

## FORTY YEARS of HOT SPRINGS VILLAGE AUDUBON SOCIETY: 1974-2014

Written for the 40th Anniversary Celebration in April, 2014

Organization - The first homes were built in Hot Springs Village in 1971. In February of 1974, a call went out from John Whelan, then general manager of the Property Owners Association, for a get-together of anyone who would be interested in designating our new community an official "bird sanctuary," primarily to support the endangered Eastern Bluebird population. From the group responding, a steering committee was formed with the following: John Whelan, Ed Pape, B. B. Burgess, Glenn Lund, Lee Warner, A. D. Penniman, Mary Klingler and Mary Hopkins. They decided to form an affiliate membership with the National Audubon Society, with a charter membership of 22 Village residents on April 24, 1974. The first elected officers were: President, B.B. Burgess; Vice President, Mary Klingler; Secretary/Treasurer, Glenn Lund.

Bluebird Program - The newly formed Audubon Society immediately embarked on its first goal which was to build and install 300 bluebird houses on the new DeSoto Golf Course and in members' yards. During the first ten years, the number of young bluebirds fledged each year increased from 206 to 496. As new golf courses were added, new bluebird boxes were built and installed by Wayne Tice and maintained and monitored by volunteers. From 1995 through 1999, Les Daniels was co-chairman of the Bluebird program with Wayne. Then in 2000 Les Daniels took over the program and has continued in that role. The bluebird house program established at the earliest meetings has continued to grow and expand. There are now more than 300 bird houses installed, monitored, and maintained on nine golf courses with over 1,000 Bluebirds fledged each year from 2002.

House and Feeder Construction and Sales - During the early years, Wayne Tice was in charge of both construction and sales in addition to his role as Chair of the bluebird monitoring program. In October of 1987, Wayne began selling houses and feeders at the Arts & Crafts Fairs. In 1999 Maury Baker assumed the responsibility of construction and sales of houses and feeders. Harry Ferris began putting the houses and feeders together for Wayne in 1997 and continued to do that for Maury. Wayne introduced his booklet, "Bluebirds, A Plan For Survival" in 1999. It described the bluebird habitat and distribution, included an incubation and feeding summary and provided pictures and information about boxes and feeders.

Field Trips - In April of 1974, the first "field trip" was a bird walk leaving from the DeSoto Fire Station into the "wilds" across DeSoto Blvd, now known as Valencia Courts. In 1975, the program of field trips was expanded to include a January or February trip to the Holla Bend Wildlife Refuge in northern Arkansas to see eagles, great flocks of Snow and Canada Geese. Field trips began on barges of Lake Ouachita escorted by the Park Naturalist. Later, Lou Leonatti organized field trips in January and February for eagle sightings; in March, April or May for spring migration sightings; and in November for waterfowl sightings. The most popular locations were: Holla Bend National Wildlife Refuge, Pinnacle Mountain State Park, Hulsey Fish Hatchery in Hot Springs, Bona Dea Trail in Russellville, Easley Creek Preserve in Arkadelphia and Richardson Bottoms Jessieville Forest District. Lou continued to lead field trips through fall of 2004. At that time, Maury Baker, Clint Sowards, and Carolyn Minson began sharing responsibility for field trips.

Bird Lists - In 1976, Harold Hopkins, as official tabulator, began a list of birds sighted within Hot Springs Village, and 128 species were noted. In 1991, Lou Leonatti began keeping records of annual sightings within the Village boundaries. Villagers notified him of the date and location of each sighting. The total count at the end of several years varied from 110 to 130. The final year for this activity was 1998 and the compilation served as the basis for preparation of the Checklist of Birds of Hot Springs Village.

Early Donations - When the Society began meeting in the newly completed Coronado Community Center in 1976, the group wanted to make a contribution to the beautiful new facility. The chosen committee selected the three stunning, limited edition, bird lithographs now hanging in the lobby at the Center. Later, in 1981, the Society also contributed the pictures of the eagle and the heron. Sometime during the 1990's, the club gave \$500 to Ouachita National Park for signs for Richardson's Bottoms on Highway 298 West. The Society has continued to be a regular contributor to maintenance of the Ecology Camp, The Nature Conservancy and various other wildlife and conservation organizations.

Christmas Bird Count - In 1977, Helen Pfeiffer (a most dedicated and knowledgeable birder, who had moved to the Village in 1976) enlisted our local Society to participate in the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count. Helen led the count until December 1997 when she handed the job over to Lou Leonatti. After ten years of coordinating the CBC, Lou turned the CBC coordinator position over to Lynn Sackett. Chris Cash and Paul Cukjati assumed CBC responsibilities in 2013.

Helen also coordinated a nesting bird survey in the late 1990s and held her last official position as secretary in 1998.

Bird ID Classes - Helen Pfeiffer began holding classes in bird identification to assist newcomers in this fascinating hobby and leading field trips in the area for "practice." She turned the Bird ID classes over to Lou Leonatti in 1989, who taught the classes through 1998. Al Behm was the instructor from then until 2007, when Keith Salisbury took over the instruction.

Bird Seed Sales - In 1980, the Village Audubon Society undertook a challenging new project to benefit all the Village residents: Bird Seed Savings Day. Dick Johnson organized the first sale and took orders for bags of a large variety of bird foods, which were then dispensed on one weekend in October. In 1994 the project became a regular semi-annual event with Ned Cole coordinating the sales

through Fall of 2000. Harry Thomas handled seed sales from Spring of 2001 through Fall of 2003. Diane Condon took over the Bird Seed Sale in 2004 and coordinated the sales with the assistance of her husband, Dick.

Educational Materials for Local Schools - In 1986, the fundraisers made it possible for the society to donate materials to Jessieville elementary library. In 1987, library materials were donated to all three local schools. The funds were spent on bird reference books. In 2001 we began donating Audubon Adventures (a National Audubon publication prepared specifically for elementary students) or other educational materials related to birds or nature for fourth grade students at Fountain Lake, Jessieville, and Mountain Pine schools.

Ecology Camp - In 1983 the Village Audubon Society began to sponsor one \$200 scholarship for a student from Jessieville school to attend the Arkansas Audubon Ecology Camp each year. In 1987, scholarships of \$225 each were given to one student at each of the three local schools - Fountain Lake, Jessieville, and Mountain Pine. In January of 1994, HSV Audubon increased their sponsorship of Halberg Ecology Camp scholarships from one to two for each of the local schools. In 1997 one senior scholarship was awarded in addition to the usual six for first year campers. Since 1998, HSV Audubon has granted at least two scholarships to each area school, and if students are invited back as senior campers or advanced campers, the group funds those, too. Some years, HSV Audubon has paid for as many as nine camp scholarships, which are all funded by the profits of Seed Sales, Houses and Feeder Sales, plus individual donations. Wayne Tice managed our camper selection from 1983 to 1987. Josie Farrell handled our camper selection from 1987 to 1993. Josie and Sara Schoelhorn covered the Chairmanship from 1994 to 1995. Peggy Langston was Coordinator for selection of Campers from 1995 to 1996. Sara Shoelhorn had the responsibility from 1996-1997. In 1997 Josie Farrell became coordinator again.

The Chirp - Clarence Mantooth began publishing a newsletter called *The Chirp* in 1987. In 1990, Wanda Schmitz, Daisy Foote, and Helen Pfeifer shared the role of Editors. Barbara Baker began working on *The Chirp* in Spring of 2003 and Angela Taylor became Editor in 2012.

Trails - Habitat preservation within the Village has been encouraged by the HSV Audubon Society. Lou Leonatti chaired HSV Trails Committee who took on the task of deciding where to build the first trail. The selected location on Minorca Road was in a flood plane and unlikely to be suitable for buildings. In a letter dated June, 8, 1992, the President of Cooper Communities, Inc. granted permission to HSV Audubon Society, in conjunction with the POA Trails Committee, to build what was to become the first loop of Cedar Creek Trail (Bluebird Path). Lou's plan for the trail was approved and money for construction of the trail was included in the 1993 POA budget. HSV Audubon contributed additional funds for construction of the trail. On December 9, 1983, Cedar Creek Trail was opened and soon became the most used Village trail. Lou Leonatti began leading both bird and native plant walks along the trail and developed a plant list of all native plants that were identified along the trail. A second letter from Cooper Communities on July 29, 1994 gave permission for construction for an extension, which became Kingfisher Path. Copies of Lou Leonatti's hand drawings of the plans for both loops are in the manuals for POA Trails Committee members. In spring of 2003, the route for Cardinal Path was flagged by Audubon members, Ned Wilson and Carolyn Minson, who were both on the POA Trails Committee at that time. Cardinal Path was officially opened in November, 2003.

In 1998, Lou Leonatti began planning and getting permission for the construction of Magellan Beaver Dam Trail. He then designed the path of the trail. Lou organized four teams who worked for twelve weeks each year in late winter of 1999 through 2001. The trail was constructed entirely by Audubon members with hand tools. Magellan Beaver Dam Trail was opened in December of 2000, and for three years after that, HSV Audubon members maintained the trail. Villagers will always owe thanks to Lou for having the foresight to understand that a system of Trails were an essential component of the Village.

501 (c) (3) - In 1999 Hot Springs Village Audubon, under the leadership of President Wanda Schmitz, with Henry Browder completing most of the application, applied for a Certificate of Incorporation of Domestic Non-Profit Corporation. During the October Audubon meeting of 1999, Wanda announced the receipt of the tax-free charitable gift 501 (c) (3) status effective January, 1999.

Helen Pfeifer, Wayne Tice, and Lou Leonatti gave much of themselves and their love of nature to their fellow birders in the Village and in the state. For many years, each was a respected leader of HSV Audubon.

The Hot Springs Village Audubon Society continued to grow and expand in membership, in varied pursuits, and in community involvement, far surpassing the optimism of that small group that first gathered in February of 1974.

SOURCES: Robertson, Mary Ann: "HSV Audubon Society Turns Silver, Enthusiasts Flock to Join the Group." Sentinel-Record 15 Apr. 1999.

"Hot Springs Village Audubon Society." Jun. 1986