

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a – million migratory birds?!

Alexandra Silva, GROW Commissioner, M.S. Ecology & Evolution

Summer is in full swing, marked by colorful garden blooms and the bioluminescence of lighting bugs. While the days will remain warm for a while longer, by mid-August one of the first tell-tale signs of the coming fall will begin: Bird Migration.

From August 15 through November 1, millions upon millions of birds will fly south through Illinois along the Mississippi Flyway, a major migratory route connecting breeding grounds in the U.S. and Canada with overwintering areas in Mexico, and Central and South America.

Within just one night last September, [BirdCast.info](https://birdcast.info) (which produces real-time maps of migration intensity) estimated nearly 33 million birds crossed over our state. In Cook County alone, given our proximity to Lake Michigan and mosaic of remaining greenspace, bird migration can reach upwards of 1.5 million birds in a single night.

According to iNaturalist.org, a social network used to record global biodiversity, Westchester has hosted many of the 250 species of birds known to migrate through Chicago. Ovenbirds, described as a chunkier-than-average warbler with a jaunty tail, spend summer farther north and then pass through on their way to Mexico and Central America, but at least one stopped in the vicinity of 31st and Kemman Avenue last September.

Others, like Ruby-throated hummingbirds, may spread into Canada come spring or opt to make Illinois their summer home, with documented sightings at Wolf Road Prairie and areas just north of the Park District's Community Center. Weighing in between 0.1-0.2 ounces (less than a nickel!), many of these iridescent individuals will travel over 2000 miles to Costa Rica come fall.

Barn swallows make similar appearances in Westchester, then overwinter as far south as the southern tip of Chile. Round-trip, barn swallow migrations can total over 12,000 miles per year! (For Monty Python fans, please note these swallows are NOT laden with coconuts.)

As birds flock together, how can Westchester help?

Whether migrating a few states down or thousands of miles away, the majority of species migrate at night. Overnight hours are thought to allow migratory birds to take advantage of cooler temperatures and gentler winds, avoid predators, and, most importantly, to navigate by the moon and stars.

As a result, light pollution is one of the biggest obstacles our migrating aviators face. Artificial lights at night, whether from fluorescing office buildings or the porchlight next door, illuminate the night sky and compete with the moon and stars to disorient and attract birds. These birds may spend vital energy reserves flying in the wrong direction, or even in circles, and once they draw close to buildings, they are at much higher risk of colliding with glass. Glass collisions (often windows that reflect vegetation) may be instantaneously fatal or stun birds long enough to be preyed upon.

To help them secure safe passage, please consider these recommendations for your home and office spaces during the fall migration (Aug. 15 - Nov. 1):

- Adjust outdoor lighting so it is:
 - *Useful*: Use light only if it is needed (turn off decorative lighting from 11 p.m. to daybreak)
 - *Targeted*: Direct light so it falls only where it is needed (shaded, pointing down)
 - *Low level*: Light should be no brighter than necessary (draw blinds at night)
 - *Controlled*: Use light only when it is needed (via motion sensors and/or timers)
 - *Warm-colored*: Use warmer-color lights where possible (color temperature at or below 2700)
- Add bird-friendly decals to existing glass, and opt for windows that are less reflective or more opaque when the time comes.

Finally, to help both migrating birds and our year-round residents, please:

- Keep cats indoors or restrict their outdoor movements using leashes and catios to reduce unnecessary predation and
- Plant a variety of structurally-diverse native flora (think trees, bushes, flowers and grass) to help sustain our avian neighbors.

With little tweaks to our outdoors, Westchester residents can help ensure our avian neighbors can safely take flight to traverse continents. Learn more at <https://abcbirds.org/news/dark-skies-help-birds/>



<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/193337017>

Caption: A ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) mid-flight.

License: Public Domain



<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/157843648>

Caption: Scarlet Tanagers (*Piranga olivacea*) are nocturnal migrants, flying between North and South America across the Gulf of Mexico.

Last Chance for Federal Tax Savings on Electric Vehicles, Solar Panels and More 💰

Elizabeth Wiseman-Chase, GROW Commissioner

Recent legislation will end Federal tax incentives on electric vehicles, rooftop solar and battery storage, home weatherization, and installation of a heat pump HVAC system or hot water heater.*

* Please consult your tax advisor on how these incentives may apply to you

🌞 Electric Vehicles and Home EV Chargers:

The Federal Clean Vehicle Tax Credit incentive of up to \$7,500 for purchasing a new EV, and up to \$4,000 for a used one will end on September 30th, 2025. If you're in the market for an EV, there is still time to take advantage of this incentive. ComEd is still offering incentives for installation of a home charger, and some manufacturers are offering attractive financing incentives.

🌞 Rooftop Solar and/or Battery Storage

The Residential Clean Energy Credit of 30% for the cost of purchase and installation. Systems must be installed and placed into service by December 31, 2025.

There is an additional group purchasing discount (up to 17%) offered by the Switch Together Program that has been vetted by Citizens Utility Board, the Midwest Renewable Energy Association, and Cook County. The program is scheduled to open on August 6th, and the decision deadline will be September 3rd. The program cannot guarantee projects will be installed by the end of the year (which would give customers a better chance at claiming the tax credit) but that is the goal.

🌞 Home Energy Efficiency

The Energy Efficient Home Improvement Credit of up to 30% of the cost of purchase and installation. Systems must be installed and placed into service by December 31, 2025.

There are aggregate limits for this credit: \$1,200 limit for improvements like windows, doors, insulation, and some heating and cooling equipment. A separate limit of \$2,000 applies to heat pump (HVAC) systems, heat pump water heaters, and biomass stoves/boilers. Upgrading your electrical panel to 200 amps is eligible for a 30% credit, up to \$600. Combining an electrical panel upgrade alongside a heat pump could potentially allow for \$2,600 in Federal tax credits. Upgrading the electrical panel with installation of rooftop solar and/or battery storage may qualify you for an uncapped 30% credit on the panel upgrade.

ComEd is currently offering ENERGY STAR rebates.

For more information, contact ewchase@westchester-il.gov

GREEN FACT OF THE MONTH:

In 2022, a juvenile godwit flew 8,425 miles, from Alaska to Tasmania, in 11 days without stopping, setting a world record. Source: USGS.gov

RECIPE OF THE MONTH:

It's a great time to enjoy seasonal produce fresh from the garden or local farm stand (like The Farm at 31st St & Kensington Ave). Eating seasonal produce offers delicious freshness and can also be economical. Try a Caprese Sandwich for a snack or light meal and enjoy all the seasonal goodness!

Caprese Sandwich

measure ingredients to your liking

Ingredients

- Ripe tomato, sliced (heirloom tomatoes are a good choice)
- Fresh mozzarella, sliced
- Basil leaves
- Olive oil
- Bread of your choosing (baguette, Italian, sourdough, focaccia, etc.)
- Salt (sea or kosher)

Optional add-ons:

- Pepper
- Balsamic vinegar
- Pesto sauce
- Arugula or other greens

Instructions

- Place sliced mozzarella on bread, place tomato on top, garnish with basil leaves, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with kosher or sea salt. Add optional items to your taste. Enjoy!

Have a plant-based recipe you'd like to share with the community? Send it to GROW@westchester-il.gov for consideration for future newsletters.