Brood parasite birds are birds that lay their eggs in the nests of other bird species. They rely on these other birds to raise the young; the young never see their parents and often no other birds of their species until they themselves mate.

Non-passerine brood parasites are all the Old World Cuckoos and some New World Cuckoos, Honeyguides of Africa and Asia, and South American Black-headed Ducks (similar to Ruddy Ducks). Passerine brood parasites are the New World Cowbirds and African Wydahs and Indigobirds.

Our Yellow-billed Cuckoo is not a brood parasite, but our Black-billed Cuckoos parasitize Yellow Warblers.

Many birders find this parasite practice abhorrent and are quite prejudiced against these brood parasites. I have seen it in action in Borneo: a pair of cute Black-and-Yellow Broadbills was feeding a Moustached Hawk-Cuckoo chick, an Old World Cuckoo. The Broadbill is small, about six inches long. The Hawk-Cuckoo is big, about a foot long. I must say, it looked disgusting. It made me wonder why the Broadbills didn’t notice that this bird they were working like beavers to feed didn’t look like them!

Some brood parasite birds are specialists: they only parasitize one species. The Wydahs, for instance, parasitize Waxbills (small, colorful finch-like birds). Each Wydah species parasitizes one Waxbill species. If you’re looking for a Wydah (dark birds with exceptionally long, striking tails), you won’t find one unless you can find the Waxbill it parasitizes. They are well worth looking for, too, of course.

Four of the five Cowbirds (not the Screaming Cowbird) are generalists; the females lay their eggs in a wide variety of other species’ nests. Our Brown-headed Cowbird has 221 known species that it parasitizes, although each female only parasitizes one species. One of the parasitized species is the endangered Kirtland Warbler, which is why the Cowbirds are trapped and euthanized in northern Michigan—to protect the Warblers. Usually, the brood parasite eggs hatch first and crowd out the hosts’ own eggs and chicks, thus threatening the reproduction rate of the hosts.

Why don’t the preyed-upon species protect themselves? Well, many try. Hosts have come up with various defenses against this unique threat. The best strategy for hosts is to avoid parasitism in the first place. This can take several forms, including selecting nest sites which are difficult to parasitize, starting incubation early so they are sitting on the nests when parasites visit them early in the morning, and aggressively defending their territory.

Once parasitism has occurred, the next most optimal defense is to eject the parasitic egg. Recognition of parasitic eggs is based on identifying pattern differences or changes in the number of eggs. Some species seem incapable of recognizing the intruder, though. The ejection can be done by grasp ejection if the host has a large enough beak, or otherwise by puncture ejection. Among hosts not exhibiting parasitic egg ejection, some abandon parasitized nests and start over again. However, at high enough parasitism frequencies, this becomes maladaptive as the new nest will most likely also be parasitized. Some host species modify their nests to exclude the parasitic egg, either by weaving over the egg or in some cases rebuilding a new nest over the existing one.

But, once the parasitic egg has hatched, apparently, almost always the “parents” will feed the intruder, their parenting instincts seem to be too strong to do otherwise. The unanswered question is, at least among parasitic song birds, how do these birds find mates when they grow up among birds whose songs are totally different? Other songbirds find mates whose songs are like their parents’.

Anyway, whatever, it’s all part of nature’s plan. Some birds are parasites, some are hosts, and some are neither. We can enjoy them all.

John Baker
President
Several dozen DBC members and about a half dozen visitors attended a summer’s look back at this past spring migration, brought to us by Brad Bumgardner, Executive Director of Indiana Audubon Society in a talk called, “Longshore Flight of the Indiana Dunes.”

Brad spoke to us last year on birding the Dunes in general when he was Interpretive Naturalist at Indiana Dunes State Park. Now he’s the Executive Director of the Indiana Audubon Society, and thankfully still heavily into birding the Dunes! There’s 43 miles of potential Indiana Dunes birding, but Brad focused on one fixed platform—Longshore Flight Tower, aka Green Tower, where over 185,000 birds were counted this past March 1 to June 1. The tower is a stable, steel structure, 20-feet-high and perched on a dune, so it’s 80 feet above Lake Michigan. With stairs and ADA ramps, it’s easy access for all.

Why is this such a great spot? Besides being on one of the main migration paths, Lake Michigan at the Dunes provides a natural bottleneck for birds heading north in spring—to complete their journey most need to veer either west or east when they reach the tower. Hawks’ beloved thermals don’t last out over the lake, so they pick a direction around it, as do Sandhill Cranes, with 30,000 a year—about a third of the Eastern population for this species—coming over this outpost and heading left towards Chicago. While some birds press ahead at the bottleneck when they reach it, about 90% of the nocturnal migrants come down in the area around sunrise, resting up before making their selection of east or west. And, naturally, there are a lot of birds leaving each morning after their day of rest and feeding.

One hero of the 2018 monitoring season was DBC’s Kyle Wiktor, who was hired to count as many of these migrants as he could. Kyle’s gifted eyes and ears recorded a record 213 species this spring, the average year yielding 205.

The impressive stats come in waves, just like the birds: 28 species of warbler were seen this spring. Rarities like Fish Crows, Northern Bobwhite, Northern Goshawk. How many Yellow-rumped Warblers have you seen in one day? Brad’s all-time personal count at the Dunes is 3,000—that’s a lot of clicker clicks. The record for the area: 4,317 yellow rumps in 2013. During a blowing rain. The birds do indeed come in waves, and Brad outlined some broad tendencies. A few notes from his many noteworthy observations:

- March 1-15: 10-20,000 blackbirds a day. 1,000 Ring-billed Gulls shifting north from their southern winter homes. Red-breasted Mergansers, the most numerous waterfowl.
- March 16-31: Diversity increases greatly. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers—354 were seen in single day, the second highest ever count ever in the U.S. Northern Flickers, American Robins, swallows start up (specifically, Tree Swallows), some Long- and Short-eared Owls.
- April 1-15: New species galore, including an explosion of wintering and migrating Red-throated Loons—85 in one day. Caspian Terns, American Goldfinches.
- April 16-30: Merlins and warblers starting up.
- May 1-15: Neotropical migrants. May 1-7, in particular, are Blue Jay heydays—5,000 to 7,000 a day during this peak. Baltimore Orioles. Prairie Warblers nesting near the tower.
- May 16-30: Shorebirds, flycatchers, secretive Mourning and Connecticut Warblers singing in shrubs, easily spied on from above in the tower.

Over the years, 371 species have been seen in the Dunes area, including a feast of rarities. Boreal Chickadee, Townsend’s Solitaire, King Eider, Hoary Redpoll, a Purple Gallinule in a backyard in La Porte, IN that enjoyed gobbling up Cheerios. Long-tailed, Pomarine, and Parasitic Jaegers.

All in all, 1,936,781 birds have been counted in seven years of monitoring. The best total was 2013 with 428,374 birds. The worst was 2018, thanks to the chilly north winds we all recall, with 185,180 birds. The best years so far are the “climatologically average” ones, not too hot or cold.

Thankfully, this count has a promising future, now with grant funding from the Lake Michigan Coastal Program. Each day’s count was put on eBird and there’s a lot more on its blog: www.indianadunesbirding.wordpress.com.

For top species lists for the waves described above, a Top 20 species list for all 7 years combined, or to ask other questions, email Brad at bbumgardner@indianaaudubon.org.

And if you missed this spring’s migration at the Dunes, consider coming out next year, preferably at sunrise and its subsequent 2.5 hours, preferably when south winds are blowing and morning flight is in full swing. And if you want to challenge your ear, come before sunrise!

— Steve Constantelos, DBC Recording Secretary
In Other News...
(from the meeting)

Before Brad got started, the assembled group heard a few engaging announcements:

• From one of our Bird Conservation Network reps, Tom Mulcahy, encouraging members to consider taking action on behalf of the Migratory Bird Act, referring to the American Bird Conservancy site: https://abcbirds.org/get-involved/take-action and a book featuring wood warbler migration, North on the Wing by Bruce Beehler.

• Vera Miller called for volunteers for the August 3-4 Dixon Waterfowl Refuge BioBlitz, where every sort of creature volunteers can find will be cataloged: http://www.wetlands-initiative.org/upcoming-events/bioblitz2018.

• And DBC Treasurer, Bonnie Graham, reminded us to renew club membership dues: https://www.dupagebirding.org/renew-your-membership

Poetry Corner

Baltimore Oriole
By Jim Blackburn

[At the lot on Sheepshead Street on South Padre
Purchased by the Valley Land Fund for the birds.]

The orange and black orioles dash to and fro
From the fruit that was placed to welcome them—
To nourish them—on their long trip north,
Orioles that inspire thoughts of prayer in me,
Thoughts of gratitude, perhaps a glimpse of divinity
For they are the response so many seek in prayer,
A sign from above, connectedness with something large,
Larger than any one of us—larger than all of us—
A sign from above that all is well today,
Comforting my fears, meeting my needs,
Ensuring me that life is worth living
And that the sun will rise again,
Hope, satisfaction, love and joy,
Delivered in an orange and black package,
And I am awed by the power of a prayer to nature,
Thankful for stewards like the Valley Land Fund,
Keepers of the Biblical mandate to care for creation,
To keep the garden, celebrating that which is good,
And restoring my soul.
Amen.

Jim is a friend of DBC Member Steve Becker and is an amazing guy from Houston: conservationist, environmental lawyer, Rice University professor, and hell-bent on saving the Texas Gulf Coast for the Whooping Cranes and other birds.
August Field Trips

This month birds are raising their young, molting feathers, preparing for and in some cases already in their fall migration. Our field trips include mid-week trips. There are opportunities for all types of birders to participate and enjoy the season.

Participants, please remember that weather and trail conditions can be variable. Biting insects can be present. Please dress accordingly and bring insect repellent. We expect everyone to enjoy birding in a safe manner by being careful and prudent. This trip list and more club information is on our DBC website at http://www.dupagebirding.org/

NOTE: Check DuPageBirding.org for any trip changes, additions or cancellations.

*** If you are interested in leading a field trip please email DBCfieldtrips@dupagebirding.org

Saturday, August 11, 7:30 am
Cantigny Park, Wheaton
Cantigny started a birding program in 2008 and offers regular walks on the 500-acre property. Please bear in mind that 25 or more birders is common. Enter through the main gate on Winfield Road (just south of Roosevelt Rd.) and tell the attendant you are with the bird walk. Parking is free. Meet at the Visitors Center.
Leader: Jeff Reiter, jreiter@wordsonbirds.com

Sunday, August 12, 7:30 am
McKee Marsh, Warrenville
Join another morning walk to the marsh to check out (we hope) early migrating shorebirds and nesting birds. Bring a spotting scope if you have one. Meet at the visitor parking lot on the north side of Mack Rd., located between Winfield Rd. and Rt. 59 in Warrenville. Most of our walk will be on preserve limestone and earthen trails; wear appropriate shoes and clothing.
Leader: Kathy Mineck, 630-254-4077, KMineck@dupagebirding.org

Thursday, August 16, 5:00 pm
Fermilab, Batavia – (Pre-registration required)
Meet at the red barn for a bring-your-own picnic supper while we watch for shorebirds. Think about dessert after our birding. The red barn is located at the first stop sign (turn south on Sauk Rd.) after entering Fermilab on Batavia Rd. from Route 59. At this time, one may enter at the Pine Street entrance off Kirk Road or Batavia Road off Rte. 59. Tell the guard you are there for bird-watching. Be sure to have a photo ID (driver’s license, etc) as security will ask to see it. Bring scopes if you have them. Please pre-register. If it’s raining, the trip will be cancelled.
Leaders: Bob & Jean Spitzer 630-790-4842
Day of FT call cell 630-222-3307, Bspitzer@dupagebirding.org

Tuesday, August 21, 7:30 am
Greene Valley, Woodridge
With its mix of woodlands, grasslands, and aquatic habitats (including the fluddle), Greene Valley enjoys a diverse group of bird species. Meet at the parking lot located just south of 79th St. on the west side of Greene Rd. in Naperville/Woodridge.
Leaders: Margie & Alan Busic 630-789-3628 mbusic@dupagebirding.org
News from the Wacky World of the Web

21 Beautiful Birds That I'm Literally Jealous Of
BuzzFeed
These are the Instagram models of the bird world. Read the full story

Why Are Some Crows Committing Acts of Necrophilia?
The New York Times
“It was certainly very surprising to me,” said the researcher who observed the birds’ strange behaviors when presented with crow cadavers. Read the full story

It All Started With a Few Trout. Now Yellowstone’s Iconic Birds Face ‘Collapse.’
National Geographic
An invasive fish set off a biological domino effect that has already affected bears and elk. Now it threatens trumpeter swans and other birds. Read the full story

What Does It Take to Raise a Flamingo?
National Geographic
A zoo celebrates as its flamingo flock gives birth to five new chicks—but the process is more difficult than it may seem. Read the full story

Russian cuckoos are taking over Alaska
Popular Science
When cuckoos come to town, it invariably spells trouble for resident songbirds. New research shows that both common and oriental cuckoos may be moving into Alaska, which is a grim prospect for resident warblers, buntings, and wagtails. Read the full story

Congratulations to DBC member Jon Grainger for finding and photographing this state first record of a Plumbeous Vireo in nearby Will County. This was one of three new species recently added to the state list by the Illinois Ornithological Society Records Committee. http://www.illinoisbirds.org/three-new-species-added-to-the-illinois-state-list/
2018 Meetings

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The photocopying of this newsletter is done through the generosity of the Birches Assisted Living Facility in Clarendon Hills. The DuPage Birding Club sincerely appreciates the Birches continued support.