



WASHTENAW
AUDUBON SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

July/August 2011

Round Robin Churchill *Article and photos by Andy Johnson*

For nine weeks this summer, I have the amazing opportunity to return to work in Churchill, Manitoba, on the western shores of the Hudson Bay. Churchill is situated at the convergence of multiple biomes, with the boreal forest to the south, the low arctic tundra to the north, and Hudson Bay's inland coastline to the north and east. This subarctic transition zone is characterized by vast, flat swathes of dry, lichen-encrusted tundra, sedge bogs pockmarked with round, shallow ponds, and seemingly endless boreal forest. At about 58 degrees North, the region represents some of the southern-most habitat of its kind, making it an accessible place for arctic research. Our team is here for the same project as last summer: studying the breeding and migratory ecology of Hudsonian Godwits for Cornell Ph.D. student Nathan Senner's ambitious project.

In this fourth and final field season in Churchill, our priority is to recapture birds banded in previous years that have been carrying data loggers on their incredible southern sojourns (often 6,000 miles without rest, pause or food). These loggers are tiny light sensors attached to flags on the birds' legs that record the times of sunrise and sunset, thereby giving us the birds' latitude and longitude for any given day. Recapturing them, however, is no simple task, because what makes this an amazing place to work also makes it an incredibly challenging chore—countless birds come here to rear young, and every fiber in their body, every codon in their genome, is devoted entirely to fledging their young. Not surprisingly, then, their nests are their best-kept secrets, and in order to obtain any information, we need to uncover them. Once we find the godwits' well-hidden nests by traversing several miles of boggy tundra daily, we can quite simply lay a mist-net over the nest while the bird incubates.



A male Hudsonian Godwit carrying a data logger

Unfortunately for us, this season in Churchill has been one restricted almost entirely by nest depredation, at a rate far higher than any we've seen. After many long hours in the fen, our hard-earned nests fell to predators—jaegers, foxes, polar bears, and more—one by one, until fifteen of sixteen were empty, grass cups. As the season wore on without pause for the godwits, our priorities shifted to finding and tracking the few chicks that had hatched from other clutches nearby, which had gone undetected before. When godwit chicks do hatch, we glue a tiny radio to the back feathers of one bird from each clutch. We can then follow the brood for the next few weeks until the chick's growing pin feathers push the radio off. Luckily, we've had more luck on this front this summer than with nests, and are now following chicks from eight families. *(Continued pg. 3)* 1

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A Note from the President, Sue Johnson

Vicarious birding can be very rewarding-- not as enjoyable as the real thing, but it can take you to places you might not otherwise see. So for this issue, rather than a lengthy chat from me simply to fill space, I've asked my son, Andy, to share some thoughts on his summer in Churchill, Manitoba. (*Starting on pg. 1*) In his second summer on a Cornell research team, studying the migratory and breeding behaviors of the Hudsonian Godwit, he has documented the experience on his blog and offers a summary in this issue of our Washtenaw Audubon newsletter. From the challenges of predators invading nests, to a run-in with a polar bear (covered in the blog) and the beauties of the northern landscape, it's almost tempting to hop on a plane to the far reaches of the Hudson Bay. Alas, I need to be content with birds more local this summer.

Sharing our birding experiences is just one of the benefits of a birding community, such as Washtenaw Audubon. If you are interested and willing to write about one of your experiences in the field, we would be glad to hear about it. Please don't hesitate to write to me and let me know.

Happy birding, vicariously and otherwise,

Sue

Tough Conditions Don't Spoil Trip to Hudson Mills

By Karen Markey and Monty Brown

A hardy group of about 15 birders trudged through rain, cold, and mushy fields at Hudson Mills Metropark on the morning of Sunday, May 15. Despite the difficult conditions, the group got good scope-aided looks at Blue-winged Warbler, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Bluebird, and nesting Tree Swallows. At the sight of an American Crow sitting on its nest, many of the participants realized that they had never seen that before.

The group was fortunate to get the scope views of the Blue-winged Warbler, which leader Karen Markey had located a few days before. This morning Cindy Lam spotted it, and we were able to get it in the scope for everyone to see because it was holding on for dear life to a wind-swept branch. The group persevered for two and a half hours, until the rain began to pour.

Final Tuesday Birders of the season

By Dea Armstrong

We spent a rather warm evening at Lefurge Woods marsh and fields for our final Tuesday Birders (May 31). We had lots of fun with Marsh Wrens and various sparrows and quite a few Wood Ducks. A Willow Flycatcher and a Common Yellowthroat were amazingly cooperative in providing long, satisfying looks. The multiple Marsh Wrens were barely seen. Last new bird for TEB was a Common Nighthawk, which was a lovely way to end the season. Thank you to Sarah Toner for keeping a checklist and for having such great ears. And thank you to all you Tuesday Birders who found so many great birds. See you next year. Number of species: 37.

Rare Bird Alerts

Michigan Bird Report

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

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

(Round Robin Churchill continued from pg. 1)

The chicks' propensity for long-distance travel is immediately apparent. Within an hour of hatching, the chicks are already dispersing from the nests to gorge themselves on whatever insects and invertebrates they clumsily stumble across, to continuously double their weight weekly until they can fly. Amazingly, we found a chick nearly two miles from its nest less than 36 hours after it had hatched, running on oversized legs, head bobbing between grassy hummocks as it fled our approach.

Our days off can be equally exciting, however. One afternoon, while driving along the coastal "highway," I glanced over my shoulder to take yet another casual gaze at the beautiful, hazy blue Hudson Bay, and happened to notice a large, white falcon, sitting aloof, not twenty feet from the road. This adult white morph Gyrfalcon is a rare summer visitor to the region, but he hardly seemed like an outsider—he was unstoppable, he knew it, and it showed. He sat completely unfazed by our slow approach and the passing of cars, watching flies buzz by and sizing up potential prey.

One of the most amazing things about spending sixty some days in the field in Churchill is having the opportunity to intimately observe the breeding biology of dozens of species, many of which are only transient visitors any further south. On our days off, I've been getting up at 3:00AM to catch the subarctic sunrise at the fen, aiming to capture footage and audio of many of the breeders at their nests. These early mornings are truly incomparable. The sun rises very gradually here, taking several minutes to fully clear the horizon as it follows a long and low trajectory to finally set just before 11:00PM. Before leaving to film in the fen one Sunday morning, I watched as this tempered dawn bled across the sky towards the full moon, still sitting high against a cobalt twilight in the south, and felt a bit estranged from the familiar confines of a passing day.

(Additional photos can be seen in the following pages.)

Read more on Andy's blog at:
<http://www.birdingetcetera.blogspot.com> and
view more Churchill photos at:
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/andysbirds>



A white-morph Gyrfalcon posed unabashedly by the road



Whimbrel chick waiting for his bands (Left)



A male Willow Ptarmigan's molt trails behind the receding snow



Long-tailed Ducks nest near shallow ponds on the tundra and in the bogs

A vista of Churchill's open, transitional habitat





A Willow Ptarmigan chick

Parasitic Jaeger



Smith's Longspur

Washtenaw Audubon Society

2010-11 Financial Report

submitted by Elvera Shappirio

<u>Description</u>	<u>Checking</u>	<u>Savings</u>
Balances as of July 1, 2009	1,417.99	13,359.98
Checking Receipts	2,170.08	
Checking Expenditures	3,039.38	
delayed deposit	285.00	
error		
Savings Interest		13.45
Transfers: CD interest to savings		143.40
Balances as of June 30, 2010 plus delayed deposit	833.69	13,516.83

Checking Account Receipts

Member Dues	1,455.00
memorial donations	50.00
Paypal=dues	610.08
members dues, delayed deposit	285.00
Donations	55.00

Total Receipts 2,170.08

Checking Account Expenditures

Newsletter Printing and Postage	993.12	
Speakers, Program Expense	35.00	
Grant: Harold Eyster	300.00	
Telephone service	445.65	
King School prize	32.62	
Brochures:	0.00	
Liability Insurance	350.00	
Banking costs (checkbooks)	17.99	
Corporate Filing Fee	20.00	
Grants:River Rouge Bird Observatory	335.00	3rd of 3 yearly
Web site costs	162.00	
Christmas Count Expenses	147.00	
Property costs: Searles drain fee	0.00	
trip van rentals	109.00	
Postal box fee	60.00	
Safe Deposit box	32.00	
	3,039.38	

Savings Account Receipts

Interest on Regular Savings Account	13.45
Interest on \$15000.00 CD	143.40
Total Savings Account Interest	156.85

Investment Account

The investment account includes one CD valued at \$15,000.00
The interest is transferred to the regular savings account on a monthly basis.
The \$15,000.00 CD matures Sept. 2011, current interest rate .74%

Butterfly Outing at Leonard Preserve *By Roger Kuhlman and Monty Brown*

On the morning of Saturday, July 9, Roger Kuhlman, John Swales, and Roger Wykes led a group of 21 people in search of butterflies at the Leonard Preserve, on the northwest edge of Manchester. This is the largest preserve in the county system, with 259 acres. It also contains nearly a mile of River Raisin shoreline. The preserve is so large that the trip, which lasted close to three hours, left at least a third of the property unexplored.

The leaders pointed out as the outing began that a wet, cold spring and the very dry, hot weather in the weeks leading up to the event had made it a tough year so far for observing butterflies. Nevertheless, on this day 30 species were observed in all, although some of the species were seen only by part of the group. John Swales headed a subgroup that saw a Summer Azure and a Southern Cloudywing, with the latter an especially satisfying

find as it is uncommon in southeast Michigan. The best butterfly of the day was a Purplish Copper (*Lycaena helloides*), which unfortunately only Roger K. saw in person at the very end of the trip, but he got a fine photo of it to show those who remained. Some of the other rarer butterflies seen were Dion Skipper, Acadian Hairstreak, Striped Hairstreak, Common Sootywing, and Buckeye. The most common butterfly found was Common Wood Nymph (over 50 seen). The second most common was Great Spangled Fritillary (20 to 25 seen).

Additional butterflies seen: Northern Pearly Eye, Little Glassywing, Little Wood Satyr, Eyed Brown, Northern Broken Dash, Clouded Sulphur, Delaware Skipper, Black Dash, Eastern-tailed Blue, American Copper, Baltimore, Appalachian Eyed Brown, Banded Hairstreak, Viceroy, Silvery Checkerspot, European Skipper, Tawny-edged Skipper, Silver-spotted Skipper, Monarch, and Mulberry Wing.

The most noteworthy bird sighting was probably Yellow-billed Cuckoo. A surprising number of Northern Flickers was also seen. Red-winged Blackbirds were abundant, and Common Yellowthroats were heard steadily but hardly seen at all.



Purplish Copper
Photo by Roger Kuhlman's

Magee Marsh Field Trip Report *By Karen Markey*

On Saturday, May 21 about 25 WAS members visited Magee Marsh Wildlife Area on this warm, sunny day in Northwest Ohio. A few stopped at Metzger Marsh on the way. We arrived at Magee at 8:15 am and more than doubled our group. Birds were scattered throughout Magee, not necessarily focused in one area. Birds weren't necessarily plentiful. We worked at finding birds but it was rare to have long periods of time without something interesting in view. For several WAS birders, the highlight was watching one of two EASTERN SCREECH OWLS harassed by the pecking of grackles. Prothonotary Warblers were prominent, singing on bare branches and at numerous locations including the hollow of a tree where a pair were busy inserting nesting materials. We watched a pair of Yellow Warblers building a nest. Everyone had up-close and personal views of GREY-CHEEKED THRUSH with a Swainson's Thrush in the distance for comparison. Several caught glimpses of a first-year male ORCHARD ORIOLE atop a tall tree. MOURNING WARBLERS were singing in the parking lot and on the boardwalk. It is wonderful that almost everyone got good looks at the boardwalk Mourning. A female CONNECTICUT WARBLER posed for a nanosecond atop a low-lying tree stump, then disappeared into the brush. WAS birders who stayed for another 20 minutes got a taste of how difficult it is to spot a Connecticut Warbler. A female Nashville Warbler was especially difficult to identify -- her yellow undertail coverts and white vent were clues that she was a Nashville. Thanks to all group members for pitching in to locate birds and help others nearby locate birds.

Birding Festivals *By Dea Armstrong*

Have you always wanted to go on one of those all-inclusive birding tours but felt a little taken aback by the price? Those tours are a wonderful way to go but definitely not the most affordable way. How about giving an out-of-state birding festival a try? Birding festivals usually showcase a birding hotspot at its premier time of year. Many choices of field trips are offered and the guides are often well known-big-name birders or hot-shot locals who really know their "neighborhood" birds. And there is usually a keynote talk by someone like Jon Dunn or Ken Kaufman. These events are not free, but they are definitely affordable. There is usually a charge per field trip of about \$25-\$50 and that may include a box lunch and does usually include transportation. Workshops and keynote and receptions come with a similar price tag and there may be a small general registration fee. But you get to decide which events that you want to go to and how fancy of a hotel that you'd like to stay in and just how much money you'd like to spend on your dinners. Airfare will probably be a necessary expense for those far away places and you'll need a rental car for most festivals. Go with a friend and share some of the expenses (Call me!!)

The internet has made researching these trips easier than ever. Below are some of the festivals that Washtenaw Audubon members that I spoke with have attended or have heard were great. Registration for these festivals often opens 4 to 5 months before the festival takes place so look into it as early as possible.

Southwest Wings 8/3-6/2011 <http://www.swwings.org/>
Sierra Vista, AZ

Cape May (Autumn) 10/28-30/2011 <http://www.birdcapemay.org/autumn.shtml>

Cape May, New Jersey (*Save this for another time and go on the WAS field trip to Cape may this fall!*)

Rio Grande Valley 11/9-13/2011 <http://www.rgvbf.org/>
Harlingen, Texas (possibly the best ever birding festival!)

Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival 1/13-16/2012 <http://www.morrobaybirdfestival.org/>
Morro Bay, California

Spacecoast 1/25-30/2012 <http://www.spacecoastbirdingandwildlifefestival.org/>
Titusville, Florida

San Diego 3/1-4/2012 <http://www.sandiegoaudubon.org/birdfest.htm>
Marina Village Conference Center in Mission Bay

Horicon Marsh (was) 5/6-9/2011
<http://www.horiconmarshbirdfestival.com/welcome.cfm>
Horicon, Wisconsin

Monterey was 9/22-25/2011 <http://www.montereybaybirding.org/>
Monterey, California. Waiting to find info for 2012!!

WAS field trip to Dolph Park trip report *By Harold Eyster*

Don Chalfant led a group of 18 birders through Dolph Park in Ann Arbor on May 22. Highlights included Philadelphia Vireo, Wilson's and Magnolia Warblers, calling Alder Flycatcher and Virginia Rail, Blackburnian Warblers foraging in good light, and a flyover Broad-winged Hawk, which seems to have been hanging around Dolph for nearly a month now. Participants saw a total of 56 species in 3 hours--not bad for a morning in late May.

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (August--September, 2011)

By Monty Brown, Field Trip Coordinator (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 listserv and/or our web page at www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php with updates as needed. If you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send an e-mail.

Fri., Aug. 19 **Swift Night Out** Swift Night Out is a national event to monitor the migration of swifts. At the end of each day, these highly acrobatic birds will begin diving into chimneys where they spend the night, and it is a fascinating spectacle. This event will begin at 8:15 PM, about 15 minutes before sundown, and will last until it's dark--roughly 9:00 PM. The exact location will be determined depending on where the Chimney Swifts seem to be gathering in large numbers, but it will likely be in central Ann Arbor. We will post the location on the web-site a week or so before the event. Bring binoculars, portable chairs, and the whole family.

Sat., Aug. 28 **Migrating Shorebirds and Waders at Pointe Mouillee State Game Area**
Leader: Jim Fowler. This is one of the premier destinations in the Midwest for viewing shorebirds and waders, but access is limited. Jim Fowler, who knows this territory as well as anyone, has led numerous field trips to this location. PLEASE NOTE: This trip will be limited to 20 participants and registration is mandatory. Priority will be given to members of WAS and to people who did not get to go last year. Registered participants will meet at the Pointe Mouillee SGA parking lot on Sigler Road at 8:00 a.m., and will consolidate into 4 vehicles. Bring bug repellent, wear a hat, and dress for warm weather. There is no shade or shelter here. Bring all the food and fluids you think you will need for 5 hours of birding. If interested, send your name, e-mail address, and phone number to fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org.

Thursdays in September & October **Weekly Fall Migration Walks in Nichols Arboretum** This will be the 6th year of these popular, leaderless walks to observe fall migration at The Arb. Every Thursday morning in September and October participants will gather at 8:00 at the end of the Riverview Drive cul-de-sac (off Geddes Road) near the eastern edge of the arboretum. The walks go until roughly 11:00, but everyone can join or leave the group as his or her schedule requires.

Sun., Sept. 11 **Fall Migrants at Kensington Metropark** Leader: Cathy Carroll. Kensington Metropark has a nice variety of habitats and is a fine location for observing migrants. On this trip, we will hope to see several warbler and flycatcher species, as well as tanagers, grosbeaks and waterfowl. Meet at 8:00 AM in the parking lot of the Nature Center. Those interested in carpooling from Ann Arbor should meet at the Park-n-Ride lot at Plymouth Road at 7:20 for departure at 7:30 sharp.

Fri., Sept. 23--Mon., Sept. 26 **Cape May!** Leader: Dawn Swartz. Cape May, at the southern tip of New Jersey, is a world-class birding destination. Join Dawn, who used to bird here every weekend, fall and spring, from 1992-97. Participants are responsible for their arrangements and round-trip costs to the Philadelphia Airport on Sep. 23, (our van will leave at 2pm) and they will be returned there by noon on Sept. 26. We will bird with Louise Zemaitis on Saturday for 8 hours (!) and Sunday explore some of the haunts that Dawn has enjoyed in the past. It will cover three nights at 4-star lodging with a beach view. Cost: \$400 double occupancy, \$485 single. If interested or have questions, please contact Dawn at fddlr2003@yahoo.com. Make checks to Dawn Swartz and mail to 2241 Delaware Dr. AA, MI 48103. There are only 10 places open. Please phone as you mail it in: 313-204-0060. Advance registration required. "We'll see sea birds, shore birds, and those mystifying warblers of which there are a lot of this time of year. When I regularly birded there I found fall an equal to spring! That's because the numbers are just as high (higher with hawks) and I for one learn a lot with fall warblers!"

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

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

Membership Dues:

_____ ADDITIONAL DONATION \$ _____

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

Name: _____

_____ Student \$10
(emailed newsletters only)

Address: _____

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

Phone: _____ Email: _____

_____ 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.

**Tuesday
Aug. 16**

Raptors in Our World: Up Close and Personal With Live Raptors. *Note Tuesday date.* Sarah Gillmore, Program Coordinator and Raptor Handler will amaze and educate you with at least three live raptors from the Leslie Science and Nature Center. Sarah will explain how these birds live, in a way that even non-birders can understand, while sharing tales that reveal aspects of their behavior that even bird experts may not know. This is your opportunity to have a close-up view of these specialist birds! The event is co-sponsored with the Huron Valley Chapter of the Sierra Club.

**Wednesday
Aug. 17**

Andy and Harold's Excellent Ecuadorian Birding Adventure. Join young birding phenoms and WAS members Harold Eyster and Andy Johnson for an account of their birding odyssey in bird-rich Ecuador. As the result of winning a birding competition at a birding festival, Andy and Harold were rewarded with a trip to Ecuador, home of the fourth largest avifauna in the world. Andy is a sophomore at Cornell University and has been a member of winning big day teams sponsored by the American Birding Association and by Cornell, and Harold, a high school senior from Chelsea, is the ABA's Young Birder of the Year for 2009.

Sept. 21

Chile: Birding at the End of the World. Join Rodolfo Palma for a visit to the southernmost South American country. Chile has 460 species of birds, including 12 endemics. A variety of geographic features, including grasslands, mountains, the driest desert in the world, fjords, and a long Pacific coastline make for some interesting habitats. WAS member Rodolfo Palma has visited and birded in Chile on several occasions, and has many photos of the birds, land, and people. We will also have some Chilean snacks to share with everyone.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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