

Birding Open Houses at the Almonte Lagoon in Strange Times

In September of 2020, during a year of pandemic, tropical storms, forest fires, rising sea levels, a general unease about where our global economic system is taking us, about how the genetically engineered food system requires the use of herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, and energy-based fertilizers to remain viable, about how the world is slowly going squirrelly because of unstable, self-centered quasi-dictators, we at the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalist went ... birding at the Almonte Lagoon.

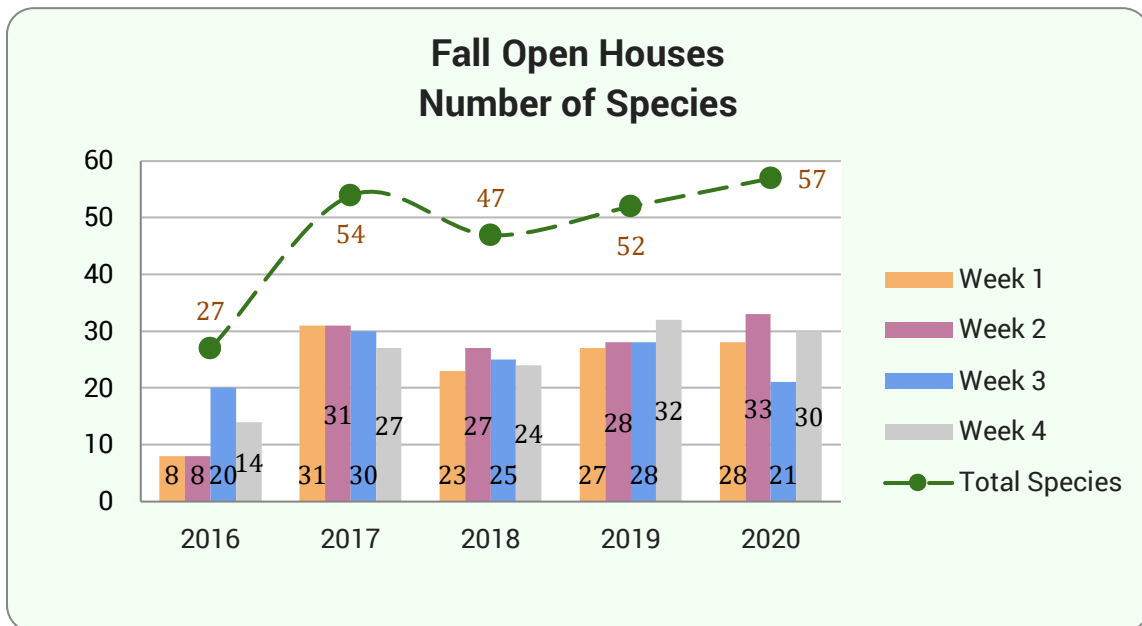
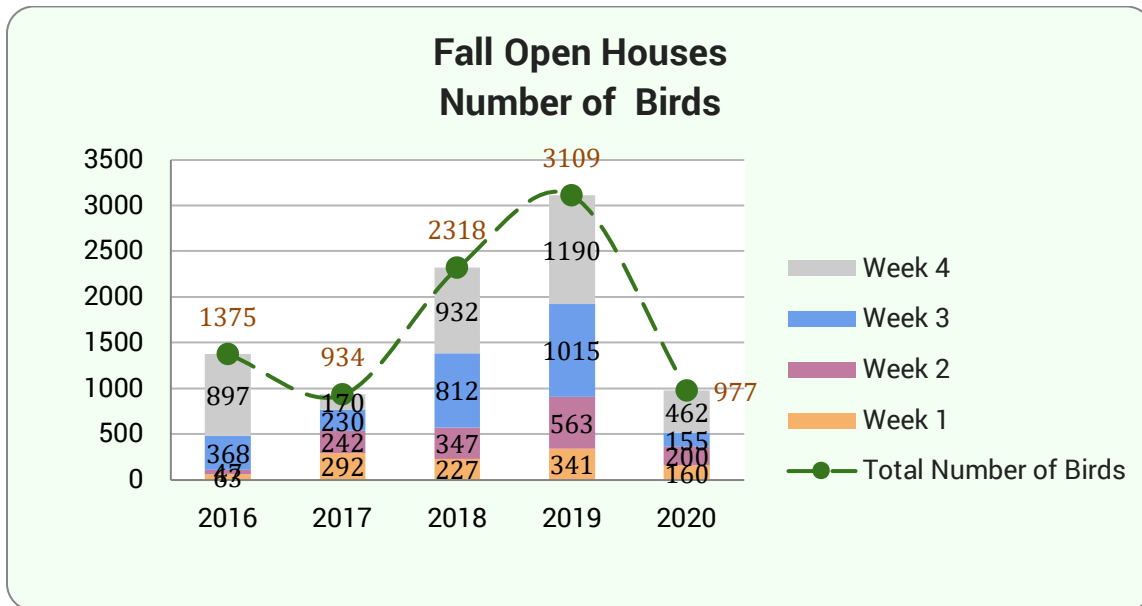
Let's face it, somewhere deep in our psyche, we all have a tiny streak of self-centeredness, and if birds are congregating at the local water treatment ponds, well, we're gonna go, no matter what.

So once again, we held the traditional Fall Open House. Of course, we observed strict social distancing measures: masks, two-meters separation, a maximum number of 4 people in the shelter at any given time, disinfected window sills, hand sanitizer for anyone who wished it, and a strict compliance with the maximum of number of people allowed for an outdoor event.

Did the birds cooperate? Well, yes and no. It was a strange year. The total number of birds was down, way down, yet the number of species was at record level. Even though we held five Open Houses during the month (one more than usual) the charts and table you see below are based only on the first four weeks in order to keep data continuity with the previous years.

Despite the less-than-thrilling number of birds, we enjoyed the exercise. Of note, was a Merlin treating us with amazing flight acrobatics. When it finally swooped down over the pond, a couple dozen swallows skedaddled out of sight in a hurry. It took half an hour before they slowly emerged from their hiding places. There is always something interesting to see in nature.

After the last Open House, we packed our spotting scopes, said goodbye to each other, and strolled back to our car. The world, after all, was not always as bad as it seemed on the news ... if you're not a swallow, that is.



Species and Number of Birds

American Black Duck	8	Mallard	42
American Crow	9	Merlin	3
American Goldfinch	6	Mourning Dove	4
American Robin	1	Northern Cardinal	1
American Wigeon	4	Pectoral Sandpiper	1
Bald Eagle	2	Pied-billed Grebe	2
Barn Swallow	33	Red-eyed Vireo	1
Black-capped Chickadee	10	Red-tailed Hawk	1
Black-throated Green Warbler	1	Red-winged Blackbird	142
Blue Jay	21	Ring-necked Duck	7
Blue-winged Teal	95	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	7
Brown Creeper	1	Scarlet Tanager	2
Canada Goose	408	Sharp-shinned Hawk	1
Cedar Waxwing	31	Song Sparrow	17
Common Gallinule	1	Swamp Sparrow	1
Common Goldeneye	5	Tree Swallow	17
Common Raven	7	Trumpeter Swan	5
Double-crested Cormorant	1	Turkey Vulture	19
Downy Woodpecker	1	White-breasted Nuthatch	3
Eastern Kingbird	1	Yellow Warbler	1
Eastern Meadowlark	6	Yellow-rumped Warbler	6
Eastern Phoebe	4	Common Nighthawk	1
Eastern Wood-Pewee	1	Semipalmated Sandpiper	3
Gray Catbird	1	Mourning Warbler	1
Green Heron	3	Cape May Warbler	1
Green-winged Teal	4	Chestnut-sided Warbler	3
Hairy Woodpecker	3	Lincoln's Sparrow	1
Hooded Merganser	14		
Lesser Yellowlegs	1	Total Numbers of Birds	977
Magnolia Warbler	1	Total Number of Species	57