

Lake, Cook counties top state's endangered species list  
By Jamie Sotonoff Daily Herald  
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[PHOTO] An Osprey (*pandion haliaetus*) is one of the 112 endangered or threatened species in Cook County. Lake and Cook counties have more endangered and threatened species than any other county in the state. courtesy of ARKive

[PHOTO] The juvenile Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*) is one of the endangered species in Illinois. Lake and Cook counties have more endangered and threatened species than any other county in the state. courtesy of ARKive

[PHOTO] The Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) is one of 464 endangered of threatened species in Illinois. courtesy of ARKive

[PHOTO] The Blanding's Turtle is an endangered species in Cook and Lake counties. Cook and Lake counties have more endangered and threatened species than any other county in the state. courtesy of ARKive

[PHOTO] The Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) is one of the threatened species in Cook County. courtesy of ARKive

A male Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exilis*) is perched on vegetation. The birds are among the threatened species in Cook and Lake counties. [PHOTO]

You probably haven't noticed many Snowy Egrets or tufts of American slough grass in suburban natural areas.

That's because they're among the 464 endangered or threatened mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and plants in Illinois. Lake and Cook counties have more endangered and threatened species than any other counties in the state, according to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Illinois Natural Heritage Database..

Lake County has 138 endangered and threatened species and Cook County has 112. The other collar counties have few by comparison: McHenry County has 83 endangered and threatened species, DuPage County has 62 and Kane County has 55.

"People think, 'Oh, it's only one little thing' ... but the more components you remove from the ecosystem, the more it will be in trouble," said Joe Kath, the DNR's endangered species manager.

Local endangered species will be among the conservation topics discussed at today's second annual Fill the ARK in Illinois gala at the Racquet Club of Illinois in Chicago. Hosted by the nonprofit group ARKive, the event's special guests will include former Motorola CEO Chris Galvin, Google Earth founder John Hanke and renowned oceanographer and aquanaut Dr. Sylvia Earle.

While state officials said the numbers on this list have held steady for years, Cook and Lake counties continually rank highest because they have the most development, which often means fewer and lower-quality wetlands, Kath said. A wetland might look fine, with lots of cattails and reeds, but the water can be polluted with salt and oil runoff, or the shallow water areas could have been taken over by invasive plants.

Kath said the suburbs have a few natural area "hot spots" where many of the endangered or threatened species are, including Illinois State Beach Park in Zion.

Local endangered species include a number of plants, like the wood orchid and downey Solomon's seal, as well as creatures as diverse as the banded killifish and the black-billed cuckoo.

If not for the aggressive county-level conservation efforts, the numbers of endangered species would be growing, said Anne Mankowski, director of the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board. She praised the many programs suburban counties have in place to manage their natural areas and protect plants and animals.

"These species are important for a whole lot of reasons," Mankowski said. "Because there are more people (in these counties), there's a lot more awareness and a lot more interest."

That's why state officials encourage people to get involved. Kath suggested people start with simple things, such as paying attention to the volume of garbage they produce and watching the impact of development in their communities.

"A single person's voice can have an influence on the way a development proceeds," he said. "So speak up. Recognize that you have a voice and a say."

Several factors can land a species on the endangered list. Among them, the animal or plant must have once populated Illinois but has now dropped to low populations, or restricted habitats, because of habitat destruction, collecting or other pressures from development. It can also be classified as endangered or threatened if it's far removed from the species' normal range.

For a full list of the state's threatened and endangered species, go to

[dnr.illinois.gov/ESPB/Documents/ETChecklist2011.pdf](http://dnr.illinois.gov/ESPB/Documents/ETChecklist2011.pdf).

For county-by-county breakdown, go to

[dnr.illinois.gov/ESPB/Documents/ET\\_by\\_County.pdf](http://dnr.illinois.gov/ESPB/Documents/ET_by_County.pdf).