



WASHTENAW
AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

January/February 2013

Dorothy Blanchard

1925-2012

The natural world lost a friend when Dorothy Blanchard died this past November at the age of 87. She was a life-long naturalist, founding member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, and volunteer extraordinaire for the Environmental Education Program of the Ann Arbor Public Schools. She was a gentle person, knowledgeable, attentive to detail, and passionate about the environment and the beauty of life. It was her life's passion to educate others about it and protect it wherever possible.

Dorothy lived much of her life in the Ann Arbor area and then moved to Dexter, Michigan. She was born to two scientists Frank N. Blanchard (Ph.D.) and Frieda Cobb Blanchard (Ph.D.). Frank Blanchard was a well-known herpetologist (the Blanchard's Cricket Frog is named for him) and Frieda Blanchard was a botanist at the University of Michigan. These two were instrumental in introducing Dorothy to the natural world and instilling in her a deep love of the environment. She was proud of her family's scientific work and spent much of her later years working on family history and providing information to the Bentley Historical Library.

In the early 1950s Dorothy was one of a small group of people who helped organize the Washtenaw Audubon Society. Within a short time she was invited to its Board and remained there until 2007. For much of the time she headed the Education Committee where she was instrumental in awarding scholarships to support Ann Arbor educators to attend a field biology class at the Ralph A. MacMullan Center on Higgins Lake. She led Audubon field trips every year, but her favorite was the spring wildflower trip to Sharon Hollow Woods, now the Nan Weston Nature Preserve. No one else could convey the beauty of these flowers and their natural history like her.



This gem of a woods was a favorite destination for Dorothy all of her life, and she and her mother played a major role in encouraging the Nature Conservancy to preserve it. Another special Audubon memory: Dorothy, bag in hand, traipsing up to the front table before the beginning of meetings, like a pied piper with a small gathering about her. Out would come some small creature – insect, herp, or other small animal – that she had collected and some literature about it. She called it a “whatsit” and then she would proceed to tell the group about it. In 1959 Dr. William Stapp invited her to become an outdoor guide for the Ann Arbor Public Schools' Environmental Education Program. With that program she found her calling, and she continued to work with it well into her 80's, touching the lives of many Ann Arbor children. In addition to her work with the schools, she volunteered for the Matthaei Botanical gardens, the Green Adventures Camp, the Waterloo Natural History Association, and preschools in the Dexter area. Dorothy also served on the Dexter Parks Commission.

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Dear Friends,

By the time you receive this your New Year will be well under way, but I wish you a happy and healthy 2013 all the same.

This is my third letter for a January/February issue of the Washtenaw Audubon newsletter, and the blank page that faces me is as blank this year as it has been the last two! For me, I am not the most avid of birders in the midst of winter and admire those of you who never lose your zeal. After I've eaten my fill over the holidays, my natural inclination is to pull out a good book and a cozy blanket. And that's what I've been doing lately.

I want to share with you about a book I've been reading that might strike a chord with our membership. It's not a bird book, but rather a fictional account of butterfly migration, and very well worth the read, at least so far. I've long been a fan of Barbara Kingsolver, and her most recent novel, *Flight Behavior*, does not disappoint. Even as I enjoy it as a compelling story, I can't ignore the call to action as Kingsolver takes on the issue of climate change. Simply, it is the story of a young farm wife in Appalachia who literally stumbles upon a fallout of butterflies, or more accurately - a migration gone wrong. When she first wanders into the wooded hills behind her farm and encounters the migrants, she is unaware of what she is observing and completely naive to how life-changing it will be:

"She was on her own here, staring at glowing trees. Fascination curled itself around her fright. This was no forest fire... Unearthly beauty had appeared to her, a vision of glory to stop her in the road. For her alone these orange boughs lifted, these long shadows became a brightness rising. It looked like the inside of joy, if a person could see that. A valley of lights, an ethereal wind. It had to mean something... She only wondered how long she could watch the spectacle before turning away. It was a lake of fire, something far more fierce and wondrous than either of those elements alone. The impossible."

While this account is fictional, albeit, believable, today's *New York Times* front page article, "Not Even Close: 2012 Was Hottest Ever in U.S." (January 9, 2013) focuses on fact. I'm by no means prepared to take on the issue of climate change in this letter, but only wish to encourage each of us to keep it front and center in our thoughts and our behaviors in 2013.

So, if the weather keeps you inside more than out, I recommend both a relaxing read and some thoughtful interaction on the environmental issues that face us and the birds we so enjoy.

Happy reading and birding,

Sue Johnson

Rare Bird Alerts

Michigan Bird Report

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

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

The 66th Ann Arbor CBC – December 15, 2012 by *Jacco Gelderloos*

I think it's fair to characterize the weather during the weeks leading up to the 66th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count as fall-like, certainly not wintery. During scouting the weekend before our count, I encountered no snow on the ground and no ice on the water anywhere. All in all, conditions were quite similar to last year's CBC, when the decidedly mild weather had resulted in a challenging count, with birds rather spread out and generally hard to find. Still, a cold front came through in the days before the count, so that by the time count day came around still waters were largely frozen – I hoped this change in weather might help concentrate birds for easier tallying. Complicating matters, though, the forecast for count day called for steady rain starting in the late morning. As always, our volunteers would need to make the best of circumstances and we'd all find out how things went at the tally at the end of the day.

Owling parties were out in all but one count area, on a windless night under cloudy, even foggy skies. Strikingly similar to the 2011 results, these seemingly ideal conditions did not result in the hoped-for owling bonanza. Most owling parties commented on how hard owls were to come by, with many birds coming in to tape recordings, but not calling in response. The results reflected these challenging conditions: 22 Screech-Owls and 10 Great Horned Owls were recorded, both rather below the recent 10-year average. Interestingly, in my count area (F), we had the best year for owls ever, with 7 Screech and 4 Great Horneds (no hoped-for Barred Owls again). Odd stuff when compared to the other owlers' predicament.

Turn-out was above average this year, with 68 field observers (12 of them under 18 years old) and a pretty decent total of 6 feeder watchers turning in results. The day started out quietly and foggy, with temperatures hovering around 30 degrees. The mercury worked its way up to the low 40s, with a few rain and snow showers during the afternoon. Luckily, no steady rain materialized, making for an altogether pretty decent day to be out and about birding.

Throughout the day, I was struck by the patchy distribution of many birds. Birds seemed concentrated in a few widely scattered pockets here and there, and numbers were low for many species, or at least so it appeared. Before we went over the results at the tally, my conversations with the other area leaders revealed a similar state of affairs throughout the count circle: "low numbers", "scarce", and "missed altogether" were some of the terms they used. It looked like the 2012 CBC would be a full-blown repeat of last year's count.

What a difference a compilation makes! Adding up the results from the 8 count areas revealed a CBC that posted results that were very good by any stretch of the imagination. Count day observers found a very respectable 72 species, slightly above the recent 10-year average of 69.5, along with 3 sp.s (see below for more on one of these). Count week observations added another 6 species to our tally, which got us very close to the near-mythical 80-species mark. Only in 2008 was that mark surpassed (with 81 species). The number of individual birds was just under 26,000, all due to the fact that the American Crows coming in to roost were nearly impossible to accurately count, resulting in a very low tally of a mere 7,200 (compared with almost 20,000 last year). Taking the crows out of consideration, and the 2012 numbers closely match those of past years.

Mild weather leading up to our count may have allowed waterfowl to stay in our area, and the mild freeze that followed may have concentrated these birds: 17 species of waterfowl were reported, four of them in record-tying numbers, one of them (Mute Swan) posting a new high with 93 – with high numbers in nearby Ford Lake it will likely only be a matter of time before our count surpasses the century-mark for this introduced species. On the flip side, we would have missed American Black Duck, had it not been for two count week birds on Barton Pond. Clearly, this species is not doing well, showing a steady downward trend over the past several decades.



Turkeys photo by Jacco Gelderloos

Another water-dependent species benefiting from the mild conditions was the Great Blue Heron, which also posted a record-high tally with 17 birds; oddly, there was no matching peak in the number of Belted Kingfishers (9), which was only a little above average. Exciting and interesting though this may have been, clearly the highlight of the day in the water-related bird category was the addition of a new species to the overall Ann Arbor CBC list: two teams found a total of 3 Bonaparte's Gulls, 1 over Independence Lake, the other 2 over Horseshoe Lake. I don't think any of us at the tally realized fully what the magnitude of these finds were, but it's highly unusual for a species to be added to the cumulative tally for our CBC these days – well done counters!

For daytime raptors the 2012 CBC was decidedly average, with only 5 species reported on count day and an additional 3 found during count week. However, falcons put on a good showing again (due to lack of snow cover?), with a count week Peregrine, 2 Merlins (tying last year's record high), and 8 American Kestrels. The latter was above the 10-year average of 5, but is still nothing to write home about for this declining species.

(Continued on the next 2 pages) 3

(CBC continued from previous page)

Wild Turkeys are clearly here to stay on our count: since the 2000 CBC, they have been recorded on all but 3 of our CBCs. This year, 3 areas turned up a total of 43, 32 of them in a massive flock on the grounds of the Wheeler Recovery Facility, formerly known as the Ann Arbor Landfill (*see photo*). A reverse trend can be discerned for the Ring-necked Pheasant – no Pheasants were recorded on our count for the third year in a row. It appears this species is on its way to following in the footsteps of Ruffed Grouse (last recorded in 1996) and Northern Bobwhite (last reported in 2000). On a final note in the galliform category, a family group of 4 Sandhill Cranes at the Ann Arbor Airport tied the all-time high for this unusual species, and can also likely be attributed to the mild weather leading up to this year's count.

A personal favorite of mine, woodpeckers were an interestingly mixed bag. Four of the 6 reported species were counted in lowish to average numbers, Hairy Woodpecker posted a record high of 45, and a whopping 3 Pileated Woodpeckers were reported (from 3 different count areas). Keep in mind that the first ever Pileated was observed as recently as 2008, followed by a single bird last year, and now this trio. It certainly looks like this enigmatic species will become a fixture on our count – let's hope it does! Rounding out the non-passerine category was a bird reported as *hummingbird sp.*, observed by Roger Wykes at Independence Lake. Tantalizingly, the bird was back-lit and observed briefly, but Roger's description (and storied birding experience) certainly make a very convincing case for getting this record accepted into the CBC annals. Needless to say, this was a(nother) first for the Ann Arbor count!

In spite of my gloomy premonitions while out counting, the day's results were not bad at all. Many, if not most, species were tallied in at least average numbers, some posted record highs, and a good handful of unusual species were found. After a near-absence last year (only 2!), Red-breasted Nuthatches clearly had a massive irruptive year in 2012 – a total of 82 were reported, besting 1993's all-time high of 50 by a stunning 64%! Not quite as impressive, but still of note was the record tally of 262 White-breasted Nuthatches, inching past the previous high of 254, dating back as far as 1979.



4 Chipping Sparrow photo by Ben Lucking

Ovenbird photo by Sue Miller



Another clear high point of the day was an Ovenbird, another first ever record for the Ann Arbor CBC. This bird was coming in to Sue Miller's feeder, on Ann Arbor's west side, and was excellently documented (*see photo*). Clearly, this hold-over had been able to survive thanks to the above-normal temperatures.

In an interesting parallel to the woodpeckers, a good variety of sparrow species was found, but several of them, notably White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco, were present in below-average numbers, probably because the mild weather had allowed them to remain farther north. That said, a handful of unusual species turned up, among them a Fox Sparrow and a count week Chipping Sparrow, nicely documented at young Ben Lucking's feeder (*see photo*).

Finally, much like the Red-breasted Nuthatch, finches posted a banner year, one virtually unlike any witnessed before on the Ann Arbor CBC. A total of 7 species were tallied, something that had previously occurred only once for our count, in 1985. Not only were our 3 regular finch species present in decent numbers, counters also turned up the rarer Purple Finch (1) and Common Redpoll (a singleton and a flock of 17), and, most unexpectedly, both species of crossbill: 4 Reds at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens, and a dozen White-wingeds (4 off Scio Church Rd, 8 in the Arb). This was the first time in the history of the Ann Arbor CBC that both species had been encountered in the same year; furthermore, Red Crossbill had last been found in 1997, and White-winged was last seen as far back as 1981. Clearly, 2012 was a good year for irruptive species!

In short, what I had feared would be a mediocre CBC, turned out to be a really good count. A dozen high tallies, 3 new additions to our cumulative species list, and a good number of other rarities spiced up our 'regular' data set. As always, there were a few low tallies, near-misses, or even complete misses (see my note re: Ring-necked Pheasant), but even those disappointing data points will serve to help us understand population trends on a much larger, continent-wide scale. Please take a look at the attached results, or to get a more in-depth historical or spatial perspective, surf over to the National Audubon Society's CBC website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html>.

Actually, starting with the year's CBC, count results will only be available through the NAS's CBC pages. With the demise of the \$5.00 participation fee, NAS has discontinued the paper publication of CBC results, North American Birds (NAB). How exactly this change will come about, or to what extent we will be able to find NAB's in-depth articles online, I cannot tell you at present. Be on the look-out for an update in a future edition of the WAS newsletter, or check out the NAS CBC pages if the mood strikes you. They are a wonderful place to 'waste' a few hours....

In closing, a heart-felt "Thank you" to all of you, volunteers; you helped make this year's count a smoothly run event once again – without you, counters, area leaders, and potluck/feeder watch coordinators, our count would not be as well-oiled a machine as it is. Thank you and see you all next year!

Canada Goose	3,613	Sandhill Crane	4 (US,tied) HC)	Carolina Wren	38
Mute Swan	93 (HC)	American Coot	67	Golden-crowned Kinglet	5
Trumpeter Swan	23	Bonaparte's Gull	3 (US NEW!)	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1 (US)
Wood Duck	2	Ring-billed Gull	481	Eastern Bluebird	205
Gadwall	2	American Herring Gull	6	Hermit Thrush	7
American Black Duck	CW	gull sp.	17	American Robin	1,457
Mallard	924	Rock Pigeon	704	Northern Mockingbird	1
Northern Shoveler	4 (US,tied) HC)	Mourning Dove	871	European Starling	4,233
Ring-necked Duck	3 (tied HC)	Eastern Screech-Owl	22	Cedar Waxwing	118
Common Goldeneye	22	Great Horned Owl	10	Ovenbird	1 (US NEW!)
Bufflehead	35 (tied HC)	Belted Kingfisher	9	American Tree Sparrow	565
Hooded Merganser	45	Red-bellied Woodpecker	126	Chipping Sparrow	CW (US)
Common Merganser	4	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	CW	Fox Sparrow	1 (US)
Red-breasted Merganser	1 (US)	Downy Woodpecker	157	Song Sparrow	17
Ruddy Duck	5	Hairy Woodpecker	45 (HC)	Swamp Sparrow	4
duck sp.	10	Northern Flicker	21	White-throated Sparrow	41
Pied-billed Grebe	3 (tied HC)	Pileated Woodpecker	3 (HC)	Dark-eyed Junco	389
Wild Turkey	43	hummingbird sp.	1 (US NEW!)	Snow Bunting	1
Great Blue Heron	17 (HC)	Blue Jay	326	Northern Cardinal	437
Bald Eagle	CW	American Crow	7,200	Purple Finch	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk	CW	Horned Lark	10	House Finch	506
Cooper's Hawk	12	Black-capped Chickadee	664	Common Redpoll	18 (US)
Red-tailed Hawk	72	Tufted Titmouse	240	Pine Siskin	226
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch	82 (HC)	American Goldfinch	636
American Kestrel	8	White-breasted Nuthatch	262 (HC)	Red Crossbill	4 (US)
Peregrine Falcon	CW	Brown Creeper	13	White-winged Crossbill	12 (US)
Merlin	2 (tied HC)	Winter Wren	1 (US)	House Sparrow	662
CW = count week only		HC = high count	US = unusual species	Total Individuals	25,875

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (February--April, 2013)

By Monty Brown, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free of charge and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For trips with constraints on the number of participants, WAS members are sometimes given priority in registering (again, as indicated). *For trips that require carpooling, minors attending without a parent must bring a written permission statement signed by a parent.* To receive a standard form for this, contact me at the e-mail address above. Also, if you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send it to me at that e-mail address.

**Saturday,
February 23**

One Road Challenge: Please participate in this friendly competition. Form a team of at least three people and select a **public** road in Washtenaw County that is likely to yield a wide variety of species in late February. Start searching this road as early as you like on the morning of the event for as many bird species as possible, stopping at 11 a.m. The official tally will begin at 11:30 a.m. at a (heated!) site to be determined. If the weather on this Saturday looks like it may not be appropriate for this event, we may postpone to the following day. A notice would be posted to the website and sent to the birders@umich.edu listserv. If you are interested in participating and need teammates, or if you have any questions or comments, check the WAS website and then contact Monty Brown at fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org.

**Saturday,
March 9**

Owl Prowl: Leader: Ray Stocking. This evening outing will focus on the county's three breeding owl species: Barred, Great Horned, and Eastern Screech. The trip will begin in the early evening (approximately 5:30 p.m.) and will go for about four hours. Final arrangements for timing and the meeting place will be decided closer to the event date, and registrants will be notified accordingly. Pre-registration is mandatory. Preference in registration will be given to Washtenaw Audubon members. To register, e-mail fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org. Include first and last names and a phone numbers. PLEASE NOTE: In case of bad weather, the backup date will be March 10.

**April
Date TBA**

Woodcock Walk at Barton Nature Area: Leader: Ray Stocking. This evening outing will focus on the American Woodcock whose unusual flying pattern during courtship 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 p.m. Please wear good walking shoes and dress warmly. (The temperature will likely drop quickly at sunset.) Bring a small flashlight to assist you in exiting the park after the program ends. You can plan on returning to your car shortly after 9:00.

Washtenaw Audubon **MASTER BIRDER** Certification

Washtenaw Audubon will offer those who wish to pursue a rigorous bird education program an opportunity to obtain a Washtenaw Audubon Master Birder certification. Like the similar Master Gardner program, applicants are asked to participate in an approved ornithological course (similar to the Leslie Science Center Course or Cornell's at home study program) and complete 40 hours of service in a bird-related activity such as leading birding field trips for a local Audubon Society, working with breeding bird surveys, doing bird related volunteer work at Leslie Science and Nature Center or the Bird Center of Washtenaw County or other similar activities. Individuals who would like to participate in this program or who have other ideas about what a Master Birder Program should be should contact Dea Armstrong, education chairperson for Washtenaw Audubon at ddarm@umich.edu.

Exciting class about birds to be offered in Ann Arbor February 26-April 27, 2013

When two individuals who love birds and love to teach folks about birds get an opportunity to work together to offer an in-depth bird course, those who enroll should be ready for an excellent learning experience. Instructors **Francie Krawcke**, Leslie Science and Nature Center (LSNC) raptor program specialist and an enthusiastic environmental educator, and **Deaver Armstrong**, Ann Arbor's City Ornithologist and experienced Washtenaw Audubon Field trip guide, have designed a two-month class that looks like a great way to learn about birds and bird-watching. Novice bird watchers, educators and environmental consultants will all find this course useful.

The class will cover basic bird anatomy and physiology, behavior, taxonomy, reproduction, vocalizations, and bird identification in a relaxed, interactive atmosphere. These topics will be covered in the "lecture" component on Tuesdays from 7-8:30 PM. The Saturday morning field trip meetings to various local sites (usually starting around 9 am and finishing by noon) will introduce participants to the local birds and provide some details about how the birds interact with each other and their various habitats. Because we are fortunate enough to be having classes at Leslie Science and Nature Center, the class component will often use live birds in demonstrations. The field component will focus more on groups of birds as they migrate into our area, moving from winter resident species, to waterfowl, to water birds, etc. From time to time other experienced field trip leaders will join us. Dea and Francie recognize that not everyone in the class may be able to make it to every event but reference materials will be provided so that "catching-up" will never be a problem. Educators should contact LSNC regarding continuing education credits. \$295 for 7 lectures and 7 field trips.

Unlike most of the Leslie Science and Nature Center programs, this course is geared towards adults but interested adolescents should inquire. Because class size will be limited, early registration is suggested. To register please call **734-531-6052** or log on to <http://www.lesliesnc.org/programs-friends-families/birds-prey-all-ages>

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 \$25
(on-line only \$20)

____ Student \$10
(emailed newsletters only)

____ Senior \$15
(on-line only \$10)

____ 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 994-3569 if you have questions about the program.

Please note: *The Matthaei Botanical Gardens charges for parking at the rate of \$1.20 an hour, enforced 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm. Members of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum park for free. This fee brings the Garden's policies into alignment with other University of Michigan venues, and provides revenue to maintain the Gardens. If you arrive at 7:15pm for a 7:30pm Washtenaw Audubon program, you will only have to pay 90 cents to park for the 45 minutes before enforcement ends at 8pm. The parking kiosks accept coins, bills and credit cards.*

February 20

My Year at the Point, Part 2: Summer into Fall Join popular Washtenaw Audubon speaker and field trip leader Michael Kielb, as he presents a sequel to last year's program, in which he recounted his experiences in Winter and Spring at Whitefish Point. Michael Kielb has devoted much time to this far north bit of Michigan, on the shores of Lake Superior, watching migration as the seasons change. Michael teaches biology at Eastern Michigan University, and is a board member of Whitefish Point Bird Observatory

March 20

Turn Your Garden Into a Hummingbird Haven Join Bruce Moorman for an informative program on attracting nature's winged jewels to your yard. Bruce will show you the flowers, trees, and shrubs to plant to entice hummingbirds to your garden, as well as different kinds of hummingbird feeders. Bruce Moorman is a Washtenaw Audubon member and an avid bird photographer.

Tuesday, March 19

Bird Migration Basics: Sierra Club (Note: This is not WAS!) (Matthaei Botanical Garden--7:30p.m.) Have you noticed an unusual-looking bird in our area for just one day? Ever wondered what happens to the hummingbirds and hawks in fall? Dea Armstrong, the city of Ann Arbor's Ornithologist, knows local birds and those just passing through. She will discuss what scientists have learned about migration, and the importance of stopover sites along migration routes. Free and open to the public. Non-members welcome. Refreshments provided.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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