Creating a Better Future for Birds and People

BY EMILY CONNOR

Challenges, successes and new faces defined this past spring and summer at the Center! We continued to adapt to changes brought on by COVID and received amazing assistance from several talented young people along the way!

Last summer, four AmeriCorps Vista Summer Associates Jermani Floyd, Abby Giering, Louise Halpert and Clare Peine created new programs while enhancing existing ones.

Our Flight Crew Team Lead Jermani Floyd served as mentor to the new Flight Crew staff and helped manage Little Creek Summer Camp. This was Jermani’s third year of Flight Crew.

Abby and Louise worked on education and outreach creating new offerings such as Crafts Under the Canopy, Field Day Fridays and Ferguson ‘pop-up’ events. Clare created digital storytelling with informative videos about our Bottomland Forest Avian Survey, Nest Box program and Flight Crew.

We also employed six teens from North County who worked on environmental concepts and projects including water quality, ecology, mammals, birds and migration and habitat restoration work. In addition, they trained and served as our Little Creek Summer Camp Counselors.

Check out our digital stories at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC2a-UJ73DKMFjMZk0KtDC4A

We believe that respect, inclusion, and opportunity for people of all backgrounds, lifestyles, and perspectives will attract the best ideas and harness the greatest passion to shape a healthier, more vibrant future for all of us who share our planet. Our programs will continue to reflect this commitment and increasingly so. I look forward to sharing more with you about our progress on this front in the months ahead!
Note from the Director

BY KEN BUCHHOLZ

Change is in the air! As summer slowly emerges to fall we are starting to see some signs of cooler weather ahead. Trumpeter Swans trickling in. Northern Harriers cruising the prairie marsh. White Crown Sparrows performing their autumnal songs.

Transition is also occurring with our “Team Riverlands” staff. Many of you know that we said good-bye to Michelle Wiegand and her growing family this past summer. Family ties and a new position as Associate Director of the Iowa Youth Writing Project at the University of Iowa took them to Iowa City.

I am pleased to announce that on November 1, we promoted Emily Connor to Education Manager. Emily emerged as our top choice for the position after a competitive hiring process. Her knowledge of environmental and outdoor education, experience creating and implementing current programs, passion for building new generations of conservationists and strong relationships with our volunteers and other stakeholders are signs of more good things to come for the Center! Her top priority straight ahead will be hiring the Educator position she just vacated.

We are bringing back a familiar face in Caia Gillett, who recently served a year as an Environmental Education Support AmeriCorps VISTA at the Center. She was an Education and Outreach Summer AmeriCorps VISTA prior to that position. Caia will be supporting Emily and our education and public engagement programs over the next six months.

There is more good news to share! We recently received a $225,000 grant from the Mysun Charitable Foundation to expand and enhance our environmental education partnership with the Ferguson-Florissant School District’s Little Creek Nature Area. In addition, we have an exciting 10th Anniversary Gift Challenge thanks to a generous $100,000 gift from a dedicated supporter. Read further to learn about these developments and more!
Each year, from November to early February, Riverlands welcomes back its overwintering Trumpeter Swans. Nearly extinct only 90 years ago due to overhunting, Trumpeter Swans are thriving due to reintroduction and recovery programs throughout the Midwest, Alaska, Yukon, Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountains, Great Plains of the U.S. and Canada. Our own interior population of Trumpeter Swans recovery and reintroduction period began as little as 60 years ago!

Dubbed the largest waterfowl in North America, these birds are known for their unique trumpet like call. Compared to other swans we see in our region, Tundra Swans and the occasional Mute Swan, Trumpeter’s have an all-black wedge shaped bill that appears to extend into their eye at a distance. Breeding in wetlands in the northern U.S. and into Canada, these large birds go as far south as Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas during the winter months to escape the brutal cold further north. During this time you can usually find them in shallow wetlands and farm fields foraging for tubers and corn stubble. However, when shallow water bodies start to freeze over they relocate to deeper bays and lakes.

Starting in November, Riverlands Great Rivers Trumpeter Swan Watch volunteers take to our surrounding wetland ponds and bays to count the swans. These counts occur every other Tuesday morning, starting at sunrise, lasting for about an hour and a half. Observers indicate the number of swans, the age (either adult or cygnet, AKA swans hatched that year), and species while recorders keep track of the count. Tagged birds, usually indicated by a neck collar, like the swan displayed inside the Audubon Center at Riverlands, are counted too and shared with the Bird Banding Lab. That information is then passed along to the bander of the swan. The original observer usually receives a certificate afterwards indicating where the swan was banded and how old it is. Since the start of our counts we have identified around 92 uniquely tagged swans, all originating from Wisconsin.

Swan 06A was recorded last winter at Riverlands and then a few weeks later in Wisconsin. Top Photo: Doug Hommert. Bottom Photo: Sherry McCartney

Join Us for Roost Watch!
Take these four easy steps and join us for the first ever Roost Watch!

1) Visit the Center for Roost Watch on December 4th and 18th, and January 15th and 29th from 3:30p.m.-5:30p.m.
2) Get an update from staff about the location of swans in the Sanctuary.
3) Visit the sites in the Sanctuary where swans have come to roost.
4) Shake off the cold with a complimentary warm beverage back at the Center.

To volunteer and help visitors find and identify swans contact Conservation Science Associate Tara Hohman, tara.hohman@audubon.org.
Fall Migration Highlights

Fall migration, compared to spring, is pretty drawn out for birds. There’s no rush to get to the breeding ground and find your mate and start nesting. Instead birds gradually head south looking for warmer and more favorable climate as our days grow shorter and less resources become available. For some species, like shorebirds, fall migration can start as early as July! For other short distance migrants that could mean just waiting for the first snow up north before heading a little ways south. With the peak of fall migration behind us we wanted to highlight some of the surprising fall migration visitors we had here at Riverlands, as well as some of the usual migration favorites in our region.

Shared observations were retrieved from eBird and MOBird LISTSERV. Some records may not be confirmed.

RARITIES AND INCIDENTALS
Sabine’s Gull
Black Tern
Little Gull
American Avocet
Western Kingbird
Laughing Gull
White-faced Ibis
Greater Black-backed Gull

SHOREBIRDS
Wilson’s Snipe
Spotted Sandpiper
Solitary Sandpiper
Long-billed Dowitcher
Least Sandpiper
Sanderling
Semipalmated Sandpiper
Lesser Yellowlegs
Black-bellied Plover
Baird’s Sandpiper
Pectoral Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Buff-breasted Sandpiper

American Golden-Plover
Short-billed Dowitcher
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Stilt Sandpiper
Semipalmated Plover
White-rumped Sandpiper
Dunlin

WARBLERS
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Palm Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Northern Parula
Magnolia Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler
American Redstart
Blackburnian Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Orange-crowned Warbler
Yellow-throated Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
Nashville Warbler
Golden-winged Warbler
Prothonotary Warbler
Canada Warbler
Yellow Warbler

Discover more about birds and birding at Riverlands
https://riverlands.audubon.org/birds/birds-riverlands-0
Center Receives Largest Grant In Its History!

We received the largest grant, $225,000, in our history this fall from the Mysun Charitable Foundation! A priority of the foundation is to create an awareness of the importance of conservation and appreciation of nature, educate the next generation of environmental leaders and provide experiential learning opportunities. Their generous support will help us expand and enhance our partnership with the Little Creek Nature Area, a 99-acre educational facility owned and operated by Ferguson-Florissant Schools. We will use the foundation’s funds for pre-school environmental education, Field Biology experiences for high school students, new weekend programming for the public at Little Creek Nature Area, and expanding our Flight Crew Program with a new Alternative Spring Break component. We also received a small EPA subgrant via the Missouri Botanical Garden to pilot an Alternative Spring Break program.

Our collaboration with Ferguson-Florissant Schools began in 2010, a year before opening the Center. The district’s high schools were then “charter” participants of the newly established RiverVision Leadership Project. We later expanded the partnership with Little Creek Summer Camp for grades 3-5 students and Flight Crew in 2019, a summer conservation jobs corps for North County teens.

Building new generations of conservation leaders has been a common theme of our environmental education programs since before opening our doors in 2011. Until recently, mainstream conservation had largely excluded people of different backgrounds, lifestyles, and perspectives. The U.S. population is becoming increasingly centered in urban locations, and more racially and ethnically diverse. Given the state of biodiversity and ecosystem health, stagnant levels of support for conservation, and demographic changes in the U.S., it is crucial for both birds and people that conservation organizations like the Audubon Center at Riverlands continue to engage new and diverse constituents where the majority of people reside. We are immensely thankful to the Mysun Charitable Foundation for their trust and investment in this critical mission!

10th ANNIVERSARY GIFT CHALLENGE

Thanks to one donor’s recent generosity and foresight, we have an amazing $100,000 challenge opportunity to raise 10 new $10,000 gifts in honor of the Center’s 10th Anniversary by June 30, 2022! We have secured seven gifts at this level toward our goal of meeting and even exceeding the challenge. The vital funds generated will advance our aims to grow Nature Education for Stewards of Tomorrow (NEST) programs while building financial sustainability for our Center’s growing education and outreach offerings. Want to help us meet this challenge? Please contact Center Director Ken Buchholz at ken.buchholz@audubon.org.

We will recognized donors supporting this challenge on a special 10th Anniversary plaque at the Center. Donors at this level will also be listed in the National Audubon Society’s Annual Report, and they will become members of the National Audubon Society’s nationwide leadership circle of conservationists called Canopy. Canopy members receive the Canopy e-newsletter and invitations to forums with Audubon’s senior leaders and scientists.
Eagle Ice Fest and More

Our location at the middle of the Mississippi Flyway, one of our planet’s great migratory pathways, means we experience the spectacle of birds virtually every season of the year. Fall is especially exciting with the arrival of Trumpeter Swans followed by Bald Eagles later in winter.

We invite you to help us celebrate our fabulous Birds of Winter starting with the Annual Eagle Ice Fest on January 8, followed by Raptor Saturdays and Eagles Sundays for the month of January and the first two weeks of February. Activities will include Raptor and Eagle "Meet & Greets" with TreeHouse Wildlife Center and World Bird Sanctuary, guided bird hikes, nature crafts and campfires with S’mores. Birds of Winter concludes with a virtual Great Backyard Bird Count training on February 10, in preparation for the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 18-22, when the world comes together for the love of birds! Find more info at https://riverlands.audubon.org/.

Hashtag #BowsforBirds2022

We had no idea how popular Bows for Birds would be when we launched it last winter! Bows for Birds is a region-wide bird-themed scavenger hunt that invites you to discover local parks and natural areas and the birds that utilize them. Last year, 310 people participated and we received 1,320 #BowsforBirds photo posts to our social media pages!

Bows for Birds is back! Between December 11, 2021 and February 7, 2022, we invite everyone to visit the designated Bows for Birds stations at 12 parks and natural areas in the St. Louis Region. The challenge is to find a shiny large bow placed at each location where there is also an informative clue to finding the wooden “mystery bird” cutout placed nearby. When you find the mystery bird cutout, you then post a photo (selfies encouraged) with the identification of the bird and the hashtag #BowsforBirds2022. Participants are entered into a raffle to win fantastic prizes with each bird found and submitted. The grand prize is a brand new pair of Vortex binoculars! We will announce the raffle prize wins during our virtual Great Backyard Bird Count training on February 10. The complete 2021-22 Bows for Birds instructions and map will be available on our website soon!

Mark Your Calendar:

Birds of Winter Volunteer Training (Virtual)
December 6th
@ 4:30-5:30 p.m.
Fall Program Updates

NATURE EDUCATION FOR STEWARDS OF TOMORROW
Despite many schools having field trip restrictions this semester, we did not curtail our NEST program offerings. As of October 31, 62 students have participated in the RiverVision Leadership Project with the help of our partners at USACE. Programs included Migration on the Mississippi, Birding 101, Seining in Ellis Bay, Fishing, The Mississippi Watershed, Macro-netting, Water Quality and Fish Adaptations.

200+ total students participated in Eco-Learners and scout programs including Migration on the Mississippi, Macro Netting and Geo Caching. We also hosted our first student paddling field trip with The College School that included kayaking on Ellis Bay and water safety instruction.

LET’S FISH LIGHTER: BIRDS UNLEADED
Lead from bullets, shotgun pellets and fishing tackle poison millions of birds each year. In October, 20 children and their families joined the US Fish & Wildlife and the Audubon Center at Riverlands for a free family friendly fishing workshop to learn about impact of lead on waterfowl and other birds. TreeHouse Wildlife Center provided lead sinkers and fishing line that were retrieved from rehabbed birds in our area, which helped to show the real life impacts this type of equipment can have on wildlife. During this workshop, participants discovered different fish species found in the Mississippi river and were introduced to eco-friendly fishing concepts.

TEAMING UP FOR GRASSLANDS
With funding from the Missouri Bird Conservation Initiative (MoBCI), we acquired $37,000 of native seed for the ongoing restoration of the 1,200-acre prairie marsh at Riverlands. We have long supported this USACE effort, which is one of the largest grassland conservation projects in the St. Louis Region. Several priority bird species are the intended beneficiaries of this collaboration including Eastern Meadowlarks, Dickcissel, Northern Bobwhite, Sedge Wren, Willow Flycatcher and Bell’s Vireo.
EMILY CONNOR, EDUCATION MANAGER

**Hometown:** St. Louis, MO

**Education:** BS in Environmental Science with an emphasis on Marine Science at The University of Tampa, FL

**Favorite Bird:** American Avocet

**What sparked your love of nature?** Family camping and fishing trips with aunts, uncles, and cousins along Oklahoma rivers and streams

**What impact do you hope to make through your work with Audubon?** I hope to connect with the youth in the Saint Louis region through environmental education and leadership training to inspire our next generation of stewards that we have the power and responsibility to protect our rich diversity along the Mississippi River and reap the human physical and mental benefits that it provides.

**Favorite Part of service at Audubon:** Flight Crew! I’ve had the opportunity to work with teens in this summer jobs program for the past three years and have watched them grow to love our environment and even pursue careers in the field as the embark on their next journey following high school.

TARA HOHMAN
CONSERVATION SCIENCE ASSOCIATE

**Hometown:** Mansfield, TX

**Education:** BS in Wildlife Biology from Texas State University and MS in Environmental Science and Policy from the University of Wisconsin – Green Bay

**Favorite Bird:** Black Rail

**What sparked your love of nature?** Visiting zoos and aquariums

**What do impact do you hope to make through your work with Audubon?** To create a strong science focus and become a leader on floodplain forest bird management throughout the Upper Mississippi River

**Favorite Project You’ve Worked on:** Our Bottomland Forest Avian Survey

We're hiring! Check out our open Educator position and apply at https://www.audubon.org/about/careers
When you support the Audubon Center at Riverlands, you make the St. Louis Region an even better place for birds and people to live.

Your yearly donations are key to keeping our Center vibrant and open while making it possible to operate and enhance our conservation, education, and public engagement programs.

Donate with cash, check, credit card, and gifts of appreciated securities. Make your checks payable to the Audubon Center at Riverlands and mail to:

Audubon Center at Riverlands
301 Riverlands Way
West Alton, MO 63386

To donate stock or other appreciated securities email Ken Buchholz at ken.buchholz@audubon.org for instructions. Learn more at https://riverlands.audubon.org/get-involved/give-today

We are the National Audubon Society, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and the recipient of Charity Navigator’s highest rating and a platinum Guide Star rating. Our EIN or Tax ID: 13-1624102.

Volunteer

Give your time, enthusiasm, and expertise! Volunteers are essential to maintaining and enhancing our conservation, education, and public engagement programs. Customer service, gardening, teaching, birding, presenting, and avian surveying are just some of the ways volunteers are making a positive difference birds, people, and nature. Start volunteering by contacting riverlandsvolunteer@audubon.org.
We're back again with our popular Birds of Winter Series. There's no place like the Audubon Center at Riverlands to appreciate and understand raptors and waterfowl in winter and become inspired to protect these and other amazing birds!

**Upcoming Events**

**Birds of Winter**

We're back again with our popular Birds of Winter Series. There's no place like the Audubon Center at Riverlands to appreciate and understand raptors and waterfowl in winter and become inspired to protect these and other amazing birds!

**Eagle Ice Fest**
- January 8
- 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Eagle Sundays**
- January 9, 16, 23, 30,
- February 6
- 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**Raptor Saturdays**
- January 15, 22, 29,
- February 5

**Great Backyard Bird Count**
- Virtual Training,
- February 10
- Count, February 18-21

**Second Annual Bows for Birds**
Back by popular demand! Get outdoors this winter. Find the mystery Bows of Bird at 12 designated parks and natural areas. Enter your findings by sending us a submission sheet and use the #Bows for Birds 2022 to win fabulous raffle prizes! [https://riverlands.audubon.org/programs/bows-birds](https://riverlands.audubon.org/programs/bows-birds)

**Embrace the Season at Riverlands**
Being in nature improve one's mental and physical well-being. Trails around Center and the Ellis Island Trail are open year round providing ample opportunity to take in a crisp cool day, see waterfowl, raptors and sparrows, and enjoy spectacular winter sunsets. The Audubon Center at Riverlands is open Tuesday through Sundays, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary is open seven days a week!

**Stay Connected**

Find us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter
301 Riverlands Way
West Alton, MO 63386
636-899-0090
riverlands.audubon.org

**Register at** [riverlands.audubon.org/events](http://riverlands.audubon.org/events)