

**WAS Owl Prowl Report** *By Ray Stocking*

On Sunday, March 6th, Harold Eyster and I led the “owl prow” field trip in western Washtenaw County for 11 WAS members. Those lucky enough to attend were blessed with one of the most amazing vocal duets ever heard from two Barred Owls. The prow was held a day later than planned after poor weather conditions on Saturday forced us to postpone. The decision to reschedule proved to be a good one. We passed on the Great Horned Owl simply because there were no known active nests viewable safely from side roads or on public land. We chose instead to focus on the Barred Owl and Eastern Screech Owls.

We arrived at the presumed Barred Owl location around 7:00 pm. Five minutes later, we started calling for the owl(s). We waited patiently for 35 minutes (!!!) and, just as I was ready to call it a night and go for the screech owls, not one, but TWO Barred Owls came from the west and landed in the tree directly in front of us. Most in attendance saw two, but the first bird stayed only 10 seconds and then flew off deeper into the woods. The second



owl stayed long enough for everyone to have outstanding looks. While the sighting of these birds would have been enough to please everyone in attendance, these two birds put on a vocal performance that even put the Stokes audio recording to shame. The owls continued to call out (deeper into the woods) for another 10 minutes before we decided it was time to leave. Patience paid off for everyone here. And we were all rewarded!!!

Next stop was Waters Rd where Harold Eyster decided to put the CD to rest and attempted to call in an Eastern Screech Owl by himself. I have been around many outstanding birders over the years who can whistle the screech call, but never have I heard someone do it so loudly and so confidently. Harold had a screech owl calling back to us in only a matter of minutes. The dialogue between the two (Harold and the bird) was something else. The bird was close, maybe 10-15 feet in front of us, but was never seen. Just like the Barred Owls, we also left this bird as it continued talking to us from the woods.

Thanks to everyone who attended the event and for their understanding and appreciation for owling ethics. It was a great night to be out!

*Barred Owl sketch by Harold Eyster (left)*

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## President's Letter, Sue Johnson

As I sit down to write this letter for the upcoming issue, February's second big snow is still very much present! I am actually a confessed snow enthusiast, but hopefully by the time you read this letter, we will all be smelling the beginning of another Michigan Spring.

Spring migration is obviously a highlight for any serious birder. No doubt, if you've been birding for years, you are looking forward to hearing your first Red-winged Blackbird or catching sight of some of our earliest visitors, perhaps a Yellow-rumped or a Black-and-White Warbler.

But spring migration is also a fabulous time for the beginner birder. The increase in the number of observable species in the county is always exciting, but in my opinion, seeing and hearing multiple individuals of a species, helps the learning curve substantially. Seeing your first Black-throated Blue Warbler and noticing the "handkerchief in his breast pocket" (the hint shared with me on my first warbler outing) is fabulous, but seeing several on one afternoon, or getting one good "life look," engrains that bird's distinguishing features in your memory for years to come.

I will venture to guess that many of our readers are long-time birders, and likely you have clear memories of your first Black-throated Blue (or other wonderful firsts). I do... and it was thrilling. To familiarize myself with a species I'd never seen before was all the more memorable with the help of a more experienced birder who just happened by as I was trying to identify my new discovery.

So, if you're at the point where you chase county lifers and plan big days, maybe take a moment to consider inviting a beginning birder, or interested friend, to join you for a walk. Nothing takes the "I don't know where to begin" out of birding more than a walk with an expert at your side. I might add, it's equally rewarding for the guide. While I won't call myself an expert, I did have the fun of watching a friend see his first Scarlet Tanager – this one perched uncharacteristically low on the Heathdale Glen trail in the Arb. It doesn't get much better than that: both the close encounter with the Tanager and witnessing the unbridled surprise and joy of our friend.

So wherever you fall in the spectrum of birding expertise, I hope you have plans to take full advantage of the coming spring and to enjoy it with others. Make a point to join in on our Spring Migration Walks in Nichols Arboretum, Thursday mornings, starting in April. Or join in on our wonderful Tuesday Evening Birders expeditions that will be offered all five Tuesdays in May. Ask another Washtenaw Audubon member to join you for a Saturday morning walk in the Arb or at Dolph Park. And better yet, make a point to pack your lunch (and windbreaker and gloves) and plan on a day at Point Pelee or Magee Marsh in early May- you won't regret it... and the experienced (and helpful) birders are as plentiful as the migrants!

Happy Birding,  
Sue

## Rare Bird Alerts

### Michigan Bird Report

<http://birdingonthe.net/birdmail.html>

Scroll down to Michigan, Mich-listers, and SE Michigan

## Outing Yields Ivory-billed Woodpecker AND Carolina Parakeet! *By Monty Brown*

On Saturday, February 19, fifteen amateur birders enjoyed the rare treat of getting an extended visit and tour of the Bird Division of the University of Michigan's Museum of Zoology. This facility, which contains approximately 200,000 preserved bird specimens, is available to researchers but is not open to the general public. By arrangement with Janet Hinshaw, manager of the collection, Washtenaw Audubon was able to offer members this opportunity to visit the bird division, learn about its activities and history, and see a small sample of this world-class collection.

Birds from every continent and region are represented. In addition to Michigan, areas with particularly strong representation in the collection include Southwest Mexico, Paraguay, Egypt, Northern India, and the Philippines. The specimens have been collected for decades. Many of them date to the era when birds sought for observation were shot. That practice has long since been abandoned, of course, but birds that die because of collisions with cars or building windows, or even just through natural causes, can end up at the museum, where they have their flesh and skeletons removed and are stuffed.

For our outing, participants had an opportunity to request specific species that they were interested in seeing. Several people wanted, naturally, to see some of the extinct species, such as the Ivory-billed Woodpecker or the Passenger Pigeon. We also got to see the Carolina Parakeet, the only parrot species that was native to the eastern United States. (It has been extinct in the wild since 1904 and completely extinct since 1918.) Other requests enabled viewing of endangered species such as the Great Gray Owl. An array of "peep" sandpiper varieties allowed close comparisons of species that are challenging to distinguish in the field.

Raptors, songbirds, waterfowl, hummingbirds—the collection has them all in abundant variety, and we were able to see at least some of each. At the end of our visit, we got to see a sample of penguins. Everyone was struck by just how huge an Emperor Penguin is. It is one thing to see a bird like that on film, where it is mostly surrounded by others of its kind, quite another to stand next to a preserved one. If you get the chance, you won't forget it.

*Janet Hinshaw, collections manager of the UM Museum of Zoology, Bird Division, with a Carolina Parakeet (Right)*

*Both photos were all taken by Douglas Leffler*



*Ray Stocking holding an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, with Monty's son Rafael in the lower left corner (Left)*

## You can help rare birds!

Many of us enjoy getting out in the spring and summer to watch our favorite birds. Since you are already going out and about, how would you like to contribute your skills to the conservation of several of our imperiled bird species?

We are seeking birders to help us with Henslow's Sparrows, Cerulean Warblers, Kirtland Warblers, Piping Plovers, and Peregrine Falcons.

Do you like long walks on a Great Lakes beach? Are you vacationing this summer on a Great Lake? You can help us look for **Piping Plovers**.

Do you spend time birding in the Waterloo-Pinckney area? You can help us keep track of **Cerulean Warblers**. Do you have a cabin in the northern LP or UP that you visit in June? Have you been on the Kirtland Warbler tour? You can help us find **Kirtland Warblers**!

Do you hike in the backcountry of the western UP? You can help us with **Peregrine Falcons**.

Do you like taking "Sunday Drives"? You can help us check historical locations of **Henslow's Sparrows**.

If you answered "yes" to any of these, please call or email Tom Funke, Director of Conservation, at 517.886.9144 [tfunke@michiganaudubon.org](mailto:tfunke@michiganaudubon.org) and he'll send you a fact sheet on the details of a monitoring program to see if it is for you. Commitments vary, from one morning once a year to checking on five locations twice a year, to spending a week in the northern part of the state.

We have a great need for skilled birders to step forward to help monitor rare birds. Please, consider helping conserve these rare birds by donating a few hours of your time.

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## The New Michigan Recreation Passport is Great! CHECK YES!

When you renew your license plate this time around, be sure to check YES to get a \$10 recreation passport. The passport is good for the same amount of time as your license plate and the \$10 fee gets you into all 98 state parks and recreation areas (no more need to buy those annual or day passes!). As a bonus, your money helps preserve:

- 133 state forest campgrounds
- Nearly 1,000 miles of hiking, biking and skiing trails
- More than 1,000 boat launches
- Historic and cultural sites in state parks
- Parks in your own community

A few other facts:

- The Recreation Passport replaces the state park sticker.
- Motorcycle Passports are just \$5.
- Camping fees will remain in effect for state parks and in state forests.
- The Recreation Passport is valid for the duration of your license plate registration.

Questions? Call 517-241-7275

[http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10365\\_55798\\_56688-234626--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10365_55798_56688-234626--,00.html)

## High Schoolers Combating Light Pollution

We'll start with a little bit about ourselves. Our names are Zach Fogel, Tae ho Kim, and Moritz Lehner, and we are sophomores at Pioneer High School. Our desire to start a chapter of the IDA in Ann Arbor stemmed from an interest in astronomy and frustration over our inability to see stars in the Ann Arbor night sky. Once the chapter is up and running, we plan to talk to the city government and attempt to have light pollution-reducing legislation passed for the city. Next year, we will start a club at Pioneer to raise awareness about light pollution. Now, we'll talk about what we know about light pollution and its effects.

Urban sky glow, which is the brightening of the night sky over inhabited areas, is the force behind the disappearance of the Milky Way in the night sky. It forces observers to travel further to get a view of a clear sky. In addition to these inconveniences, however, urban sky glow has environmental ramifications, affecting the chemical cleansing of the night air. The nitrate radical  $\text{NO}_3$ , a nitrate that exists only at night, reduces the following day's level of atmospheric pollutants by breaking down harmful emissions from factories and automobiles, according to a study led by Harald Stark of NOAA's Earth System Research Laboratory. Sunlight or artificial light causes  $\text{NO}_3$  to become inactive, therefore allowing airborne pollutants to increase.

Urban sky glow is not the only consequence of light pollution, however. Light trespass is another result, occurring when light falls where it is not intended, wanted, or needed. Birds suffer hugely from this. Millions of songbirds die yearly in the United

States and Canada when they collide with lighted communications towers and buildings during their migrations. Low cloud cover or fog raises the risk. In places with large amounts of artificial lighting during the night, birds often think this light signals the advent of dawn; thus, feeding and mating patterns are disrupted. Most owls hunt under the cover of darkness, and have trouble hunting when the skies are lit up by artificial light. These disruptions in feeding and migration can in turn upset entire ecosystems.

As well as harming animals and ecosystems, light pollution has a profound effect on humans. While it does inconvenience stargazers and astronomers by forcing them to travel long distances to find a substantial number of stars to view, the real problem is that it damages our health. According to the American Medical Association, excess lighting hampers our bodies' production of melatonin, a hormone that aids in the regulation of dormancy cycles. A study conducted by the Harvard Medical School showed that when the subjects were exposed to unnatural light before bedtime, they produced less melatonin than usual. Light pollution also impedes the immune system and raises the risk of breast cancer and other health issues. Glare from streetlights and buildings leads to unsafe driving conditions by causing eye pupil restriction and reduced visibility. The AMA estimates that 40 percent of the light emitted from standard streetlights is wasted, which "contributes to excess carbon dioxide production and possibly global warming". Light pollution is a problem that poses a serious threat to our health and safety, and so is one that must be addressed and solved.

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### Highlights of the field trip to Sault Ste. Marie

Bohemian Waxwings, a large flock of more than 150 – behind (west) of the Dafter post office feeding in a crab apple "orchard." Snowy Owl, 2 – one on the SW corner of upper 48 and Centerline Rd and a second at the aforementioned location near Hancock and Townline Rds near Pickford. Both times this owl was seen to the west of Hancock and much closer to 23 Mile Rd. Sharp-tailed Grouse, 9 dancing on a lek – in a field west of Nicolet about a half mile north of 9 Mile Rd. Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawks (including 2 dark morphs) were widely scattered south and west of the Soo. Pine Grosbeaks, Pine Siskins, and Common Redpolls were common at the feeders in Dunbar Forest and in Strong Corners and elsewhere in scattered flocks. We did encounter a large flock of Common Redpolls on Lower Haylake Rd. between 10 and 11 Mile Rds. near the same location as reported by Doman and Robson, but we were unable to find any Hoary Redpoll. We had a single Gray Jay and no Boreal Chickadee on Basnau Rd. We saw no Evening Grosbeaks anywhere including at traditional locations on Basnau Rd. and near the Bear Butt Inn in Eckerman.

## Upcoming WAS Field Trips (April--May, 2011)

By Monty Brown, Field Trip Coordinator ([fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org))

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For more information, go to our webpage. Changes and updates will be made via our Twitter service, the [birders@umich.edu](mailto:birders@umich.edu) listserv and/or our web page at [www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php) with updates as needed. If you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send an e-mail.

**Thursdays in April and May**      **Weekly Spring Migration Walks in Nichols Arboretum** This is an annual series of Thursday morning walks at Nichols Arboretum to observe migrants as they pass through on the way north to their breeding grounds. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to join with other birders of all skill levels. This season's walks will start on April 7 and go through May 26. Park and meet at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off of Geddes Road at 8:00 AM. The walks go until roughly 11:00, but anyone can join or leave the group as his or her schedule requires.

**Fri., April 15**      **Woodcock Walk in Barton Nature Area** The American Woodcock is known for its unusual flying pattern during courtship, which can be seen at dusk in the spring. Park at the Barton Dam lot, across the street from Bird Road on Huron River Drive, and follow the trail around the building to the foot bridge. We will meet right on the other side (the dam side) of the bridge at 7:45 PM. PLEASE NOTE: Do not park in the Barton Nature Area lot on Huron River Drive just after Main Street, or else you will have a long walk back to your car in complete darkness. Please wear good walking shoes and dress warmly (the temperatures drop quickly at sunset). A flashlight will assist you in exiting the park. Plan on returning to your car shortly after 9:00 PM if all goes well.

**April 16--23**      **Dominican Republic** Leader: Bryn Martin      Trip is **FULL**.

**Sun., April 17**      **Waterloo Bog Trail** 8:00-11:00 AM Leader: Dan Sparks-Jackson. Please join us for a hike along the Waterloo Bog Trail in Waterloo State Rec. Area. This will be approximately a three-mile journey, roundtrip. Species we will hope to see and hear include Pileated Woodpecker, Brown Creeper, and perhaps Pine Warblers. Please dress and select footwear appropriately. We will meet in the parking lot of the Gerald E. Eddy Discovery Center, which is located at 17030 Bush Road, north of I-94 and west of Chelsea.

**Every Tuesday in May**      **Tuesday Evening Birders:** Leaders: Dea Armstrong, Lathe Claflin, Mike Sefton Returning by popular demand, Dea and the Lathe-Mike combo will alternate in leading these outings. The leaders scout locations and scan bird reports during the day, and then in the evening take the group to where the action is. This is a carpool event, typically with multiple stops. Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the Miller Road/M-14 park-and-ride lot, where everyone will consolidate into fewer vehicles and prepare for a 6:15 sharp departure. Over the years, participants have seen some great birds (e.g., Red-necked Phalarope) and memorable sights (Sandhill Crane pair with newly hatched young). These outings end at dusk.

*(Field trips continued on the next page)*

*WAS field trips (continued)*

**Sun., May 15**

**Hudson Mills Metropark:** Leader: Karen Markey. This outing reliably yields delights for both experienced and novice birders. Last year, for instance, there was an extraordinary encounter with Great Horned Owls (including a juvenile) being mobbed by crows in the woods. Target birds for this trip include cuckoos, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, woodpeckers, vireos, flycatchers, thrushes, warblers, and tanagers. Bring your binoculars, but please leave pets at home. If you do not have a Huron-Clinton Metropark annual sticker, there is a vehicle fee to enter the park. Please consider purchasing an annual sticker to help support our metropark system. (To learn more about Hudson Mills and other metroparks, go to [www.metroparks.com](http://www.metroparks.com).) Meet at the flagpole in front of the Activity Center at 7:30 AM.

**Sat., May 21**

**Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Northwest Ohio:** Leader: Karen Markey. Magee Marsh is an internationally known migrant trap where neotropical birds stop to refuel before their long flight across Lake Erie. Warblers, flycatchers, sparrows, and thrushes are just some of the many types of birds you can see there during spring migration. Even owls are possible. It's not uncommon to end a day birding at Magee Marsh and to have seen more than 100 species.

Meet at the park-and-ride lot at Plymouth Road and US 23 in northeast Ann Arbor at 6:00 a.m. to arrange carpools for a 6:15 (sharp!) departure. Alternatively, you may meet Karen and the rest of the group at the warbler sign on the boardwalk at Magee Marsh at 8:00 a.m. The trip usually goes until mid-afternoon. Bring a hat, insect repellent, lunch, and adequate fluids for hydration.

To become a member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, please complete the form below (or a copy) and mail it with a check or money order payable to **Washtenaw Audubon Society - WAS Membership PO Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113**

\_\_\_\_\_ RENEWAL \_\_\_\_\_ NEW MEMBER

\_\_\_\_\_ ADDITIONAL DONATION \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Dues:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual/Household \$20  
(with printed newsletter \$25)

\_\_\_\_\_ Student \$10  
(emailed newsletters only)

\_\_\_\_\_ Senior \$10  
(with printed newsletter \$15)

\_\_\_\_\_ Patron \$50

We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means.

Note: WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal, and emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

## WAS Monthly Programs

WAS monthly events usually are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Programs begin at 7:30pm at U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. Call 677-3275 if you have questions about the program.

### April 20

**eBIRD: Make Your Daily Observations Count:** eBird is an online program that pools the checklists of contributors and makes the data available to the global bird community such as ornithologists, various agencies, and conservation organizations. Darrin O'Brien will provide an overview of how to use eBird and will present examples of how he uses eBird to record his day-to-day birding activities and the potential of contributing one's records to this database. Join us and see how eBird can change the way you go birding. Darrin is a licensed bird bander and long-time volunteer for the Rouge River Bird Observatory, has served in various capacities for the Detroit River Hawkwatch, compiles the Clinton Christmas Bird Count and the North American Migration Count for Wayne County.

### May 18

**Birding the Dominican Republic:** Join globe-trotting birder Bryn Martin for a program on Washtenaw Audubon's most recent foreign field trip, to the Caribbean nation of the Dominican Republic on the island of Hispaniola. Seven intrepid birders from WAS visited the Dominican Republic in April to see some of the country's nearly 30 endemic species, birds found nowhere else in the world, including an endemic family. Bryn Martin teaches high school in Livonia and is an avid international birder.

### Washtenaw Audubon Society

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