



November/December 2011

Big Day for *The Big Year* By Bryn Martin

2011 was a cinematically special year for birders as we finally got the first feature film set in the birding world with big-name stars such as Steve Martin, Jack Black, and Owen Wilson. From top to bottom, the film was incredibly well-done in its depiction of what it feels like to be a certain sort of intense birder. My worry prior to seeing it was less that they may get some details wrong (“*wait, that bird doesn’t belong in that habitat at that time of year*”) but that the feel would be wrong. Happily my fear was unfounded. They absolutely captured the spirit of what it feels like to travel the country looking for and at birds. This movie will not catch on with the mainstream audience. It’s topic is too quirky and the movie itself is (ironically) not quirky enough. It’s standard fare with typical character arcs and a bit of expected slapstick thrown in. Had this not been about birding, for me, the movie would be just *good*. But it definitely struck me in the birding part of my brain and I loved it. If you are a birder and have yet to see it, I highly recommend it.

To commemorate this special film, the area audubon societies participated in a special event organized by Wild Birds Unlimited of Grosse Pointe Woods. They sponsored a special viewing of the film at the Emagine Theater in Royal Oak (Monday, October 24) which was attended by well over 200 people! I have not attended any big birding festivals and have never in my life seen that many bird enthusiasts in one place at one time! It’s funny. You know they’re out there, but to see so many in one place was very interesting to me. I’d never been to this theater before, but they couldn’t have picked a better venue. Very nice. Large, spacious, comfy chairs and a bar/restaurant to gather in prior to the event. Many members of WAS attended (25+) as well as many of their less-bird-enthusiastic spouses who also greatly enjoyed the film. (They still recognized the characters depicted on the screen and you could hear the occasional “If you ever did that” or “That’s just like you!”)

What made the event even more special was the guest speaker prior to the film: Greg Miller, one of the actual participants whose exploits are documented in the book *The Big Year* by Mark Obmascik and upon whom Jack Black’s character is patterned after. Greg served as chief birding consultant on the movie and told us all his stories about being on set (he even took Jack Black birding one of the days!) He went over the script with a Sibley-comb and was called on to come up with appropriate changes on the fly as they filmed. As he spoke, you could see a glow and how star struck he was by the whole experience. In addition to telling us about this experience, he talked about how he got into birding and how his obsession drove him to engage in a Big Year. A lot of this would be a repeat for anyone who had read the book (as I had re-done prior to seeing the film), so I was more interested in hearing about his life post-Big Year. (Things such as the fact that it took him 6 years (!) to pay off the credit card debt accrued from doing the Big Year--something that may sober up anyone’s romantic visions of doing a Big Year themselves.)

Whenever meeting someone famous--and yes, I am calling Greg Miller famous--I try to think of something unique to say to connect with them. Greg is from a part of Ohio near where my sister now lives. In the book it mentions the Mennonite pies they make in that region. I know those pies. They are fantastic! Seriously, the best pies I’ve ever had. So, that was my “in.” Upon meeting him, I shook his hand and said, “Love the pies in your area.” He patted his belly and said, without missing a beat, “Not as much as me!”

*(Read about a few of our local birders attempting a **Green** Big Year starting on pg. 6)*

Contact

President

Sue Johnson
(734) 995-1821
President@washtenawaudubon.org

Vice President & Programs

Mike Sefton
(734) 677-3275
Vp-programs@washtenawaudubon.org

Treasurer

Ellie Shappirio
(734) 665-6613
Treasurer@washtenawaudubon.org

Secretary

Dana Novak
(734) 424-9305
Danacnovak_13@yahoo.com

Field Trips

Monty Brown
Fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org

Membership

Sherri Smith
(734) 994-6287
Membership@washtenawaudubon.org

Newsletter

Bryn Martin
(734) 454-0439
Brynmartin@sbcglobal.net

Education

Dea Armstrong
(734) 276-9372
Ddarm@umich.edu

Past President

Ray Stocking
(734) 973-3155
rstocking@gmail.com



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Bryn Martin
6241 Runnymede
Canton, MI 48187

Dear Friends,

There is much to be said for stepping into the wilderness “unplugged.” I don’t think many naturalists would advocate differently. That being said, as technology advances, not only are the benefits to birders growing, but they are increasingly more accessible and less obtrusive. In this issue, I want to draw your attention to the technological aids that Washtenaw Audubon offers and also touch on a few others offered from outside sources. The world of technology is ever expanding with ways to enrich the lives of birders and hopefully, the lives of birds.

First, I’d like to thank our talented webmaster, Rob French, for our newly remodeled website. Our new site is clear, well organized and easier to navigate. As you hopefully know by now, our website offers up to date information on WAS trips and programs, information on membership and donations, and many other resources that might be of interest to the birding community. If you have not visited recently, take a look: www.washtenawaudubon.org.

We have also upgraded our facebook page from a personal profile page to an organization page. Simply search “Washtenaw Audubon” in facebook and “like us.” By doing so you can adjust your settings to receive WAS updates in your newsfeed or your email, or choose to forego them. You might also want to sign up to follow us on Twitter. Following Washtenaw Audubon on Twitter could be the difference in your Big Year or perhaps just your county listings. Tweets from Twitter (even sounds birdy, doesn’t it?) will alert you to birds of interest and rare birds as we become aware of them in southeastern Michigan. To access WAS on Twitter just go to www.twitter.com, set up an account and search “Washtenaw Audubon” to follow, or follow the Twitter link from our home page. A special thanks to Mike Sefton and Ray Stocking for tweeting at us!

Beyond Washtenaw Audubon, the techno gadgets that can help you in many aspects of birding are seemingly endless. I recently became tethered to an iPhone, and already I am armed with two cool apps: *iBird Midwest* (a bird guide with perks, such as songs and calls) and *BirdsEye*. *BirdsEye* uses eBird data to give up-to-date sightings and can prioritize based on what you’ve seen and entered in eBird. When you open the app, it will show you the list of species seen recently in the area, and give you a separate list of those you still need. If you select a bird from the list, it will show a map and drop pins where the bird was reported. You can then hit “get directions,” and be on your way immediately. You can now consider yourself an emergency first responder...without the medical background.

At last month’s WAS meeting, a member sympathetic to my goal of improving my recognition of bird songs, told me about a website, eNature.com. With one click from their home page you can access multiple nature guides, mobile apps, and even download a state bird ringtone for your phone. (Alas, I can assure you there is no option for Kirtland’s Warbler for Michigan, but if you wish to move beyond the American Robin, you can be serenaded by Vermont’s Hermit Thrush).

And as some of us had the pleasure to learn through a Washtenaw Audubon program last spring, the growing ebird project (*Continued on the next pg.*)

Rare Bird Alerts

Michigan Bird Report

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

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

(Continued from previous page) launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, is not only a terrific tool for birders but in time has the potential to be the most impactful use of citizen science ever undertaken. The eBird website describes the impact of their work: “(eBird) is amassing one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence...The observations of each participant join those of others in an international network of eBird users. eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists. In time these data will become the foundation for a better understanding of bird distribution across the western hemisphere and beyond.” (www.ebird.org) The eBird team at the Cornell Lab is quickly innovating new features to both harness this massive database’s scientific potential, and also to make the information readily available and relevant to birders as well. So, fear not my fellow birders, technology doesn’t have to interfere with your enjoyment of the natural world, and it might actually make the most of your sojourns into the beauty that surrounds us.

Happy Tech-Birding,

Sue Johnson, President

For Your Consideration

By Dea Armstrong

Recently, WAS added a donor page to our website. Now it is as easy as charging a book to Amazon to make a donation to our organization. You might ask, why should I do this? After all, I pay my membership dues. Why should I pay more? What a great question! I think each of us has to answer that question in a very personal way but there are some more general questions that come to mind first. Is our organization able to cover the expenses it incurs each year? Yes, we are able to do that, especially now that many of you take your newsletter electronically. We’ve seen our printing and mailing costs go down quite a bit. We don’t currently pay a facility fee to Matthaei Botanical Gardens for our monthly meetings, and we only sometimes have to pay for our CBC potluck use. But if you read our treasurer’s report, you’ll see that we have been able to provide funding for a wonderful variety of activities that support birds and birders.

WAS funds helped to bring Dr. Douglas Tallamy to Ann Arbor in October of this year for a fabulous presentation about how native plantings can improve bird habitat. Helping some of our outstanding young birders attend American Birding Association Camps and workshops has earned Washtenaw Audubon Society a reputation for nurturing our excellent young birders. And luckily, they often come back to tell us all about some of these experiences in wonderful presentations on our program nights. We have also been able to support some of the important research that Julie Craves does at Rouge River Bird Observatory. We also provide outreach materials for attendees at Earth Day and other ecological events. And when we have money and opportunity, we can provide support for land and habitat preservation, like the time we were able to help fund the purchase of additional land that is now a part of the Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Audubon Sanctuary.

While it seems that we at WAS do quite a bit with our funds, the amount of money that we contribute to most of these excellent causes is small. We can make use of every penny that is donated to us. We can provide honorariums to high quality speakers. We can help encourage the preservation of lands of high quality bird habitat. We could provide even more help to local ornithological research. These are simply examples. Some donors stipulate that their gift is to be used for something near and dear to them. Others allow WAS to use the funds as the board members see fit.

So while you are marveling at the amazing young birders we have in our organization, being impressed by Julie Craves’ research, or being thrilled at the habitat that Haehnle Sanctuary provides not only for Sandhill Cranes but many other species of birds, take some time to go to our web site and learn how you can make a donation to Washtenaw Audubon. We support some great activities. Let’s try to do more. And who knows what other opportunities might come up.

On a more personal note, I recently updated my will. When my attorney asked if there was any organization I wanted to remember in my will, I thought about my alma mater first. So many folks do. But my attorney suggested I take some time to really think about what organizations, over the years, had provided me with a sense of well being, opportunities to serve, or served me or my family or were a major part of my life in any other way. Washtenaw Audubon came to mind and is now in my will as one of those organizations that will be remembered. I think it is definitely something worth thinking about.

Please have a look at our donation page: <http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/betasite/donate.php>

65th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 17, 2011

The early October Indian Summer that brought temperatures close to 80 degrees to our area has come and gone and a distinct chill is in the air. Just about all of our summer birds left some time ago, most migrants have passed through, and in the past day or so I noticed a few Dark-eyed Juncos among the birds in my neighborhood – winter must be on its way! And, with that, it's time to think about the Christmas Bird Count.

This year's edition will be the 65th time that intrepid birders have headed out on the Ann Arbor CBC, both in hopes of finding rarities and knowing that their efforts will contribute one more piece to the picture that is the CBC dataset. After a couple of average years (2009 & 2010) and an off-the charts year (2008), what will this year bring? Will the crow roost be accessible? Will we miss American Kestrel, a species that has declined precipitously during the past decade or so? Will Wild Turkeys continue their almost meteoric increase in our circle? What rarities (if any) will be found?

As always, your contribution to answering these questions (and more) is crucial, so all are invited to participate in the 65th annual Ann Arbor CBC, sponsored by the Washtenaw Audubon Society. This year, **Saturday, December 17th** is the date to pencil in on your calendars. Experience in identifying birds is not absolutely necessary as you can always be grouped with more experienced candidates.

The Ann Arbor CBC is part of a hemisphere-wide effort coordinated by the National Audubon Society. The National Audubon Society publishes the data from each CBC and mails a copy of this compilation to participants (last year's data compilation should arrive in our mailboxes shortly). To cover the cost of compiling and publishing the data, a mandatory \$5.00 fee is charged per participant age 19 and older (it's worth it!).

All CBCs are conducted during a 3-week period from mid-December to early January, all over the Western Hemisphere. Each count circle covers an area 15 miles in diameter; the Ann Arbor count circle is centered on the Foster Road bridge, near the intersection of Maple Road and Huron River Dr. The object is to identify all bird species present in the circle as well as count the number in which they are present. In addition to the daylight bird census, several observers will conduct a predawn search for owls.

There are several ways to participate in this count, the main one of which is field observer. The Ann Arbor CBC area comprises eight regions, each of which is assigned to an area leader who coordinates the census in that region. If you wish to be a field observer, select one of the eight regions (*see map, or check out the detailed maps on the WAS website*) and sign up with the area leader of that region. If you are not sure where to help census, call me (CBC Compiler Jacco Gelderloos) at (734) 973-9422 and I will assign you to an area based on need. The National Audubon Society web site also has a system for signing up for counts across the nation. If you sign up through this service, please contact me by phone or email me at JJGelderloos@yahoo.com to let me know you have done so, as I will need to place you into an area within the count circle.

You can also be a feeder watcher. If you have a feeder within the count circle this is a fun and easy way to participate. (**Remember:** the feeder MUST be within the count circle, otherwise the data is invalid.) Like field observers, you may sign up to participate for any length of time – from one hour to all day. As a feeder watcher, you don't have to pay the \$5.00 fee unless you want to receive the National Audubon Society's annual CBC publication. Call feeder watch coordinator Kurt Hagemeister for more information, to sign up, or to get feeder watch forms.

The real fun and excitement happens at the end of the day at the potluck supper, when the final results are tallied and announced after dessert. This year, the potluck supper will be held at the meeting room at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens - all participants are invited! If you plan to attend, please contact the potluck coordinator Nicole Sefton to let us know you're coming and to coordinate dishes – please note that alcohol is not permitted on the premises. The MBG are located at 1800 N Dixboro Rd, about ¼ - ½ mile south of Plymouth Rd in Ann Arbor. Area leaders will have maps/directions if you need them; plan to gather there around 5:30-6:00 p.m.

Please remember that the CBC is run entirely by volunteers and can always use your help. Consider helping out with the potluck set-up and clean-up: we can always use people who arrive early at the potluck site to set up tables and chairs and help prepare for the arrival and arrangement of food. This may also entail getting supplies such as tablecloths, plates, etc. (costs will be reimbursed by WAS). After the supper, we will need to clean up as well. Remember: many hands make light work!

Information regarding the count will also be available on the Ann Arbor CBC web page (<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/annarborebc.php>) where any updates will be posted as the count day approaches.

Area Leaders

Phone

E-mail

1	John Swales	(734) 995-1139	jmswales@umich.edu
2	Rob & Nancy French	(734) 994-8418	rwfrenchjr@comcast.net
3	Roger Wykes	(734) 769-6482	
4	Cathy Carroll	(313) 595-4562	songsparrow@wowway.com
5	Mike & Susan Kielb	(734) 239-6064	makielb@comcast.net
6	Jacco Gelderloos	(734) 973-9422	jjgelderloos@yahoo.com
7	Don Chalfant	(734) 665-3120	screech-owl@comcast.net
8	Mike Sefton	(734) 677-3275	mseft@yahoo.com

CBC Compiler:

Jacco Gelderloos
(734) 973-9422 or jjgelderloos@yahoo.com

Feeder Watch Coordinator:

Kurt Hagemeister
(734) 663-9746 or khagemeister@sbcglobal.net

Potluck Coordinator:

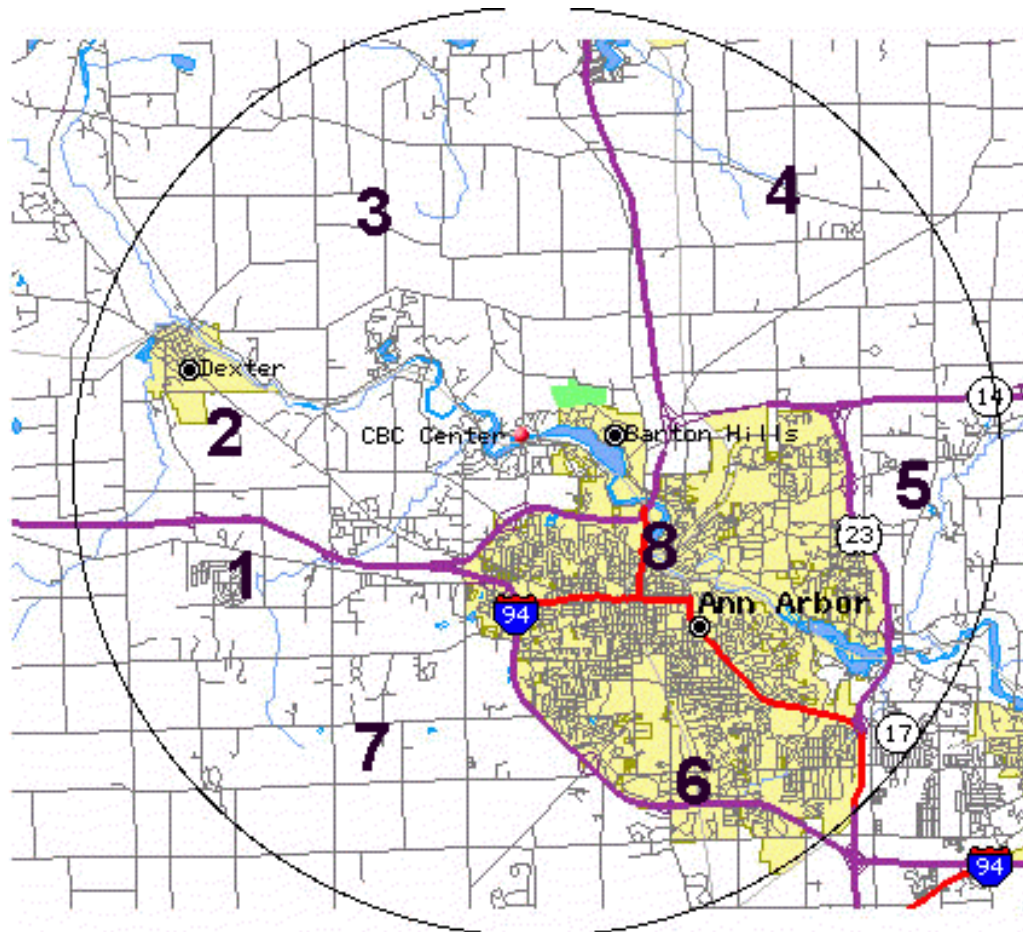
Nicole Sefton
(734) 677-3275 or seftonn1344@yahoo.com

Ann Arbor CBC Web Site:

<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/aacbc/>

National Audubon Society:

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>



“Green” Big Day Effort, May 21, 2011

Jacco Gelderloos (with Andy Dettling and Laurent Fournier)

(photos courtesy of Andy D. and Laurent F.)

On 5/16/10, Laurent and I established a new ‘green’ Big Day record for Washtenaw County by tallying 114 species in a full day of birding (see the Sept/Oct 2010 WAS newsletter). At the time, we focused our route mostly in and around Ann Arbor, but during and after this 55-mile effort we decided that a route with a western Washtenaw County component would have the potential to do significantly better. With this idea in mind, we set out to plan a second Big Day, scheduled for May 2011. A fellow BGBY birder from Canton, Andy Dettling, signed on to the effort, which we scheduled for May 21, with May 22 as the rain date.

As the big day approached, we exchanged numerous emails to try and sort out the optimal route. With a route centered on Pleasant Lake Rd, I drafted a monstrous 120-mile route – luckily, we heard about several good birds at locations closer by, so that in the final days I was able to shave off a couple of 10-15-mile loops. Still, 90+ miles would be quite a test for our stamina....

1:30 a.m. I meet up with Laurent and we head off to our first stop, downtown Ann Arbor, where we hope to connect with a Common Nighthawk. Before we turn into North University we pick up our first bird of the day, a calling Solitary Sandpiper – not what we expected, but keeping in mind last year’s trouble with shorebirds, it’s a species we’re both glad to have out of the way! Shortly after, Laurent hears the call of a Nighthawk overhead, which I miss, unfortunately. A quick check of Burton Tower turns up one of the resident Peregrines – only the second I had seen there in weeks, both of them during darkness! Surrounded by late-night partiers in bustling down-town we add a sleepy House Sparrow to our list, then we’re off to the Devine Preserve where we are set to meet Andy.

2:30 a.m. Andy catches up with us near Devine’s parking area, and we pick up a few more *peent*-ing American Woodcocks, after hearing a few en route to Devine. Our intrepid trio now completed, we bike a little way down Liberty Rd and pause to listen for Sedge Wren. The field here will be our best bet for this species today, so our hopes are high – we’re not disappointed, as a bird sounds off in the back of the field! A life bird for Laurent, and a species we were all very eager to get today – in good spirits and on schedule we leave Devine Preserve, with 8 species under our belt.

3:10 a.m. Next stop: Scio Church and Parker. In our planning, this was going to be the place where we should get Marsh Wren (based on previous years), but the excessive amounts of rain in April and May has caused flooding with few cattails left for the Marsh Wrens. A painful miss, but we do connect with both Sora and Virginia Rail. From here, we make a quick stop at a pond in between Waters and Ellsworth Rd, where a Common Moorhen had been found during May Count the week before. As we slow down,

Andy’s squeaking brakes provoke a Moorhen into vocalizing – nice! Our Screech-Owl spot on Ellsworth is quiet, except for several Veeries migrating overhead, a calling Gray Catbird, and an odd call in the woods nearby: a begging Great Horned Owl(et), very unexpected!

4:00 a.m. Now, the first major uninterrupted stretch of biking: down Parker and Pleasant Lake Rds into Sharon Twp, a distance of some 10 miles. Knowing full well that we have a long day ahead of us we maintain a steady pace, picking up some early morning species as we go along. Who knew Horned Larks are in full song at this time of day (well, night, really)? At the corner of Smyth and Pleasant Lake we encounter a mystery bird that has us stumped – we have some ideas as to the bird’s identity, but cannot afford to wait around for daybreak to be sure. Instead, Laurent records the bird’s song and we continue to our sixth stop of the day, along Sylvan Rd (over the summer Laurent was able to manipulate the recording to establish the bird’s ID as a Tree Swallow – another odd night bird!). The area north of the Trolz Rd intersection has turned up Eastern Whip-poor-will fairly reliably and we are very pleased to be welcomed by an exceedingly vocal individual – our early target species for the day are certainly falling into place nicely! Thanks to Bob Arthurs for tipping us off on this one.

5:25 a.m. Well, it’s happened already: we’re behind schedule! The perennial bane of Big Day birding, we too have fallen prey to the clock somehow. Luckily, we had a back-up stop for Whip-poor-will scheduled, so eliminating that spot gets us back in the realm of acceptable delay. Full of anticipation we wander into the Nan Weston Preserve while it’s still somewhat dark out – would Barred Owl (still) be possible? Well, in a word, no. The forest is quiet where owls of any kind are concerned, but that is definitely made up for by the onslaught of passerines sounding off! One or two Louisiana Waterthrushes are singing along the boardwalk, Acadian Flycatchers seem to be everywhere, Wild Turkeys gobble all around, and a Brown Creeper enralls us with its beautiful high-pitched song. With time pressing us on, we walk out of Nan Weston, with several good species added to the list, but missing Barred Owl and Pileated Woodpecker. The final highlight here is a woodpecker, though: a very handsome Red-headed Woodpecker puts on a show for us right by the entrance to the preserve.

6:15 a.m. Almost on time we start pedaling north on Jacob Rd for a loop up to Kendall Rd, then back down on Prospect Hill Rd. Even though we have already heard our main target species for this loop (Vesper Sparrow), we opt to stick to our planned route and just see what we can find along the way. As we expected, new species follow in rapid succession, among them the always tricky (from a Big Day perspective) Ruby-throated Hummingbird, a couple of

(Cont'd from previous page)

Northern Mockingbirds, a Brown Thrasher, and a duo of Grasshopper Sparrows. We also find our fifth warbler species of the day, a male Blackburnian in some roadside bushes – an odd spot, but we'll take it! In the days leading up to the 21st, disconcerting posts had mentioned the virtual lack of warblers in almost all area parks, and we are worried that this will prove to be our Achilles' heel today. As we pass the Eusades intersection on Prospect Hill, the landscape becomes more forested and there is a corresponding change in the avian life present: Hooded and Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo are good additions, but very frustratingly a singing Wood Thrush stays on the Jackson County side of the road. Grrrrr....

7:30 a.m. With 78 species under our belt, we turn east onto Sharon Valley Rd and almost immediately find more birds. Unexpected, but very much appreciated is a Black-billed Cuckoo perched on a fence post – cuckoos are never a certainty on any Big Day and it is very good news to have both species out of the way before 8:00 a.m. Some more roadside birding and a quick check of the main field of the Sharonville SGA turn up another handful of species, including a female Wilson's Warbler and singing Henslow's Sparrows and Bobolinks. As it is now 8:00 a.m. already, we have a choice to make: stick to our route and bike to the Meyers Rd area, or adjust on the fly and take the shortest route to an *ad hoc* stop along Timber Ridge Rd, just west of Manchester. A local birder had clued us in to the possibility of both Great Horned Owl and Northern Bobwhite there, and since we already have the target species for Meyers Rd (Mockingbird), the choice is easy to make. Down Lamb Rd we go, towards Austin Rd!

Upon riding down Timber Ridge, we notice a large white bird in a small pond; this Mute Swan is certainly unexpected here, as is the Belted Kingfisher that sounds off soon after! After a VERY close encounter with some deer crossing the road, we start noting new species here: Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged, Pine, and Tennessee Warbler, and a Northern Waterthrush. Yet try as we might, we fail to turn up Northern Bobwhite, our main reason for coming here to begin with. Somewhat disappointed, but thrilled with the good species we found instead, we set off for the Leonard Preserve in Manchester.

9:25 a.m. Hmmm, well over half an hour behind schedule we arrive at the Leonard Preserve and are greeted by copious amounts of water and mud on the trails. Not to be discouraged from a visit to this high-potential site, we maneuver our way in, but have a hard time finding birds, period, let alone new species. We had hoped to be able to catch up on our schedule here, but the way things work out, that's simply not in the cards for us. Luckily, our perseverance pays off: Green Heron, Pileated Woodpecker, Blackpoll and Black-throated Blue Warbler, and Purple Martin – species #100! As we're

leaving, we see a fly-over Great Blue Heron, nudging us one species closer to the old record. And all this before 10:00 a.m., very encouraging!

10:15 a.m. Due to the slow going we have managed to overstay at Leonard and we arrive at our next stop, the Schwab Rd ponds, close to an hour behind schedule (not good at all from a Big Day-technical point of view). With quite a bit of relief we enjoy the magnificent song of a Wood Thrush (no county line problems here!), and pick out a female Hooded Merganser in with the Wood Ducks. With nothing else new present, we press on. A Cooper's Hawk is soaring over the fields at Schwab and Neal, and Cliff Swallows fly in and out of a barn. Shortly after turning east on Bemis Rd, we notice the first of several Orchard Orioles for the day. Still, with the large amount of time to be made up, we opt not to hang around and make for a short-cut towards our next destination, the Schneider Rd ponds.

11:10 a.m. Somehow we've done quite well getting caught up: we arrive at Schneider Rd pond only 10 minutes behind and with American Kestrel in the bag (# 107), a painful miss last year. Unfortunately, though, Schneider Rd pond is essentially empty. There is just too much water in the pond, so the only new species we find here are Great Egret and (with a lot of effort) a Spotted Sandpiper, nothing like the wide selection of shorebirds we had hoped for here. Of course, there's not a whole lot we can do about this, so we cut our losses and head back towards the pond along Parker near Waters Rd. In addition to the Common Moorhen we had previously found here in the pre-dawn hours, we tally Pied-billed Grebe and American Coot, the latter quite unexpected. Next stop: Scio Church and Parker, where we hope to connect with the nesting Trumpeter Swans (and anything else, of course).

Just shy of noon (and on schedule!) we pull up to the wetlands and in quick succession pick up Bank Swallow and Trumpeter Swan. We are now only one species shy of last year's record, a truly exciting state of affairs this early in the day. However, at the same time we are all very well aware that we are about to hit the early afternoon doldrums when lots of effort is required for little return. Not to be deterred and knowing that we have a good variety of sites (plus associated species potential) left to visit, we leave for the Devine Preserve.

As it appears that the Alder Flycatchers have not yet arrived, we waste little time looking for this species at Devine. Instead, we push on to Saginaw Forest, where we have a shot at Red-breasted Nuthatch. Before arriving there, though, we have to labor up a very nasty hill, and our trio splits up into singles by the time we make it to the entrance. Clearly, the distance traveled so far (60+ miles) is making itself felt! Luckily, the nuthatches are home and the birds' sounding off allows us to tie last year's record, 114 species by 1:00 p.m. Off to Dolph Park!

During last year's Big Day we visited Dolph around the same time and were able to turn up just one new species there: Least Flycatcher. Wouldn't you know it: our first new species here is Least Flycatcher! Having now officially broken last year's record, we spend a lot of (too much?) time exploring the park's trails hoping for migrants, or the local Carolina Wren, or the last swallow species still missing (Rough-winged).

(Continued from previous page)

Much like last year, Dolph Park is turning out to be a major disappointment – quite odd for such a great migrant hot spot. In the end, though, the park presents us with a very nice and unexpected consolation: a fly-by Osprey. Needless to say, that at least partly makes up for the misses here.

With the first of our major migrant stops falling short, we hope that the next site on our route will prove to be better: Nichol's Arboretum, the mainstay of Washtenaw County birding in May. Our timing is not ideal, however, since we arrive just after 2:00 p.m., with temperatures well into the '70s. But hey, this is the Arb – something good has to be around! As we explore the minor trails behind the Caretaker's House we come across a very elusive *Catharus* thrush, which we eventually nail down as a Swainson's. In the same area, we pick up a small flock of migrants and are able to identify one of them as a female Black-throated Green Warbler. Slowly but steadily we're beating the doldrums, it seems. That said, activity in the Arb is subdued, so we choose to move on. As we work our way towards the exit, we discuss our options: stick to our schedule and head to some sites south of town, or cut off that loop and work our way down the Huron River towards several stops in Superior Twp? All the while, we continue to scan the sky, because we still need Broad-winged Hawk, a very real possibility at the Arb.

3:00 p.m. And then it happens: the single-most exciting moment of the day. Almost simultaneously, our illustrious trio spots a large black bird, soaring overhead – almost as one, we exclaim "Anhinga!" While Andy and I track it overhead and call out field marks, Laurent grabs his camera and takes several photos of the bird (the best of which is included here). The mayhem associated with the three of us, hot, sweaty, and dusty, must have been some sight to behold for the other visitors! With photos and notes taken, and phone calls made to other area birders, we watch the bird soar out of sight – WOW! Unfortunately, after the adrenaline rush is over, I start feeling decidedly woozy, and we conclude that I must be suffering from dehydration (in spite of the copious quantities of water I ingested). In the interest of my overall health, I ask Laurent if he would be willing to accompany me home. The other two members of our trio agree this would be the smart thing to do: we will continue on towards Gallup Park together, then split up.

3:30 p.m. The final birding stop for Laurent and me is South Pond: here we pick up Ring-billed Gull (finally!) and Northern Rough-winged Swallow, and (by phone) alert Andy to the presence of these two, species # 120 and 121. We try for Carolina Wren in the final mile of our ride, but fail to turn up this normally very vocal bird. Andy continues home-ward, into Superior Twp, where he picks up three more species: Black-and-white Warbler, Least Bittern, and Marsh Wren, for a grand total of 124 for the day.

When it was all said and done, we birded for 15.5-17 hours, biked 75-85 miles, walked several more, and tallied 124 species in the process. On average, then, that boils down to roughly 7.5 species/hour and right about 1.5 species/mile.

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However, as you can see in the chart below, the rate of new species/hour throughout the day is rather different. The hours around sunrise are clearly the crucial time of day on any Big Day – we added 70 species between 5:00 and 9:00 a.m., more than half of the day's total! After this, things generally get much more difficult (the mid-day doldrums), and new species are few and far between – the three of us were definitely tested during the early afternoon hours, both physically and mentally.

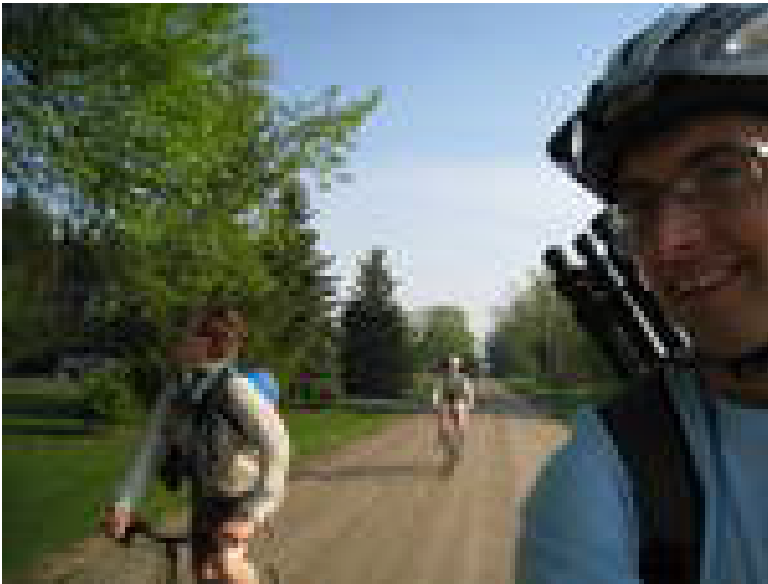
Although I had created a "master" route of some 120 miles, I used last year's experience and built in several redundancies. We did not deviate much from our basic route, but cut (and added) as progress allowed, which resulted in our loop of some 80 miles. Based on our results, all three of us agreed that this southwestern route has great potential from a BGBY point of view. However, while we were out and about we were already discussing the possibilities of a northwestern route – next year!

Now, last year I posited that a Green Big Day could well be competitive in the grand scheme of Big Day birding; this year's results clearly confirm this idea – 124 is pretty close to the top 10 tallies for May Big Days in Washtenaw County. So could we have hit 130 this year? Considering we missed Carolina Wren, Eastern Screech-Owl, and Barred Owl, recorded 'only' 16 warbler species, and found a truly abysmal number of only four shorebirds (worse than last year's six...), I dare say 130+ should certainly be possible. We're certainly looking forward to trying again next year!

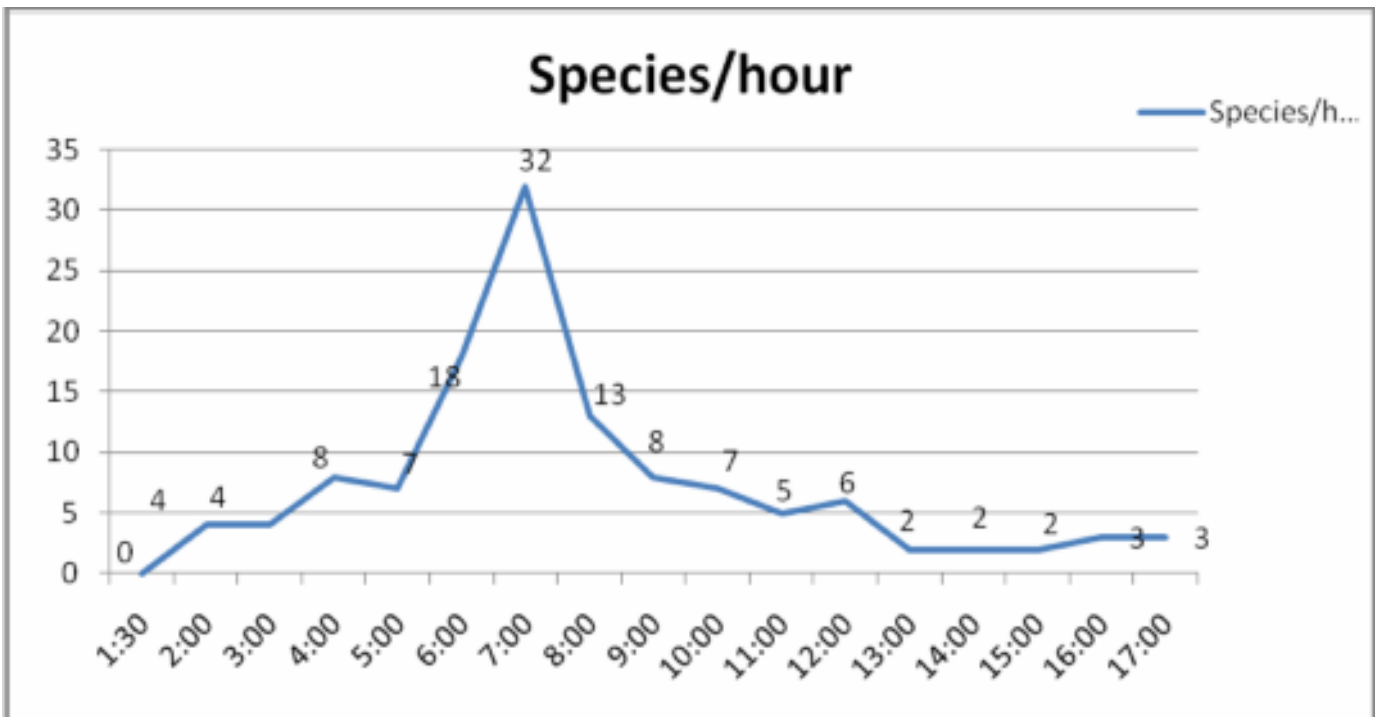
On a final note, after extensive review of our field notes and Laurent's photos, we determined that the bird we initially identified as an Anhinga was in fact a Double-crested Cormorant (luckily, no net loss for our total, since we missed cormorant elsewhere). It seems that the degree to which this species soars is significantly underappreciated; this played a major role in our admittedly adrenaline-fueled misidentification. The possibility for confusion between Anhinga and DC Cormorant is certainly something that needs to be emphasized more in field guides – be careful out there!



Anhinga (?)



All 3 of us on Lamb Rd.



Laurent and I Lamb Rd.



Laurent and I Sharonville SGA

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (December, 2011--February, 2012)

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.

December 3 **Gull Trip to Salem Landfill** Leader: Rob French Because access to the landfill is highly restricted, we rent a van for the trip and have to limit the number of participants. Meet at 8:45 a.m. in a NEW MEETING SPOT for this event: the Park-n-Ride lot at Plymouth Road and US 23. Please note that the weather for this outing tends to be very cold and that there is usually wind on the heights of the landfill, where participants will be spending most of the time. Dress warmly! Please also note that if the activity at the landfill is not up to par, the group may move on to one or two other sites. If you want to attend this trip, please e-mail your name and a contact phone number to fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org.

December 17 **Christmas Bird Count** Organizer: Jacco Gelderloos Details on pg. 4.

Feb 3 -- Feb 5 **Birding the Soo** Leaders: Lathe Claflin and Gary Siegrist This is a perennially popular trip, jointly sponsored by the Jackson and Washtenaw Audubon societies. Snowy and other owls, Sharp-tailed and Ruffed Grouse, Boreal Chickadee, Bohemian Waxwing, grosbeaks, and crossbills are some birds that make driving to the Upper Peninsula worth the effort. The weather can be rough, but no matter what the weather is like, the birding is reliably excellent. The event begins on Friday evening and ends during the day on Sunday. The number of participants is limited, and **reserving a space is mandatory**. There is a \$20 charge for the trip, and individual participants are also responsible for their food and lodging costs. For more information or to register, please call Lathe (517-522-3949) or Gary (517-522-5990).

Birding Mentors Needed for Local Science Olympiad Teams.

Washtenaw Audubon Society (WAS) is pleased to announce that we are helping the Washtenaw Elementary Science Olympiad (WESO) build a new event for this year's Science Olympiad. The new event will be called "Our Feathered Friends". WAS education coordinator Dea Armstrong has been working with other volunteers at WESO since early spring to make this happen. For those of you who do not know, the WESO Science Olympiad is an alternative to traditional science fairs and is now the largest Science Olympiad in the country. We are thrilled to be a part of this event and to bring the world of birds to the program.

How does it work? Teams from individual elementary schools participate in skills/knowledge demonstrations/contests. Each school team is comprised of up to 100 students (50 in grades 2-3, 50 in grades 4-5). Students prepare for these events throughout the school year. Events offered are designed to recognize the wide variety of student skills. While some events require knowledge of scientific facts and concepts, others rely on scientific processes, skills, or applications. This ensures that everyone can participate.

"Coaches", (usually volunteers from students' parents) from each school and discipline help students understand the subject matter and begin teaching in early January. Preparation continues until the tournament takes place, which will be held this year on April 21st, 2012, at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor, Michigan. There will be outstanding opportunities to take students out for bird walks as the spring migration nears.

How can you can help? Not every elementary school has a bird-watching parent. WAS is seeking current members who are interested in helping coach a local school. We are also seeking members who are interested in helping prepare for this event. If interested in either option, please contact Dea Armstrong (ddarm@umich.edu or 734-276-9372). Time investment should be brief.

For more information about WESO and Science Olympiad see <http://www.aaps.k12.mi.us/wesowizards.home/home>

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
- Parks in your own community

A few other facts:

- The Recreation Passport replaces the state park sticker.
- Camping fees will remain in effect for state parks and in state forests.

Questions? Call 517-241-7275

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10365_55798_56688-234626--,00.html

Do you like WAS? Well, do you **LIKE** WAS?

If you belong to Facebook, please go to our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/washtenawaudubon>. If you have not "liked" us yet, please do so first. On the bottom left side of the page you will see a link that says "SHARE" - click on this. Add a personal note to your FB friends to "like" our page. I had two local friends who I never expected to like the page actually follow through. Future members??? Hit Send. Sit back and wait for the LIKES to come in. That's it.

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.

Dec. 17

No program. Join us for the Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count. Previous birding experience is helpful, but not necessary, as you will be assigned to count with an experienced birder if needed. See www.washtenawaudubon.org for details, or contact Jacco Gelderloos at 734-973-9422.

Watch the WAS web-page and the next newsletter for program topics in 2012!

Washtenaw Audubon Society

PO Box 130923

Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0923