

LAKELAND AUDUBON SOCIETY



The Chat



April 2026

CHAPTER MEETING

Tuesday, April 28

7:00 PM

Lions Field House - 270 Elkhorn Road (Hwy 67), Williams Bay, WI

Free and open to the public!

The Stories Behind the Photos

By Vic Berardi

Join the Lakeland Audubon Society at its April 2026 chapter meeting. This meeting will feature a guest speaker (Vic Berardi) who will give a talk called: The Stories Behind the Photos. Vic will discuss his nature photography and the stories behind the photos. His favorite subject is raptors, but he will also include a few photos of wildflowers, trees, and dragonflies, which he also enjoys photographing. Vic is a knowledgeable, avid raptor enthusiast and an accomplished photographer with many of his images published in guidebooks, magazines, journals, and online.

About the Speaker

Vic Berardi is the founder of the all-volunteer Illinois Beach State Park Hawk Watch which has conducted twenty-four complete seasons of full time hawk migration monitoring which began in the fall of the year 2000. In 2013, he and a few others conducted several spot counts at a new hawkwatch site at the Fort Sheridan Forest Preserve on the shore of Lake Michigan in Highland Park, IL. The Fort Sheridan Hawkwatch has now completed seven seasons of hawk watching and is now close to having full time coverage.

Vic is currently serving on the Board of Directors for the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), a position he previously held several years ago. He also serves on several HMANA Committees including being the Chair of the Winter Raptor Survey Committee. He also served for several years as the Central Continental Flyway Editor for Hawk Migration Studies which is HMANA's biannual publication. In 2014 he was the recipient of HMANA's Appreciation Award for his outstanding service to further hawk migration studies and conservation. In 2009 he was awarded the Service to Chicago Area Birders by the Chicago Audubon Society. And in 2007 he was awarded the Grassroots Conservation Leadership Award for his leadership in raptor education and research.

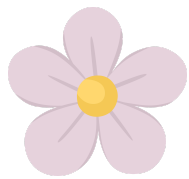


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In addition to Vic's dedication to the hawk watches in northeastern Illinois and HMANA, he also finds time to write articles on hawk watching, give hawk identification seminars and raptor conservation related talks. Vic is also an accomplished photographer and many of his photos are published in several magazines, including several cover photos for Hawk Migration Studies and Bird Watching Magazine and Outdoor Illinois.

His book contributions include, "Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America" by Donald & Lillian Stokes, "Hawks From Every Angle" and "Hawks At A Distance" by Jerry Liguori, "Birds of Prey: Hawks, Eagles, Falcons, and Vultures of North America" by Pete Dunne with Kevin Carlson, "The Crossley Guide: Raptors" by Richard Crossley, Jerry Liguori and Brian Sullivan and the "Pembina Valley Raptor Field Guide." Most recently he has contributed many photos for the new HawkWatch International, HWI Raptor ID app co-authored by Jerry Liguori and Brian Sullivan and has made contributions to the latest raptor book by Brian Wheeler, "Birds of Prey of the East: A Field Guide." He also regularly donates his photos for use in raptor conservation efforts.

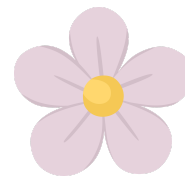
Vic is also a member of the Raptor Research Foundation, HawkWatch International and several other birding organizations including the Illinois Ornithological Society in which he served as a Board member for 4 years and Field Trip Chair for 3 years.



A Day in the Field

Photos and notes from the trail.

By Kevin Dickey



Spring is here and the flowers have surely begun to bloom. Migratory birds have been returning and moving through in earnest, and the insects are more active again. On a recent outing, I took some photos of nature's wonderful splendor.

Some of the birds I heard and saw, but didn't get pictures of: Tufted Titmouse, Pileated Woodpecker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Wood Duck, Northern Waterthrush, Pine Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Brown Creeper and both White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

Clockwise: Marsh Marigold, Bloodroot, Round-lobed Hepatica, Rough Speckled Shield Lichen



The Common Chuckwalla

By Janice Bain

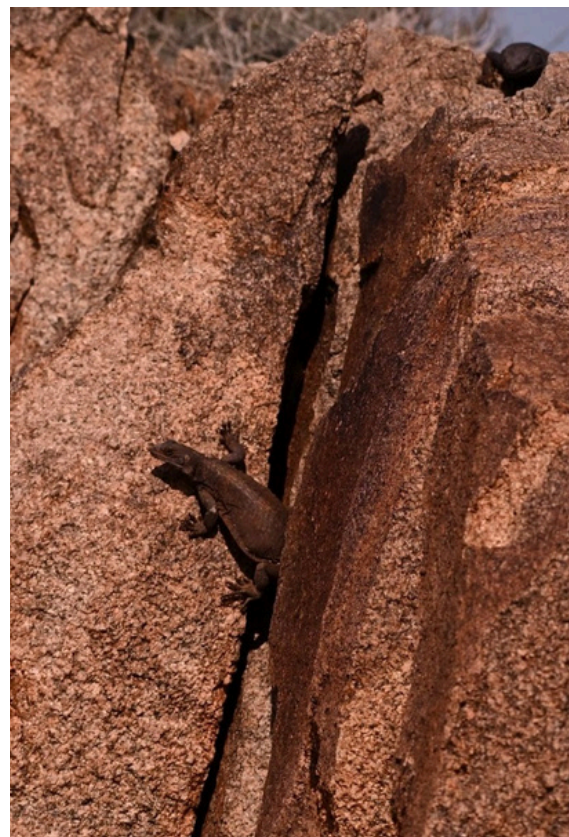
Traveling is a great way to discover things you have never previously seen. What is common to a Californian may be entirely unfamiliar to a Wisconsinite and vice versa. Such was the case for me on a recent excursion to Joshua Tree National Park in southern California. While on a hike, I caught a glimpse of movement between two boulders. I waited patiently until a large flat-bodied lizard slowly exited the crevice and crawled up a vertical boulder face. Still as a churchmouse, I watched in wonder. Allow me to introduce you to the ubiquitous lizard of the rocky areas of the Sonoran and Mojave deserts, the chuckwalla.



The chuckwallas found in Joshua Tree National Park are known as common chuckwallas, one of 5 different chuckwalla species, second in size to gila monsters. Chuckwalla lizards, found in the Iguanadai Family, have their own specific genus, *Sauromalus*, meaning flat-bodied. While they are herbivores, they will occasionally eat insects. They have no need to drink water as they get enough from the vegetation they consume. Unfortunately, the desert vegetation is considered to have a high-salt content, and excess salt builds up in their bodies and interferes with their hydration. Luckily, they are equipped with special nasal glands that transform the excess salt into crystals which they proceed to sneeze out of their bodies. Problem solved.

In the wild, chuckwallas have a lifespan ranging between 15 and 30 years, they weigh up to 2 pounds and grow as long as 20 inches, with half that length being the tail. Chuckwallas thrive in the extreme conditions of the deserts found in our southern states. Rock temperatures in the triple digits, sure to burn our skin, are no problem for chuckwallas. In fact, they require basking surface temperatures of 120-130 degrees just to reach their required internal body temperature.

Hawks and coyotes are chief predators. Chuckwallas' first defense is camouflage, and they are masterful at matching the boulders they bask upon, black, brown or red. Resembling granite is a forte; tourists walk right past, hawks fly right over, missing a potential meal. The flat body shape is an asset. Flatness allows them to fit in thin crevices that hawks and coyotes cannot easily access. Once safely inside, they perform a crafty trick to ensure they aren't pulled out. They gulp air and puff themselves up like a balloon. The air expands the loose fitting skin folds around their neck and shoulders and secures them so tightly in the crack that they are virtually impossible to remove.



Caudal autotomy, the ability to drop their tail, is a defensive tool employed when in grave danger. After the tail drops, it wiggles and twitches for several minutes, acting as a decoy to distract the predator, hopefully providing enough time for escape. If the tail drop saves the chuckwalla's life, the tail can be regrown later, but since the tail is used for fat storage, its loss is a serious metabolic blow. The regrown tail will be downgraded from bone to cartilage.



Chuckwallas are heliothermic, meaning they are “sun baskers” that rely almost exclusively on direct sunlight to regulate their body temperature. They are also thermogenic, meaning they manage their own internal body temperature. Basically, they must regulate their own body temperature using the sun and inherent adaptive traits.

The first order of a chuckwalla's day is to raise their internal temperature to within 102 and 105 degrees. They achieve this by finding a warm rock to bask upon. To hasten the heating process, they flatten their body, creating extra surface area with which to absorb the sun's rays. They also darken their skin tone to gain heat or lighten it to cool off. Taking refuge in crevices or burrows is a second method used to cool off. After achieving their optimal internal temperature, they venture off to eat.

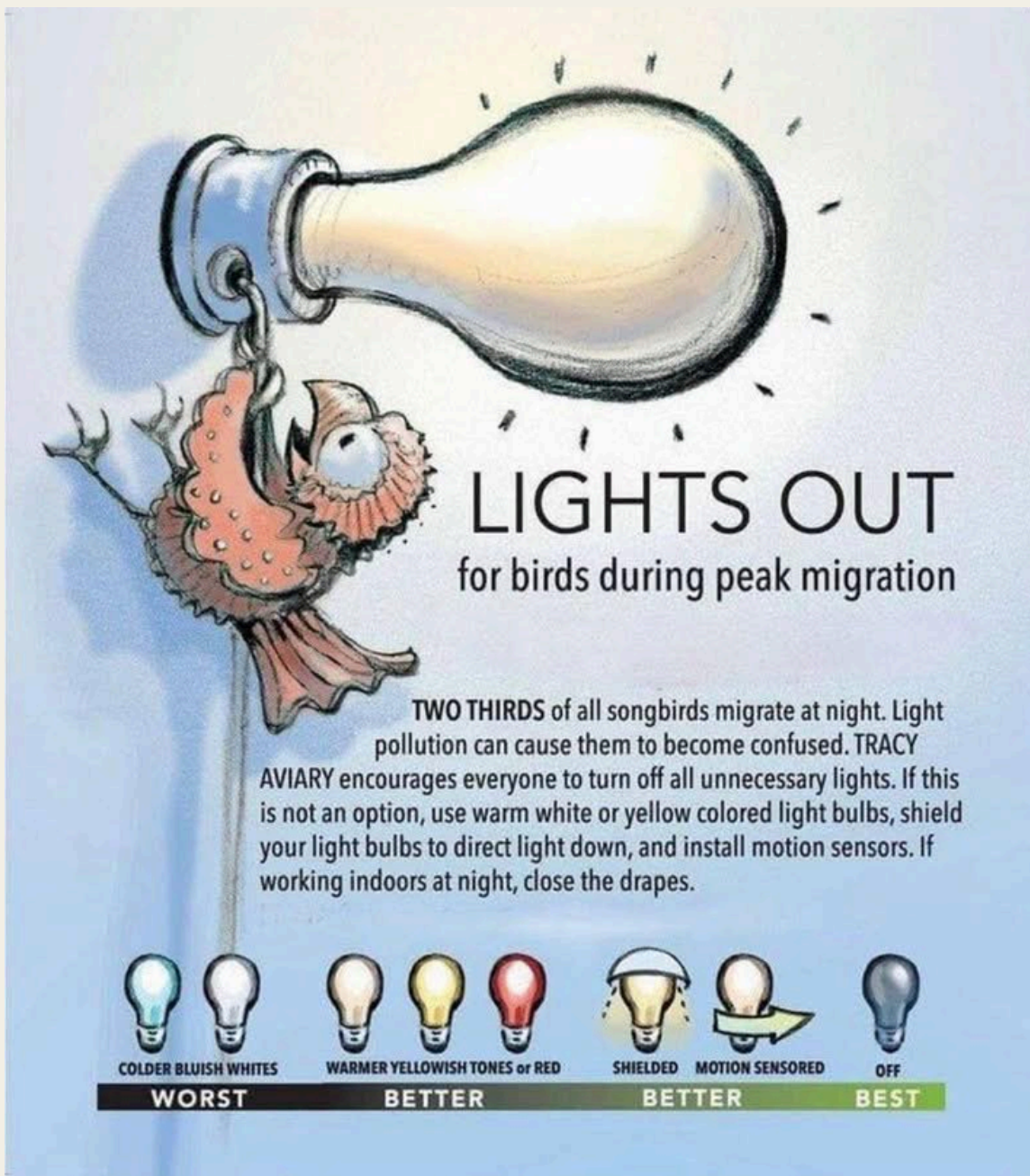
In the cooler months, November to February, chuckwallas brumate, a form of hibernation for ectotherms (reptiles and amphibians). Brumating animals are in a deep sleep, but often wake up and move around. Unlike hibernation, brumation is heavily dictated by external temperatures. If there happens to be a few warm days in the cooler months, the chuckwallas may become temporarily active but generally don't eat during this active time. Hibernators will sleep through the occasional warmer days.

Chuckwallas communicate through body language. Males are very territorial and display their emotions via physical performance, such as doing push-ups, head-bobbing and/or mouth gaping. While color changes are primarily used to regulate body temperature, lighter colors can also indicate stress. Darker colors have more nuanced meaning, particularly among the males. They signal dominance and aim to intimidate rival males. Darker colors and rusty-reds are meant to help them stand out and impress the females.

Chuckwallas are interesting creatures. I was lucky to find a pair. Remember to take time if you get to hike in our southern deserts to look carefully on and between the boulders for a sun-basking chuckwalla. Maybe you will find one dining on the salt laden succulents, or their all-time favorite, yellow flowers. If you are really lucky, you could even witness a sneeze! May you have many adventures as you live your life.

Sources:

- Pictures by Janice Bain
- Battlefoxx Living Earth – Nature, Coto de Caza (Channel)
- <https://www.saczo.org/common-chuckwalla>
- 10 fun facts about the Chuckwalla Lizard (Iguana), Sauromalus ater: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mK4yX3Blbgw>
- CuriOdyssey-5 Fun Facts about the Chuckwalla – San Diego Zoo Kids: YouTube - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3M1Wy1yjo>
- San Diego Zoo Kids YouTube video – April 29, 2019
- Sacramento Zoo: Common Chuckwalla - <https://www.saczo.org/common-chuckwalla>
- https://library.iucn-iscg.org/documents/1972/Case_1972_Copeia.pdf



Multiple programs and/or initiatives from bird conservation organizations aim to educate the public about artificial light and its negative effects on birds that migrate at night. One such program is Audubon's **"Lights Out"**. Find more information about this program on the Audubon website by clicking the link below:

[Audubon.org](https://www.audubon.org)

Another similar program is American Bird Conservancy's **"Dark Skies Help Birds"**. Also check out the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's **"BirdCast"** tool that let's you know when high numbers of birds are expected to be migrating through an area.

Learn more:

[American Bird Conservancy](https://www.americanbirdconservancy.org)

[BirdCast](https://www.birdcast.org)

Upcoming Spring Bird Walks

Saturday, May 2

8:00 - 9:00 AM

Yerkes Observatory - 373 W. Geneva Street Williams Bay, WI <https://yerkesobservatory.org/>

Saturday, May 9

7:00 - 9:00 AM

Kishwaukee Nature Conservancy - 251 Elkhorn Road, Williams Bay, WI <https://www.friendsofknc.org/>

Saturday, May 9

8:00 - 10:00 AM

Peterson Island Woods - East end of Oak Park Road, Elkhorn, WI <https://kmlandtrust.org/>

Bird Migration – an amazing journey – and how we can help

When: Tuesday@2

Tuesday, May 12 2026 - 2 pm

Where: Geneva Lake Museum, 255 Mill St. Lake Geneva, WI

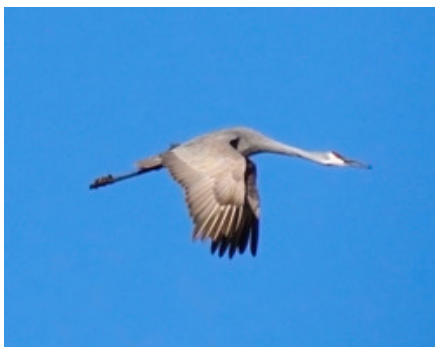
Spring is the best time to pick up your binoculars and appreciate the amazing journey taking place in front of us. Millions of birds are returning from warmer climates- sometimes thousands of miles and across oceans - as they make their way back to summer feeding and nesting grounds. It is estimated that more than 350 billion of North America's migrating birds (more than 300 species) rely on the Mississippi Flyway each spring. This Flyway is one of four major paths that birds follow on their way north or south every year, and Wisconsin plays an important role in this long trek, as birds use our rich areas of rivers, wetlands, forests, prairies and yes, even backyard gardens and feeders to seek food and shelter. They mostly fly at night, starting shortly after sunset and stop over to rest and feed during daylight hours. But humans may be hindering this process with our carefully mown lawns, our brightly illuminated night skies and clear windows.

Join the City of Lake Geneva's Avian Committee on Tuesday, May 12 for a **Tuesday@2** program on bird migration at the Geneva Lake Museum. Two experts will help us understand how we can help birds survive this rigorous journey.

Carol Elkins is a Conservation@Home consultant for the Geneva Lake Conservancy and a University of Wisconsin Master Naturalist. She is passionate about habitat conservation and advocates for healthy land, water and wildlife and is thrilled to share her knowledge about native plants for wild birds.

Adam McCulloch is the Education and Outreach Manager at the Geneva Lake Astrophysics and STEAM Society (GLAS). Adam manages GLAS's Dark Skies program, which encourages local communities to adopt best practices for maintaining dark night-time skies in Walworth County. He will help us understand light pollution and how the night sky is threatened by careless use of artificial light.

Come join us for **Tuesday@2** on May 12, at 2 p.m. at the Geneva Lake Museum, 255 Mill St., Lake Geneva. Please note: Reservations are required for Tuesday@2 programs, as they have a maximum of 100 attendees. Museum members free, non-members \$8. Email your reservations to staff@genevalakemuseum.org or call 262-248-6060.



Mark them with ribbon. Leave them standing.
They're feeding every nest on your block.



Your oak — supports
400+ caterpillar species



Chickadee — needs
6,000-9,000 caterpillars
per clutch



One clutch —
hundreds of feeding
trips per day



MATH BOX

- 1 oak → 400+
caterpillar species
- 6,000-9,000 per
chickadee clutch
- Hundreds of
trips per day
- Every nest on
your block fed

HACK PANEL



April

June

The hack: tie ribbon. Don't spray. Leave through June.

The tree budgets for the caterpillars. The birds depend on it.

Field Trip

Tuesday, May 12, 2026

8:00 AM – Noon

Richard Bong State Recreation Area – 26313 Burlington Road. Kansasville, WI

Open to the public! (State Park Sticker Required)

Join us for a morning of birding at **Bong SRA**. We will do some hiking and some stationary scanning for birds at one of the top bird-watching locations in the state. Situated in the northwest corner of Kenosha County, the property has an interesting history and is a major destination for outdoor recreation. It has also been officially recognized as an IBA (Important Bird Area) by both Audubon and the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Partnership. For more information about this, visit the following website: [Wisconsinbirds/IBA](https://wisconsinbirds.org/IBA)

Meet at the Molinaro Visitor Center parking lot. From there, we will proceed to various birding hotspots throughout the property. Please contact us and let us know if you are interested in attending this field trip. <https://lakelandaudubon.com/contact> Call or Text: +1 (262) 729-9702_

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Bird Walks

Saturdays

11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Big Foot Beach State Park

N1550 S Lakeshore Drive, Lake Geneva, WI

Meet in the main parking area to the right of the entrance station a little before 11:00 AM. A state park sticker (\$28, \$13 if age 65 or older) or daily pass (\$8, \$3 if age 65 or older) is required to enter Big Foot Beach State Park.

Sundays

11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

White River County Park

6503 Sheridan Springs Road, Lyons, WI

Get out and enjoy one of the best parks Walworth County has to offer. We'll walk the trails and be on the lookout for birds and other critters. We'll also watch for plant blooms and other interesting elements of nature. Meet at the kiosk by the parking lot a little before 11:00 AM.

Please contact us to let us know you are interested in attending a walk.

<https://lakelandaudubon.com/contact>

Call or Text: +1 (262) 729-9702

The Chat is the newsletter of the Lakeland Audubon Chapter of the National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 473, Elkhorn, WI 53121. Subscription is \$15 per year for printed copies sent by US mail.