



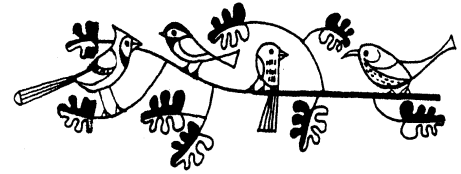
Friends of Thorn Creek Woods

Thorn Creek News

Winter 2018

Beginning Birding For All

Saturday, February 17 9 a.m.- noon
Beginning Bird Hike at 9 a.m.
Call or email to register



Who is that feathered creature pecking at your feeder?
Come to our open house for help with *all things BIRDS!*

Watch & count birds, participate in "bird" activities,
and get help with identifications. Make a bird feeder to take home,
play the beaks game, examine the size and mass of birds and other activities.

And sip hot chocolate, coffee or tea at the bird viewing window.

This program is sponsored by the Thorn Creek Audubon Society.

*Tips on Identifying Birds * Games * Crafts * Bird Feeding * Using Binoculars
Bird Checklists & Field Guides*

Beginning Birding Programs For Kids

Beginning Birds for Kids

At Thorn Creek
Nature Center

Saturday, January 20
1-3 p.m. Ages 7-12 Free

Registration required : 708.747.6320.

Impress your friends this spring
with your birding smarts, binocular savvy.

Learn key shapes, markings,
habits and songs for our most common local birds
with crafts, activities, sounds and hikes.



Birding By Sight & Sound

At Wetlands Discovery
Center, 30 N. Orchard,
Park Forest

Saturday, January 27, 1-3 p.m.
Ages 6-10 \$20 Fee

Registration by January 22 with
Park Forest Parks and Recreation Dept.:
708.748.2005

Learn simple ways to identify and observe birds
and their behavior using binoculars, field guides
and birdcall tapes, worksheets, games and more.
Each participant will take home a Guide to Birds.

Warm Fuzzies...or Wuz She?

Thorn Creek Woods Observations, Winter, 2017

As the winter solstice approaches and passes, temporarily cloaking us from sunlight, we human mammals sometimes resort to insight while seeking warmth, especially when venturing out of doors, away from our vehicles of manufactured, climate controlled comfort.

Here at Thorn Creek Woods we look for the almost imperceptible fuzziness of black oak buds, or the shaggy bark of the eponymously named hickory. Overhead, on last-season's clinging red oak leaves, we see large empty oak apples dangling out of reach. Cynipid wasp larvae sleep safely suspended in the blown-dandelion-like fibers of these winter bedrooms.

Our resident royalty, the white-tailed deer, now shed of their light chestnut coats, settle for serviceable, dull brown guard hairs, protecting the insulating air-pocketed underfur. The camouflage presents no issues for the end of rutting season; bucks don't "look" for does, so much as sniff them out.

Meanwhile, the resinous scent of needles crushed silently underfoot soothes our souls as, bundled in dark green fleece and down filled parkas, we offer thanks in the nave of the pine tunnel leading towards the salamander pond.

On one sunny day at the cusp of winter, a group of us walked to the edge of the woods, facing south, to view dried goldenrod stems in the old field. Various flies, mosquitoes and leaf hoppers made themselves known by flying, sunning on favorable perches, and hopping across our path. An edge oak caught my eye, decorated with several praying mantis ootheca, and what looked like a bunch of serried, orange leaves sporting an impressively large, fuzzy, tribble-like gall. I reached out to examine this attractive object, only to pull back and exclaim, "Why, it's a bat"! Not just any bat, but a furry orange bat with cream colored tufts gracing the edges of its wings. With head tucked tightly between the shield of the folded wings, and one foot tightly gripping the twig at a slightly acute angle, it copied the stance of a petiole from last season's dried leaf growth clinging to its woody anchor. The densely furred orange tail of the creature curved over its abdomen and bibbed the nose with the thoroughness of an anxious mother tucking in her child at the beginning of a long night. Approximately the size and shape of a damson plum, the tiny red bat, had I been careless, would have fit easily within my cupped hand.



Photo by Ingrid Krizan

My exclamation apparently startled the sleeping critter, for it shrugged and further tucked head to chest, causing a minute shaking of the twig, and a gentle, almost imperceptible swinging of the leaf doppelganger.

Male red bats (*Lasiurus borealis*), typically roost from 4-15 feet off the ground during daylight hours, often at a southwest exposure like this one, impersonating a clutch of dried oak leaves. Juanita Armstrong, our local bat expert at the Forest Preserve District of Will County, confirmed this behavior, as well as the likelihood that this was a male settling in for a period of winter torpor.

In winter most red bats migrate to warmer parts of their ranges, and males particularly roost singly on trees at woodland edges. When cold weather settles in, banishing moths and other nocturnal food sources, the torpid bats drop into the protection of leaf litter for the duration.

Later that same unseasonably warm winter day, a second wild visitor graced the woods with her statuesque presence. In this case the winged creature was a diurnal one, and an avian. "Fuzzy" aptly describes her presence, with a froth of white down obscuring her flexible neck and curved beak. At rest atop a snag overlooking Thorn Creek, her eyes resembled two black horizontal magic marker lines. Aroused by the smallest crunch of the leaf litter beneath her perch, she blinked and stared. Sudden, brilliant yellow disks edged in kohl tracked the binocular-bearing disturbance, and the observer role reversed. She may not be from these parts, but the personal charisma of this snowy owl reduced us landlubbers to awed silence.

A large white bird creased with blackish, brown bars on her wings and back, she plays gorgon atop her perch, mesmerizing all who peer up towards her. She lowers her wings slightly, ruffles her back feathers, and releases a copious stream of whitewash onto the branch below, emphatically turning her back upon us as she shakes her flank feathers. This is classic bird language for "I am top bird. You cannot touch me. You are not worthy of my notice". Even so, periodically she swivels her head so that her penetrating, incandescent glare monitors our every sigh.

(Continued on page 3)



Photo by Javier Chavira, December 2017

She is part of what is known as a snowy owl “irruption” year. Snowy owls, or *Nyctea scandiaca*, spend most of their lives in the far north. But every four to five years, juvenile owls move south for the winter, in what is known as an “irruption”. Scientists disagree whether the pattern of irruption follows a scarcity of food in the arctic circle, (in this case, fluctuations in the lemming and ptarmigan populations), or due to exceptionally successful breeding seasons for the owls (during a good year, a pair of snowy owls may lay up to 13 eggs)!

During breeding season a male snowy courts the female by bringing her food: insurance that she, the larger bird, will not attack! Later he will also bring food while she broods on the nest. The snowy female chooses a nest site on the ground and lays eggs severally in two-week intervals. The chicks hatch at different times. Thusly, during scarce food years, older chicks feast on younger ones, ensuring at least a partial generation survival. (During famine years adults may not breed at all). Here in Illinois these solitary daytime hunters substitute mourning doves and squirrels for their preferred arctic circle fare.

Females and immature owls are more heavily striped than adult males. This makes sense since the relatively vulnerable brooding female and chicks need to blend in with any rocks and shadows offered on the ground, while the male spends less time stationery in one place.

Seeing snowy owls in northern Illinois during heavy irruption years does not mean that the species is thriving. “Over-all, the species is declining quite rapidly”, says Andy Symes of BirdLife International. “Snowy owl numbers have plunged in N. America by 64 percent since 1970. Some researchers pin the decline on climate change, which may be making it harder for Snowies to find their rodent prey. Snowy downgraded from “least concern” to “vulnerable” on Int’l Union for Conservation of Nature’s Red List of Threatened Species”. (Audubon News website, 12/13/17)

With the Chicago area named as one of the climate change “hotspots” in North America, with a 7 degree increase in average temperature since 1970, we must greet this one early winter day’s occurrence of interesting critter sightings at Thorn Creek with a combination of awe, excitement, and trepidation.

References:

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Leonard Lee Rue III, The Deer of North America, Times Mirror Magazines, book Division, 1978.

David Gerroud, “The Trouble with Tribbles”, *Star Trek*, NBC, December, 1967.

Mary Holland, “*Winter Insects*”/Naturally Curious.

Merlin D. Tuttle, America’s Neighborhood Bats, U. of Texas Press, 1988.

Glover Morrill Allen, Bats, Dover Publications, 1962.

John Sparks and Tony Soper, Owls: Their Natural & Unnatural History, Taplinger Publishing Co., 1970.

Arthur Cleveland Bent, Life Histories of N. American Birds of Prey, Part II, Dover, 1938.

Andy Symes, *Snowy Owls*/ BirdLife Int’l/Audubon News website, 2017.

Climate Central, *Winter Is Warming Since 1970* Report, Nov. 29, 2017.

-Ingrid J. Krizan

Winter Events at Thorn Creek Woods

247 Monee Rd
Park Forest
708-747-6320
Thorn_creek@att.net
Nature Center open Friday and
Sunday, noon to 4 pm

Closed:
April 1—Easter

Beginning Birds for Kids	Saturday, January 20 1-3 pm
<i>At Thorn Creek Nature Center Ages 7-12</i>	

Birding By Sight & Sound	Saturday, January 27 1-3 pm \$20 fee
<i>At Wetlands Discovery Center Ages 6-10</i>	
	Register at Park Forest 708.748.2005

Beginning Birding For All	Saturday Feb 17 9 am-noon
<i>Free! All Ages</i>	

Tracking Animals in Winter	Sunday February 25 1-3 pm Free! All ages
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Woodcock Watch	Sat, March 3 <i>Rain date: Sat. March 10 5:15-7 pm</i>
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Make a Gourd Birdhouse	Sunday March 4 1-2 pm \$10/birdhouse
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Woods Music	Sunday March 18 3-5 pm
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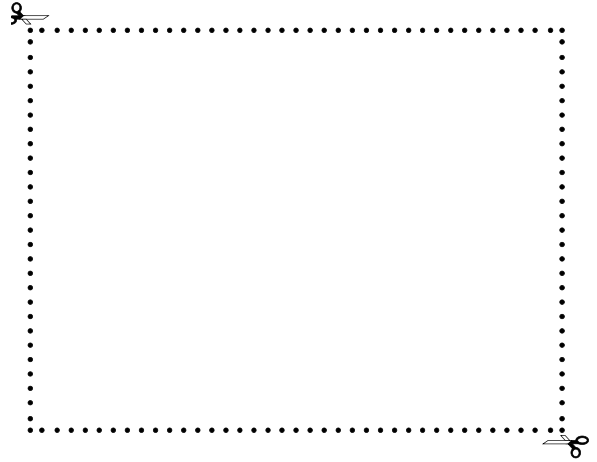
\$10/person

Spring Clean Up & Trail Work Day	Sunday March 25 Noon-4pm
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Friends of Thorn Creek Woods
Box 32
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Please clip commemorative stamps
& bring to Nature Center for
Audubon Stamps
for Wildlife Habitats



Want to receive
Thorn Creek News
only via email-
then email editor
Judy Dolan
Mendelson at
dolanmendel@aol.com

Renew Now!

- △ Helpers for Nature Center Open Hours, Fridays and Sundays from noon—4 p.m.
- △ Batteries—C and A's
- △ Hand clippers, loppers & hoes
- △ Large plastic storage boxes 1.5' x 3' w/lids

Nature Center Needs

- △ Night scopes
- △ Cases of bottled water
- △ Birdseed (mix or black sunflower seed—no corn)

- △ Suet cakes
- △ 1" x 2 5/8" address labels – ink jet or laser
- △ Stamps you saved for Audubon Society
- △ 3M Command med. Picture Hanging Strips
- △ 6" x 9" mailing envelopes

Be a FRIEND OF THORN CREEK WOODS

Membership....\$20 Organization & Business.....\$50 Life Membership....\$200
New Member _____ Renewing Member _____

____ I'd like to help as a volunteer at Thorn Creek Nature Center, please call me.

____ I am donating \$ _____ to the Friends **Capital Fund** for improvements in the Nature Center building & in the Preserve.
In memory of _____ In honor of _____

____ I am donating \$ _____ to the **Jim Marzuki Memorial Fund** to make a difference in Thorn Creek public programming.

____ I am donating \$ _____ to **Friends** general purposes.

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Telephone _____
E-mail _____



Annual Renewal Date is May 1st

Make checks payable to: FRIENDS OF THORN CREEK WOODS, Box 32, Richton Park, IL 60471