



**Augustana College**  
 Rock Island, Illinois  
 Environmental Education or Outreach

**SCHOOL**

Augustana College is a private, 4-year year with 2,500 students located in Rock Island, Illinois.

**ABSTRACT**

Beginning 2008, the Augustana College Darwin Club (<https://sites.google.com/a/augustana.edu/darwin-club/>) has sponsored biannual bird walks through the Augustana College campus. The goal of these walks is to offer the campus community an opportunity to learn about and appreciate more the natural history of the campus. In spring 2011, a bird walk was completed as part of the club's celebration of Earth Day. (Unfortunately, only one walk was completed in 2010-11.) Approximately 20 members of the campus joined in the walk including students, staff, and faculty. Binoculars and bird guides were distributed to all participants. Several faculty of the biology department with expertise in herpetology, botany, and ornithology were present that unexpectedly enabled a broad natural history experience, including birds. We observed 30 bird species, two reptiles (painted turtle and garter snake), and talked about several interesting plants (e.g., *Ranunculus*). Bird observations were uploaded to eBird.com, an online bird checklist program. An email was sent to the campus that described our findings and experiences. Several more individuals responded to this summary explaining that they could not make the walk, but appreciated very much receiving the information about the walk. The Darwin Club tries to model its activities after the life of Charles Darwin and continues to offer opportunities for exploring the natural world and the philosophy of science. The bird walk incurred no expenses.

**GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

**Goals**

The mission of the Augustana College Darwin Club is to inspire in others an awareness and appreciation of the natural world by hosting events, such as campus walks that highlight abundant and easily observable organisms.

**Quantifiable targets/goals:**

- Engage as many members of the campus community in bird walks
- Observe as many bird species as possible on campus
- Focus on a subset of common species and provide natural history information on these species
- Summarize the observations of the bird walk and send the summary to the campus via email

Birds seen:		Darwin Club / Bird Walk Summary / 12 May 2011	
Great Blue Heron	<p>We focused on bird watching, but also explored the natural history of the campus.</p>  	<p>Dr. Muir captured a female garter snake along the slough. He explained that these females give birth to live young, which is unusual since most snakes lay eggs instead.</p> 	<p>Dr. Dziadyk botanized...he found the plant <i>Ranunculus</i> (Latin for "a little frog") growing next to the slough. <i>Pliny the Elder</i> named these plants because they lived in places where frogs (genus <i>Rana</i>) were common.</p>
Turkey Vulture			
Cooper's Hawk			
Mourning Dove			
Chimney Swift			
Red-bellied Woodpecker			
Downy Woodpecker			
Red-eyed Vireo			
Blue Jay			
Black-capped Chickadee			
White-breasted Nuthatch			
House Wren			
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher			
Gray-cheeked Thrush			
American Robin			
Gray Catbird			
European Starling			
Tennessee Warbler			
Nashville Warbler			
Magnolia Warbler			
Common Yellowthroat			
Chipping Sparrow			
Northern Cardinal			
Rose-breasted Grosbeak			
Common Grackle			
Brown-headed Cowbird			
Baltimore Oriole			
House Finch			
American Goldfinch			
House Sparrow			
	<p>A total of 30 bird species were observed, including an active Cooper's Hawk nest with nestlings.</p> 	<p>Window-stunned Tennessee Warbler found after the walk</p>	

- Continue to offer two campus bird walks (one each in the spring and fall) each academic year that coincide with bird migration and community events, such as Earth Day
- Continue to include bird species information on eBird.com, an online citizen science database of bird populations in North America
- Continue to maintain an overall campus bird species list using observations from the bird walk
- Develop a simple and informative webpage of the birds of Augustana College

### **Accomplishments and Outcomes**

Engage as many members of the campus community in a bird walk

*Approximately 20 members of the campus attended the spring bird walk. Participants included students, staff, and faculty.*

Observe as many bird species as possible on campus

*We observed 30 species in a wide variety of groups, such as raptors, thrushes, warblers, and finches. Although the timing of the walk, which was scheduled in the late morning at a time when no classes were scheduled and when ambient temperatures were relatively high causing many birds to become less active, compromised the detection of birds.*

Focus on a subset of common species and provide natural history information on these species

*Natural history information was described for the House Sparrow, House Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Cooper's Hawk, and Black-capped Chickadee. For example, we talked about the song, timing and aspects of nesting, and appearance of the Black-capped Chickadee. Unexpectedly, the bird walk also provided opportunities for natural history discussions of organisms other than birds. A herpetologist and botanist attended the walk and natural history information on, for example, the garter snake and Ranunculus, was provided to the group.*

Summarize the observations of the bird walk and send the summary to the campus via email

*A summary of the bird walk was produced on a PowerPoint slide (later converted to JPEG format) and sent to the campus. Included in this summary was a bird list, several pictures taken during the walk, and descriptions of highlights of observations. The summary was also uploaded to Darwin Club website (<https://sites.google.com/a/augustana.edu/darwin-club/>).*

Continue to offer two campus bird walks (one each in the spring and fall) each academic year that coincide with bird migration and community events, such as Earth Day

*The Darwin Club has offered campus field experiences since 2008 and will offer continue to lead bird walks in the future.*

Continue to include bird species information on <http://www.eBird.com>, an online citizen science database of bird populations in North America

*Bird observations (species and numbers of individuals) from all campus walks have been uploaded to [www.eBird.com](http://www.eBird.com).*

Continue to maintain an overall campus bird species list using observations from the bird walk

*A comprehensive bird list (including known observation dates and expected occurrences) is maintained for the campus from the results of bird walks and other bird research activities*

<http://www.bioone.org/doi/abs/10.1676/07-075.1>) on campus. A copy of the bird list is maintained as a PDF attachment at the bottom of <http://www.theovenbird.com>. We have observed and documented 136 species at Augustana.

Develop a simple and informative webpage of the birds of Augustana College  
A webpage is currently being developed that will allow the user to explore the natural history of the campus, including the birds.

### **Challenges and Responses**

Below is a list of major challenges and obstacles:

- Scheduling two dates (actual date and rain date) when the entire campus is “free” and theoretically available to participate in an hour-long bird walk
- Generating interest in participating in a bird walk
- Offering interesting/compelling natural history information on a subset of birds
- Stimulating in participants an appreciation of the natural world via a bird walk
- Providing guidance on how to use binoculars to observe actively moving birds
- Teaching participants the attributes and qualities of bird song, which is the most obvious signal of bird activity in the field

The Darwin Club scheduled two dates at the end of the spring trimester during the off-weeks of the campus convocation time, Thursdays 1030-1130 AM. Weather cooperated on walk day; however, this happened at the end of both the spring trimester and academic year, which represents the busiest time of year for everyone on campus. Heavy advertising (email and hardcopy fliers) and previous bird walks generated interest in attending the field experience. The hardcopy fliers contained vital information (time, location, etc.) and interesting artwork (see reference below) drawn by a member of the Darwin Club.

It is difficult to quantify in participants their interest in the walk and whether the walk generated appreciation for the natural world. Qualitatively, all participants told the Darwin Club that they enjoyed the bird walk very much. It was obvious that participants genuinely cared about the information they learned during the walk by their attentiveness and questions. Several participants join the walk every time it's offered; they enjoy the Darwin Club walks and have told us that the walks have stimulated their interest in birds, which they now watch throughout the year.

### **Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint**

Bird walks are a natural history activity and do not directly address global climate change. However, caring and understanding of the natural world may compliment efforts aimed at addressing global issues, such as climate change.

### **Commentary and Reflection**

Scheduling bird walks is a chore. Plus, the Darwin Club never knows whether anyone will show up for the walk and if the weather will cooperate during a scheduled walk day. Nevertheless, the effort and risks are very much worth it. It is inspiring and gratifying to learn after every walk that all participants enjoyed the experience. They also indicate looking forward to attending the next bird walk. We enjoy

watching birds with folks from a variety of academic (political science, art, literature, sociology, psychology, classics, and math) and professional (administration, staff, faculty, students) backgrounds.

Organizing bird and natural history walks is relatively easy. Success in conducting walks can be achieved by a group dedicated to scheduling and following through by conducting a walk.

## **ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT**

### **Leaders and Supporters**

The Augustana College Darwin Club is a group of individuals who are enamored with the diversity of life on our planet and the mechanisms by which that diversity arose. Again, the club's goal is to inspire awareness and appreciation of the natural world in others and we host events such as field experiences, guest lectures, and discussion sessions. Key individuals helpful in achieving our goals included Matt Craig (Darwin Club President), Don Planey (Darwin Club Treasurer), and Steve Hager (Darwin Club Faculty Advisor).

### **Funding and Resources**

The bird walk incurred no costs. It should be noted that past support from the Biology Department allowed for the acquisition and use of binoculars and bird field guides.

### **Education and Community Outreach**

The bird walk was a campus activity; the Darwin Club is not aware of any interest in the event by the local community.

### **National Wildlife Federation's Campus Ecology Program**

The Campus Ecology program provided an online outlet for the Darwin Club to submit information about field experiences offered to Augustana College.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Dr. Stephen Hager, Associate Professor, Department of Biology, 309-794-3439,  
stevehager@augustana.edu

**Case study submitted by:** Dr. Stephen Hager

## **MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL**

### **Campus Sustainability History**

"Augustana College is striving towards sustainability through its academic programs and institutional policies. In 2007, the Augustana College Board of Trustees approved a broad and ambitious action plan in an effort to reduce the college's environmental footprint. A central point of this plan was the establishment of the Campus Sustainability Committee, composed of students and members of the faculty and staff. This committee oversees and helps facilitate numerous activities on campus, including recommendations of institutional policies. In addition, Global Affect, a long-standing student organization, supports numerous environmental activities on campus."

(<http://www.augustana.edu/x11531.xml>)

**“Interesting Artwork” reference above:** [https://7444664392436326959-a-augustana-edu-sites.googlegroups.com/a/augustana.edu/darwin-club/past-events/Bird-Watching-2.jpg?attachauth=ANoY7cpKAPga3Nn-kINUERIVs5ggwhy3j6AlrEfaqY3ORpGW2Exzr3K2BeHtGVodqD55HG0r94KP5tgggYL9diEHIObn3TSjytYP6UekCjos9J60VtAKPOvh4E9Gd\\_dTh7UoDeNmZip5w6pLTL8WnkxQ940QU91qGEcw12O3ebh9\\_R-KMultmOeu1FzXZKskVI52wuPrO0LA5Hsfno2Ym7VGrQIm4TEwftDWkPiZPZoBxmVjMp0COUk%3D&attredirects=1](https://7444664392436326959-a-augustana-edu-sites.googlegroups.com/a/augustana.edu/darwin-club/past-events/Bird-Watching-2.jpg?attachauth=ANoY7cpKAPga3Nn-kINUERIVs5ggwhy3j6AlrEfaqY3ORpGW2Exzr3K2BeHtGVodqD55HG0r94KP5tgggYL9diEHIObn3TSjytYP6UekCjos9J60VtAKPOvh4E9Gd_dTh7UoDeNmZip5w6pLTL8WnkxQ940QU91qGEcw12O3ebh9_R-KMultmOeu1FzXZKskVI52wuPrO0LA5Hsfno2Ym7VGrQIm4TEwftDWkPiZPZoBxmVjMp0COUk%3D&attredirects=1)

**Image credit: : Stephen B. Hager**