



NEWSLETTER

September/October 2015

A Tale of Blue Grosbeaks

by Ross Green

“July is hot. And humid. And July can also be downright buggy. So perhaps it is understandable why July is the month with fewer people participating in eBird than any other month. There are also fewer checklists submitted on an average day in July than any other day of the year. But July provides fascinating birding—perhaps some of the most interesting birding of the year.”

Excerpt taken from July 4, 2014 eBird Challenge blog

It was the morning of July 27, 2015. I had already visited some of my favorite eastern Jackson County / western Washtenaw County birding spots, including Thorn Lake and the Sharonville State Game Area, home of the Henslow's. My sixth stop of the day included the Sharon Mills County Park Grassland area. This is the story of discovering a nesting pair of Blue Grosbeaks, rare to Michigan, and the excitement and responsibility that goes along with it.

As I rounded the west end of the loop trail that took me to the north grassland side of the swale, I wondered if I would find the Red-headed Woodpecker family. That was the main reason I was there. I had spent several visits last summer observing, photographing, and videotaping a family of Red-heads that had made a home in a snag on the eastern side of the swale. So far today I had seen none. Several Indigo Buntings and a couple of House Wrens had chastised me for entering their territory on this hot morning, so at least I had been mildly entertained.

I walked several more steps and then I heard the first “chink.” Another Indigo Bunting I assumed; its alarm just a little bit madder and louder because I had invaded its space? A few more steps and that one “chink” turned into a series of metallic “chinks.” It was then that I realized the bird (or birds) making this noise was not a species that I was familiar with. I took out my point-and-shoot camera, turned it to the video/audio mode, and began recording what was happening in an Elm tree—shaped more like a large bush—which stood out in a field

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President's Letter

Hello Washtenaw Birders,

I hope you are all enjoying fall migration. In contrast with the spring, fall birds can be more numerous, since adult birds are joined by all the first fall youngsters. Also, the window for seeing warblers, in particular, seems to be spread out over many more weeks. I have had a great fall in my yard, with many days in a row with at least one warbler species present. From September 10 through 12 my backyard hummingbird feeder hosted a female Black-throated Blue Warbler, who feasted on nectar and



ants several times per hour. On September 23, I was treated to a fabulous flock of warblers (10+ species), vireos (Blue-headed and Philadelphia) and later fall migrants such as White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Brown Creeper, 33 species in all. And, our Thursday and Weekend Fall Migration Walks at the Arb have been fun adventures. Lots of days with impressive warbler and vireo flocks, cuckoos eating spiny caterpillars at close range and rarities showing up.

During one of our weekend walks, Matty and Benjamin Hack refound a bird seen the previous day by Maggie Jewett and Alan Ryfe, the elusive Connecticut Warbler (a lifer for both Hack brothers), near the Beach and Boardwalk, which brought excitement, frantic texts, and emails. Andrew Pawuk's group was able to find the bird again moments later, but alas, my group missed the rarity. Karen Markey led a WAS-sponsored field trip to Hudson Mills MetroPark giving us all glimpses of colorful migrants, including a rare Prothonotary Warbler.

Those same Hack brothers stirred up excitement as well in the September issue of the American Birding Association's *Birding Magazine*. They are noted for their 500th World Birds and 500th ABA Birds, both occurring on the same day for each young birder, while birding Florida parks, including the Dry Tortugas.

On Sunday, February 15, 2015, Benjamin Hack of Ann Arbor, Michigan, saw his 500th world bird, the long-staying Key West Quail-Dove at Long Key State Park, Monroe County, Florida. The next day, he saw his 500th bird for the ABA Area, a Sooty Tern—actually, hundreds of them! This sighting came at Dry Tortugas National Park.

On Sunday, February 15, 2015, Matty Hack of Ann Arbor, Michigan, saw his 500th world bird, the Orange-winged Parrot, a pair at Matheson Hammock Park, Kendall, Miami-Dade County, Florida. The next day, he saw his 500th bird for the ABA Area, the Brown Booby, a singleton from the Ferry to Dry Tortugas National Park, Monroe County, Florida.

A huge congratulations to the Hack Brothers!

Check out our website, www.washtenawaudubon.org, and this newsletter for more information on our fall field trips and programs, including perennial favorite, the Big Sit, on October 10. More field trips will be added as fall progresses, so stop by often!

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger

Photo Credit: Black-throated Blue Warbler (Juliet Berger)

Blue Grosbeaks

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made up mostly of tall grasses and weeds. Even though I could hear what appeared to be two birds “chinking” in the bushy tree, I could only find one in the camera’s LCD viewfinder. An easily recognizable female Indigo Bunting chattered at me from the same tree, just a few feet from one of the “chinking” birds. I ended up recording about a minute of video/audio, and then set the dial back to the photo mode, hoping to get a decent picture of the newly discovered bird or birds.

Seconds later, a bird popped out of the small tree, positioned itself on one of the tall weeds in the field not far from me, and posed just long enough for me to get the first of many photos I would take of this bird over the next several weeks. It then flew off. A few seconds later I heard more “chinking” in the swale behind me. Perched on a small limb in a tree was a different bird, its color very unlike that of the first. I quickly snapped some pictures of it before it moved on. [[Photo to right: First photograph of first summer male Blue Grosbeak, 7/27/15.]]



At this point I was still unsure of the species of these two birds, but at least I had photos and video/audio, so maybe I could figure it out later with the help of an Internet search. With the mystery birds now settled down, two Red-headed Woodpeckers showed up, so I took a couple of pictures of them and then concluded my visit at Sharon Mills County Park and headed for the Nan Weston Preserve, located just down the road. [[Photo to the left:



Female Blue Grosbeak wondering what all the commotion is about, 7/31/15.]]

Later that afternoon I had a chance to look at the photos and video by way of my computer screen. Fortunately, most of the photos turned out. And the video with audio was pretty clear. Unfortunately, I still wasn’t positive what I had, and looking in my field guides and then searching the Internet didn’t prove to be much help.

It was at that point that I had to make a decision; just report them as passerine species and let it go at that, or email two or three photos to Adam Byrne and let him make the call. I had been down that road a couple of times before, sometimes not getting a reply for a week or so.

And, to make things worse, more often than not the reply wasn’t the one I was hoping for. This time I decided to report the mystery birds as passerine species on my eBird list and also send the photos and a short description of the day’s events to Adam, under the message title “Help Identifying mystery Grosbeaks (or something) in Washtenaw County.”

Within a couple of hours I had a response. The birds were indeed Grosbeaks—the Blue type. One was a first summer male, which is what caused most of the confusion for me from the start. Except for the bill, it looked nothing like the adult male I had observed a few weeks earlier at the Whiteford Township Park in Monroe, MI. Also, the Washtenaw male never sang that first morning while I was there. The Monroe County Grosbeak had sung the entire time (at least 10 minutes) it was perched in the Cottonwood tree next to the old quarry. Also, the Monroe male never “chinked” like the Washtenaw male did. And since I had never seen a Blue Grosbeak female before, I had no idea what they looked like.

Anyway, I now had a decision to make. I decided to sleep on it.

The next morning I updated my eBird list to include the two Blue Grosbeaks and then headed back to Sharon Mills County Park to see if the birds were still there. I live in Jackson County, about 17 miles from the Park, which makes it about a 22-minute drive. I was wondering if anybody would get there before I did. When I entered the parking lot, it was empty, so I hurriedly headed down the hill to the area I had seen the Blue Grosbeaks the day before.

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Blue Grosbeaks

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Within a few seconds of me hitting the trail north of the swale, the “chinking” began. And a few seconds later I saw one of the birds fly out of the grass less than six feet from the trail where a young Elm tree was located. Curiosity getting the best of me, I stepped into the tall grass and looked into the eight-foot tall tree, immediately seeing a nest with three white eggs, tucked between three small limbs just 36 inches from the ground. Okay, now I had a nest with eggs I couldn’t identify. I took out my smartphone and did a quick search. Yep, it looked just like the Blue Grosbeak nest and eggs in the illustrations.

It appeared Washtenaw County had a nesting pair of Blue Grosbeaks. I took a few photos of the eggs in the nest and continued down the trail in the direction of the parking lot. [[Photo to the right: Nest with three eggs located in eight-foot elm just a few feet from the trail, 7/28/15.]]



Before I made it to the north/south tree line I saw visitors walking the trail toward me. Washtenaw birders Brandon Nidiffer, Marci Baez (now Nidiffer), and Cathy Theisen were heading my way. Jokingly, I asked them what took them so long to get there, and then I filled them in on the details. I also let them know about the nest that I had found a few minutes earlier and how vulnerable its location was. I asked them their opinions of what we should do in terms of advertising the nest. Cathy said that it was my bird(s), and I could make the decision. I suggested we keep the “nesting pair” part quiet for a while. Later that day, I emailed Adam Byrne to update him on the Blue Grosbeak situation, and asked him for advice on what I should do about announcing the nest. He responded very quickly, agreeing that the nest should not be made public for a while.



That day, and the next few days, visitors poured into the Sharon Mills County Park to see the Grosbeaks. [[Photo to the left: Washtenaw Birders Juliet Berger, Norka Saldana, and Merrily Hart check out the Grosbeaks, 7/28/15.]]

I continued to visit on a regular basis: taking photos, checking on the nest, and helping visitors from around the area and beyond see the adult Grosbeaks. I don’t know how many times I walked the loop, or stood the grass up next to the tree with the nest when others weren’t around, but it was many times the first couple of weeks. It appeared to me that more than one birder had stood within inches of the nest while watching the adult birds. That happened even after the birds had hatched. I never heard one peep

out of the hatchlings during any of my visits so being quiet must have been part of their survival tactic.

On approximately August 7th, the three birds hatched. I say approximately because I saw eggs in the nest on the morning of the 6th, and then returned on the 9th to see the hatchlings. I talked to Don and Robyn Henise of Jackson on the 9th and Don mentioned that he had seen the female carrying food the day before. [[Photo to the left: First look at the three nestlings on August 9, 2015.]]

For the rest of the tale of the Blue Grosbeaks, please see the November/December 2015 Washtenaw Audubon Society newsletter. And if you can’t wait that long for print, check the whole story out at www.washtenawaudubon.org. Thanks to Ross Green; full bio of Ross in the November/December issue. All photos copyright and courtesy of Ross Green.



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The Washtenaw Audubon Society is an active chapter of Michigan Audubon formed in the early 1950s. Monthly programs feature guest speakers on a wide variety of natural history and birding topics. We conduct field trips to places in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and beyond.

Meet the Flock: Mike Sefton

If you have read other “Meet The Flock” columns, you’ve seen Mike Sefton’s name mentioned as a mentor to many! He has been married to his wife, Nicole, for 49 years, and has two daughters living in Ann Arbor. He lost his beloved Golden Retriever, Jake the Wonder Dog, and has not yet been ready to get another dog, although he thinks a Golden or a Goldendoodle are in his future. He is retired from the late, lamented Border’s Bookstores group.

Mike became interested in birds as a child, both through bird coloring books, and by observing a neighborhood Red-headed Woodpecker nesting in a telephone pole. His Great Aunt Adele further stoked the birding passion in him by giving him a small Golden Guide to birds when he was six years old.

He has been active in WAS for several decades, and credits neighbors Judy and Manfred Schmidt, Will Weber, and ultimately the entire membership of WAS as his mentors. In fact, Mike was the 2014 recipient of the Washtenaw Wingnut Award. In his words, “I finally won the coveted Wingnut Award, presented annually to the birder with the greatest number of species seen in Washtenaw County for the year, with 232 species in 2014. My win was made possible by Ben Lucking and Cathy Theisen, who kept the pressure on, by all the birders who found and promptly reported birds that I chased, and by Nicole, who always said, “Go now, or the bird will be gone!” He continues: “2014 was the only time I’ve won it, though I finished in second place a few times, including 2013, when I had my best year with 237 species. That was the year Andy Dettling set the county record with 240 species, 235 of which he found while riding a bicycle! He thus set a county record for a Big Green Birding Year, or BGBY, for the greatest number of species seen without the use of fossil fuels.” Mike gives props to the pioneers of this annual competition since 1994: Roger Wykes, who won or tied for the win an amazing 12 times, with a high of 238 species in 2005, and Don “The Man” Chalfant, who has won or tied for the win six times, with a high of 237 species in 2002. Other winners of the coveted award are Bob Arthurs (three times), Dea Armstrong, and Maggie Jewett.



There are a bunch of eager youngsters in the lead this year, and it will be interesting to see who comes out on top. We’ll all be rewarded with the chance of seeing the cool birds that they find.

His most memorable birding experiences include the birds and mammals of South Africa and Peru; a fallout at Pte. Pelee; the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival; hiking out to a colony of nesting Laysan Albatrosses on Oahu; and finally, finding the elusive ‘Akiapola’au on the Big Island after hiking the Pu’u ‘O’o Trail for the sixth time. Now, he would most like to see an Ibisbill in its native habitat.

His favorite birding spots in Washtenaw County are the Nan Weston Preserve, the Arb, Portage Lake, and any shorebird habitat.

He encourages new birders to join WAS and go on field trips, where many experienced birders can teach you so much. He feels it is imperative that we cultivate youth birding, so that these young people can continue the work of halting habitat and species loss. His best advice to young birders: PROTECT YOUR EARS!

Mike is also the Vice President and Program Chair for WAS, and can be reached at Vp-programs@washtenawaudubon.org. [[Profile by Cathy Theisen]]

Washtenaw Audubon Society		
2014-15 Financial Report		
submitted by Elvera Shappirio		
Description	Checking	Savings
Balances as of July 1, 2014	3,189.36	12,656.05
Checking Receipts	2,488.29	
Checking Expenditures	2,798.29	
Rita Burke bequest		20,000.00
error	4.85	
Savings Interest		
Transfers: CD interest to savings		23.08
Balances as of June 30, 2015	2,884.21	32,679.13
Checking Account Receipts		
Member Dues (by check or cash)	1,020.00	
memorial donations	50.00	
Donations	225.00	
member dues by Paypal	1,193.29	
Total Receipts	2,488.29	
Checking Account Expenditures		
Newsletter Printing and Postage	653.37	
Speakers, Program Expense	100.00	
Grant: Whitefish Point	500.00	
Grant: Rouge River Bird Observatory	500.00	
Brochures	25.64	
Liability Insurance	525.00	
Banking costs (checkbooks)	0.00	
Corporate Filing Fee	20.00	
Web site costs	0.00	
Property costs: Searles drain fee	0.00	
Gull trip van rentals	364.28	
Postal box fee	80.00	
Safe Deposit box	30.00	
Total Expenses	2,798.29	
Savings Account Receipts		
Interest on Regular Savings Account	3.11	
Interest on \$10,000.00 CD	23.08	
Total Savings Account Interest	26.19	
Investment Account		
The investment account includes one CD valued at \$10,000.00		
The interest is transferred to the regular savings account on a monthly basis.		
The \$10,000.00 CD matures Sept. 2015		

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (October/November 2015)

Bryn Martin, 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 email address above. Also, if you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send it to me at the email address above.

Thursday mornings through October 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. / Sunday, October 11, 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. (October 1, 8, 15, 22, 29)

Weekly Fall Migration Walks at Nichols Arboretum (Leaderless)

Every Thursday morning from August 27 through the end of October, participants will gather at 8:00 a.m. at the end of the Riverview Drive cul-de-sac (off Geddes Road) near the eastern edge of the Arboretum for these leaderless walks to observe fall migration. The birders available that day will choose a route and head out in search of migrants. The walks go until roughly 11:00 a.m., but anyone can join or leave the group as his or her schedule requires.

Saturday, October 10 6:00 a.m. until the afternoon

The Big Sit (Independence Lake County Park), Leader: Don Chalfant

This is a low-key international competition that Don has participated in for the past 14 years. The task is to try to identify by sight or sound as many bird species as possible while remaining in a circle of 17 feet in diameter. For participants other than Don, the timing can be completely flexible. You can arrive before dawn to join in the owling or you can come after breakfast, in the afternoon—whatever works for you. It is also a great outing for those with restricted mobility since everything takes place in a fixed spot. For those staying for any significant amount of time, we recommend bringing food and a chair, in addition to your binoculars. (Rain date is October 11th. If bad weather is projected, be sure to check the birders listserv. This decision will be made by 4 a.m.)

Saturday, November 21 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Belle Isle State Park

We will once again be joining up with Oakland Audubon Society for this annual trip to Belle Isle. Waterfowl abounds and other species lurk in the woods and along the shore. Please meet in the parking lot at the Nature Center on the east end of the island at 8:00 a.m. Dress for the weather. It can be very cold there with the wind whipping off of the river. We will scope for birds in the water and end with a hike through the woods. We should be done by noon. If there is interest, we may go somewhere for lunch afterwards. A state park recreation passport is required.

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, P.O. Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	Membership Dues	
Additional Donation \$_____		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> 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 7:30 p.m. at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. **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.*

October 21 Birding Jamaica

Join Bryn Martin for a program on Washtenaw Audubon's most recent overseas field trip, to the lovely island of Jamaica, where there are a number of birds found nowhere else in the world. Bryn Martin is an avid world birder, a high school teacher, and Washtenaw Audubon's field trip coordinator.

November 18 How You Can Help Birds to Survive

Join Barbara Lucas for an informative program on ways we can help birds to survive in an increasingly urbanized environment. From making our yards more hospitable to birds, to preventing fatal window strikes, there are many things we can do to help our feathered friends. Barbara Lucas is an environmental media consultant for Washtenaw County, and is the host of WEMU-FM's The Green Room, a radio program exploring local environmental issues.

December 19 No formal program in December

Join us on Saturday, December 19, for the Christmas Bird Count! Beginning birders are welcome to participate in the count. The well-attended tally/potluck after the count takes place at Matthaei Botanical Gardens. Visit the Washtenaw Audubon Society web site for more information.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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