appear to have escaped.



### Proposed Actions

- Promote the Cats Indoors! Campaign. Work with Cook County Forest Preserve District to stop feral cat feeding in forest preserves.

### What Chicagoans Can Do

Chicagoans can help decrease the number of birds killed by cats:

- Keep pet cats indoors.
- Do not feed feral cats.

Photo credit: Sarah Beazley



Flycatcher



Ovenbird

<sup>1</sup> Fiore, Carol and Karen Brown Sullivan, 2000, Wichita State University.

## ISSUE

While most bird species need our help to protect their populations and habitats, some species have become a nuisance because they present health and environmental challenges due to overpopulation or competition with other birds.

For instance:

- In park lands and waterfront recreation areas, goose droppings make walkways slippery.
- Some scientists have shown a potential connection between the presence of Ring-billed Gulls on a beach and positive tests for *e.coli* bacteria in the water, which leads to swim bans.
- Some species, such as non-native European Starlings and House Sparrows, drive other species away by taking over nesting cavities and bird feeders.

Nuisance and non-native species in the Chicago area include Canada Geese, Ring-billed Gulls, House Sparrows, pigeons, European Starlings and Monk Parakeets.

By modifying habitat and reducing nuisance species feeding, we can decrease their numbers.

## RECENT ACTIONS

Below is a sampling of actions that our Bird Agenda Partners have recently taken toward managing nuisance species in Chicago:

- The Chicago Park District, the City of Chicago, and others investigated methods of reducing nuisance species at beaches and in parks; they have implemented pilot programs at beaches to discourage gulls, including use of wires over trash cans.
- Chicago Park District replaced turf along the water's edge with native plants at several parks and beaches, including Canal Origins Park and Humboldt Park Prairie River.
- Chicago Park District posted signs in parks discouraging feeding of gulls and geese.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service created a pamphlet and web resource that give tips on how to deal with nuisance birds.



*Ring-billed Gulls on a Chicago beach.*  
Photo credit: Department of Environment



*Eastern Bluebird*

## PROPOSED ACTIONS

The Bird Agenda Partners have committed to carrying out the following actions:

- Increase public awareness about the effects of feeding Ring-billed Gulls, pigeons and Canada Geese.
- Create habitat design guidelines that discourage nuisance species and distribute to major landowners.
- Encourage waterfront landowners to plant and maintain native vegetation in place of turf on shoreline sites, to reduce Canada Geese and Ring-Billed Gulls in those areas.
- Continue to implement and monitor pilot nuisance species mitigation programs.
- Collaborate with Com Ed on their ongoing initiative to remove Monk Parakeet nests from transformers where they pose a fire hazard.
- Collaborate with the Greater Chicago Cage Bird Clubs initiative to incubate the above parakeet eggs and put them up for adoption as pets.

## WHAT CHICAGOANS CAN DO

You can help halt the increase of nuisance species:

- Be litter free. Be sure to put food waste in enclosed trash receptacles.
- Do not feed geese, pigeons, or other wildlife. Human food is not good for birds, leftovers attract rodents, feeding can disrupt natural migratory behavior, and extra feeding can increase population to unhealthy levels. Instead, try another fun activity such as a family bird-watching excursion with binoculars and an ID book.
- Learn more about waterfowl by visiting a library, nature center, museum, state wildlife management area or a National Wildlife Refuge, or visit the Fish and Wildlife Service's homepage at <http://www.fws.gov/>. After learning more, teach others what you know.
- Use a bird feeder or bird food that is intended for a particular species to prevent nuisance species such as pigeons and starlings from taking over your bird feeder.



*Great Egret*



*Prothonotary Warbler*



*Black-capped Chickadee*

## Bird Agenda Partners' Information



City of Chicago  
<http://www.cityofchicago.org>



Chicago Department of Planning and Development  
<http://www.cityofchicago.org/PlanAndDevelop>



Audubon Chicago Region  
<http://www.audubon.org/local/chicago>



Chicago Ornithological Society  
<http://www.chicagobirder.org>



Bird Conservation Network  
<http://www.bcnbirds.org>



Chicago Park District  
<http://www.chicagoparkdistrict.com>

### BIRDS & BUILDINGS

Birds and Buildings Forum  
<http://www.birdsandbuildings.org>



The Field Museum of Natural History  
<http://www.fieldmuseum.org>



Chicago Audubon Society  
<http://www.chicagoaudubon.org>



Forest Preserve District of Cook County  
<http://www.fpdcc.com>



Chicago Bird Collision Monitors  
<http://www.birdmonitors.net>



Illinois Natural History Survey, Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
<http://www.inhs.uiuc.edu>



Chicago Department of Environment  
<http://www.cityofchicago.org/Environment>



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
<http://www.fws.gov>

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

## Additional Information

### The Chicago Region Birding Trail Guide

Go to [www.bcnbirds.org/birdtrail/index.html](http://www.bcnbirds.org/birdtrail/index.html) or call 311

### Birds of the Windy City

Call 312-743-9283

### A Bird's Eye View of the Migratory Bird Route

Go to [www.cityofchicago.org/Environment/BirdMigration/](http://www.cityofchicago.org/Environment/BirdMigration/)

### Chicago Nature and Wildlife Plan

Go to [www.cityofchicago.org/DPD](http://www.cityofchicago.org/DPD) then "Community Plans"

### Chicago Lakefront Bird Trail Guide

Call the Chicago Park District at 312-742-PLAY

### Chicago Park District Lakefront Bird Habitat Guidelines

Call the Chicago Park District at 312-742-PLAY

### Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds

Go to <http://www.fws.gov/birds/urbantreaty.html>

### Feeding Waterfowl May Be Harmful

Go to [http://training.fws.gov/library/Pubs9/caution\\_waterfowl.pdf](http://training.fws.gov/library/Pubs9/caution_waterfowl.pdf)

### Cats Indoors! The Campaign for Safer Birds and Cats

<http://www.abcbirds.org/cats/>



*Wilson's Warbler*



*Snow Bunting*



*Chestnut-sided Warbler*

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A special thanks to **Jerry Kumery** for supplying the bird photos that are not otherwise credited.  
**All photos taken in the City of Chicago.**