



WASHTENAW
AUDUBON SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

September / October 2020

[July-August 2020: Summer Birding Highlights](#)

The Highlight

Oftentimes, the July-August period gets a bit of a bad rap as the “summer doldrums”, a time of year when not much is happening as far as birding is concerned. In reality, of course, the birds are still out there to be found and enjoyed – some of our local nesting species are still quite active in early July, and southbound shorebird migration seems to start almost as soon as northbound migration ends! With that in mind, which bird made the biggest splash? As was the case with the “Highlight” birds from the previous three 2-month periods, this period’s top bird was found at the tail end of the period, on August 30, in a large plowed field at the intersection of Reno and Hieber Rd. During this all too short time window, a fortunate few birders got to enjoy a very dapper **BUFF-BREADED SANDPIPER** that was present there from about 10:00 until approximately 3:30 p.m. At times, it was not easy to (re)locate and it flew off at least once around 1:00 p.m., but the bird came back to the field soon after, only to fly off for good later in the afternoon. There are fewer than ten local records for this handsome shorebird, although it appears that it is being found more regularly in recent years. >>>>continued on page 5<<<<



Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*, Reno & Hieber Rd, August 30 2020 (left: Ben Lucking; right: Victor Chen)

President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon members and friends,

Oh, how I miss all of you!! The pandemic has caused WAS to cancel all our in-person programs and field trips. I would never have imagined this to be possible last February, when we were still going out birding every weekend on Matt Spoor's field trips and enjoying a well-attended trip up to the Soo for Winter birding. We enjoyed Len Sander's smashing photography at our February program, and birded the One Road Challenge in early March. We were looking forward to spring migration. Then we locked down—we lost so many fellow Michiganders, first responders, US residents and world citizens to COVID-19, and saw the world's sense of safety rocked to the core. We stay apart for our own and each other's safety, even though we miss each other terribly. Maintaining safe social distancing is so important. The pandemic has hit my own family. We lost my uncle in California, in September, and we have family members who are sick now and, thankfully, expected to recover. We must do more than pray for each other. We must each act with care and compassion, with the knowledge that wearing masks saves lives.

Your Washtenaw Audubon Board of Directors has not been idle during the shutdown. We're learning how to put Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into practice in our organization, and have a new DE&I statement that we're committed to with energy and enthusiasm. You will see our statement on our FB page, our Website and in each WAS Newsletter going forward. We want to welcome all nature enthusiasts and birders without regard to race, sex, nationality, income, religion, sexual orientation, age, veteran status, ability or disability, or any other factor. We also welcomed Heather Good, Executive Director of Michigan Audubon, and Ann Arbor resident, to our WAS Board, as our new Education Chair. We look forward her creativity and teaching experience on our board, and to collaborating with MAS on initiatives going forward, including educational signage for Chimney Swifts roosts, and more. We thank outgoing Education Chair, Astrid Padilla, for all her energy and enthusiasm for people, birds, and bringing us together around important social issues.

WAS Programs continue monthly via Zoom. Check our FB page and website for the link to join the Zoom, and invite your friends, who are not yet members. This month Don Chalfant takes us on a Virtual Nature Walk, and we go birding with Keith Dickey and his camera, in Oahu, in November. Several weeks from now, October 17, many of us will do Big Days in a safe way, on the eBird October Big Day. The Christmas Bird Count will be conducted safely, on December 19th, and we hope many will join the fun, organized by our own Jacco Gelderloos. See details in our media.

Enjoy fall migration. There is still so much more to come. My birding adventure today, a trip to UM's Saginaw Forest, included Purple Finches, Red-breasted Nuthatches, many Warbler species and a clucking Pileated Woodpecker. The birds are still here, providing enjoyment for us in a time when much other entertainment seems unsafe. I look so forward to seeing all of you on the trail, with a mask on, by the next good bird.

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger

President, Washtenaw Audubon Society

WAS Financial Report for Fiscal Year 2020

Summary Report for 2019-2020		
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES		
<i>Year ended June 30, 2020</i>		
REVENUES, GAINS AND OTHER SUPPORT		
Member dues	\$ 3,555	\$ 3,255
Gifts, unrestricted	1,216	932
Gifts, restricted (Chimney Swift Fund)		2,000
Contributions in kind - Loates "After Audubon" Prints		2,900
Interest earned	628	279
Sales of merchandise	625	40
TOTAL REVENUES, GAINS AND OTHER SUPPORT	\$ 6,024	\$ 9,406
EXPENSES		
Newsletter and brochure costs	\$ 909	\$ 2,088
Stipends		1,200
Cost of Merchandise	653	
Grants made		1,000
Insurance	712	688
Recognitions and Awards	188	
Program expenses	137	422
Searle property expenses	39	126
Other operating expenses	462	284
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 3,099	\$ 5,808
RESULTS FROM OPERATIONS	\$ 2,924	\$ 3,598
NET ASSETS AT BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$ 159,305	\$ 155,707
NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR	\$ 162,229	\$ 159,305



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The birds Washtenaw Audubon pledges to protect differ in color, size, behavior, geographical preference, and countless other ways. As we honor and celebrate the equally remarkable diversity of the human species, Washtenaw Audubon considers the work of inclusion, diversity, and equity a top priority moving forward. We hope that, in doing so, we can bring creativity and energy to our work in Washtenaw County and beyond for birds and people alike.

[Read our full statement at washtenawaudubon.org](http://washtenawaudubon.org)

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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.

Field Trip/Event Update

Saturday, October 17

eBird October Global Big Day

Join Team eBird for this year's October Big Day 2020, which is happening during the first [Global Bird Weekend](#). The goal of Global Bird Weekend is to make October 17-18 the biggest ever birding weekend and support BirdLife International's appeal to end illegal bird trade. One of Global Bird Weekend's aims is to have more than 25,000 people submit eBird checklists on 17 October. For more information on this event, check out the event's website: <https://ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2020-bigger-than-ever>

Sunday, November 1 (November 7 is the rain date), 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. Community Workday at the Searles Nature Preserve

Join us for the semiannual restoration day at our very own Searles Nature Preserve! Social distancing rules will apply; masks must be worn at all times. Bring your own water, gloves, and tools, like loppers and clippers. Additional tools will be provided. The Searles Preserve can be found along Bolla Rd in Augusta Twp.

Saturday, December 19

The 75th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count

Mark your calendars for this annual event! Note that there will be some changes in how the count will be run this year, so please keep an eye on the WAS website's CBC page and the CBC announcement article in the November-December newsletter.



Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* (Keith Dickey)

Please join us for Keith's upcoming "Birding Oahu" program to learn more about these lovely birds!

Did you know that you can help save birds by drinking Smithsonian "Bird Friendly" certified shade-grown coffee? Visit 3billionbirds.org to learn more about this and other practical conservation tips!

Summer Birding Highlights >>>>continued from page 1<<<<**Waterfowl through Rails**

Summer is generally uneventful as far as unusual waterfowl is concerned, but there were a few goodies out there. A female **Northern Shoveler** at North Bay Park (8/14), an **American Black Duck** reported from the Matthaei Botanical Gardens (7/18), and a **Green-winged Teal** at Sharon Mills (8/21) were all quite early for the County. Rather intriguingly, and possibly indicating a failed local breeding attempt, both a male and a female **Common Merganser** were present - the male was seen below Argo Dam on 7/5, the female was encountered at Island Park (7/26) and during 8/25 - 8/27, at Nichols Arboretum.



Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*, Nichols Arboretum, August 25 2020 (Victor Chen)



Northern Bobwhite *Colinus virginianus*, Braun's Tree Farm, July 25 2020 (Michael Bowen)

Following up the seemingly crazy record of May-June's bird in northeast Ann Arbor, an apparent colony of **Northern Bobwhites** was found nearby, at Braun's Tree Farm at Warren and Gleaner Hall, with as many as four birds heard calling from 7/19 through 8/14. A single **Eastern Whip-poor-will** was reported southeast of Dexter on 8/2. Apart from the regular breeders at Trinkle Marsh, the only other **Common Gallinule** observation came from the Matthaei Botanical Gardens, where a quartet of these cute rails made for a pretty unexpected record.

Shorebirds through Terns

Adding to the excitement of the **Buff-breasted Sandpiper**, an **American Golden-Plover** was present in the same plowed field at the intersection of Reno and Hieber Roads on 8/30 – it seems this species has been found roughly every other year since the turn of the millennium. **Stilt Sandpipers** had an excellent fall migration, with a group of eight birds at Four Mile Lake from 8/9 – 8/12, a juvenile in the same location from 8/26 – 8/27, and a very confiding trio at State & Textile from 8/27 – 8/29. The former sighting makes for a record high count for Washtenaw County! In among the numerous reports for its Least and Semipalmated cousins, there was a one-off record of a **Baird's Sandpiper**, recorded when it flew in to Four Mile Lake on 7/27. Continuing a stellar year for dowitchers (and for the location they were found), there were two separate reports of singleton **Short-billed Dowitchers** at Four Mile Lake, one on 8/14, and another from 8/26 – 8/28.



American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*, Reno & Hieber Rd, August 30 2020 (Juliet Berger)



Stilt Sandpiper *Calidris himantopus*, State & Textile Pond, August 28 2020 (Russell Ryan)

Apparent early migrants, a few **Bonaparte's Gulls** passed through the County in early August, with a duo over the Westgate Shopping Center (8/2), and another duo at Four Mile Lake (8/2 – 8/4). Terns continued their great spring showing with multiple reports for the two more regular species. As many as 13 **Caspian Terns** were present at North Bay Park from 7/12 – 8/22, with another bird at North Hydro Park from 8/5 – 8/8 – the former is among the top high counts for Washtenaw County. On 7/27, a group of 10 **Forster's Terns** stopped by Four Mile Lake, followed by another five at Whitmore Lake on 8/10, and two more at Portage Lake on 8/19.



Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, North Bay Park August 6 2020 (Bill Nolting)



Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*, Whitmore Lake, August 10 2020 (Norka Saldana)

Hérons through Owls

2020 continued to be an excellent year for herons. On 8/14, an **American Bittern** was found at the Schwab Rd marsh near Manchester. **Least Bittern** reports continued well into summer, with single birds at Crooked Lake (7/6), Four Mile Lake (8/10), and along the Huron River near the Foster Rd bridge (8/11). Add to that as many as three birds present at the reliable site of LeFurge Woods (7/12 – 8/9), and it's clear these secretive little herons were well-represented this year. Often equally secretive, **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were seen at Furstenberg Park (7/2) and at North Hydro Park (8/4 – 8/11). What had seemed like a brief stay back in June, last period's highlight, a **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**, was relocated near a complex of ponds in a subdivision off Tuttle Hill Rd, giving many birders another chance to see this handsome rarity during its second stay from 7/13 – 7/18.



Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, North Hydro Park, August 8 2020 (Bill Nolting)



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa violacea*, Tuttle Hill Ponds, July 16 2020 (Kiehl Smith)

Hawk migration traditionally kicks off at the end of August, but, not surprisingly, a few birds often get in an early start. After a string of sightings during late spring/early summer, **Northern Harriers** turned up in rather widely spread locations. A bird near Zeeb & Gregory on 7/10 neatly fit in the pattern of early summer birds and may be indicative of a local nesting attempt. More likely migrating was a bird over Nichols Arboretum (8/6), one in the Vreeland Rd area (8/7 – 8/8), and a female over Four Mile Lake (8/27). Early migrant **Sharp-shinned Hawks** appeared over Nichols Arboretum on 8/12 and near Chelsea on 8/23. There clearly was an uptick in **Barred Owl** activity during July and August, given that they were observed in at least ten separate locations! Most reports were from their traditional haunts on the west side of the County, but there were quite a few observations from locales around Scio Township in particular, i.e. much closer to Ann Arbor.

Last, but certainly not least, a pair of **Merlins** successfully raised at least one chick in the Normal Park neighborhood of Ypsilanti, with sightings of up to three birds during the first three weeks of July. Starting mid-August, additional Merlin reports started coming in from sites scattered around Ann Arbor (Thurston Pond on 8/13 and UM North Campus on 8/20) and farther out, at the Reno & Hieber field, where it spooked the rarity shorebirds present on 8/30.



Barred Owl *Strix varia*, Burns-Stokes Preserve, July 2 2020 (Jocelyn Anderson)



Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Thurston Pond, August 13 2020 (Victor Chen)

Passerines: Flycatchers through Mimids

Reverse migration for many passerines gets underway by the middle of August, and this season was no different. **Olive-sided Flycatchers** pushed through in good numbers, and were found in at least eight different locations, starting on 8/13. The same can be said for **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers**, although their presence was largely limited to Ann Arbor parks, with the first of these handsome *empids* present at Eberwhite Woods from 8/18 – 8/21. **Alder Flycatchers** seem to have had a good breeding season locally, with calling birds present in at least four locations through the end of July. Most notable were two birds at County Farm Park from 7/16 – 7/18. The only **White-eyed Vireos** that managed a (likely) successful nesting were inhabiting the thickets near the Knox Presbyterian Church at Scio Church & Wagner, where a bird was singing for essentially all of July. Southbound **Philadelphia Vireos** appeared near Dexter on 8/27 and in the Pittsfield Preserve on 8/30.



Yellow-bellied Flycatcher *Empidonax flaviventris*, Eberwhite Woods, August 20 2020 (Bill Nolting)



White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*, Knox Presbyterian Church, July 20 2020 (Michael Bowen)

Red-breasted Nuthatch is an uncommon local breeding species, so it is no surprise to see as many as three reported from Stinchfield Woods (7/4 – 8/5). However, it is also a well-known irruptive species, and this year looks to be one of those years where unusually large numbers of this feisty little bird find their way to Washtenaw County: starting as early as 8/5, nuthatches showed up all over the County and this push showed no signs of abating by the end of August. An even rarer nesting species, the **Brown Creeper**, may well have done so at Stinchfield Woods, with two birds there on 7/4. Other reports of these rather inconspicuous birds came in from the Ruthven Nature Area (7/21) and from Silver Lake (8/25).

A **Winter Wren** was singing at the Searles Preserve until at least 7/1, making for a very rare summer record for this species. As mentioned in the spring write-up, both *Cistothorus* wrens had an excellent year – **Marsh Wrens** were present in numerous locations scattered across the County (7/2 – 8/28), with a high count of 6 on 7/25 at Trinkle Marsh. Similarly, **Sedge Wrens** were detected at a variety of sites throughout (7/2 – 8/19). As many as four singing males on 7/30 at one of the hayfields at the Ann Arbor Landfill was particularly exciting for a City Parks property. As has been the norm in recent years, good numbers of **Northern Mockingbirds** were in Manchester and Sharon Townships throughout the period, with a high count of five along Meyers Rd. More unusual were Mockingbirds continuing from spring in the Maple & Milkey area south of Saline (7/11 – 7/25) and along Lindley Rd on 7/27.



Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*, Arbor Hills, August 24 2020 (Victor Chen)



Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis*, Ann Arbor Landfill, July 21 2020 (Aditya Varma)

Passerines: Sparrows through Cardinals

Many of the rarer sparrows that featured in the spring report stuck around and nested locally. To find nesting **Grasshopper Sparrows**, a visit to Sharon Township was required, with up to three along Prospect Hill Rd on 7/22, and a few singing birds at the Sharonville SGA (7/2 – 8/3). Up to four **Clay-colored Sparrows** continued to thrill birders at Rolling Hills County Park from 7/16 – 8/1. Territorial **Vesper Sparrows** held court in about half a dozen locations throughout the County through at least 8/16. Five locations held State-threatened **Henslow's Sparrows**, with a staggering 11 singing birds heard at the Ann Arbor Airport on 7/30. The only **Yellow-breasted Chat** report was of a bird coming to a birdbath in the Vorhies Rd area on 7/3.



Grasshopper Sparrow *Ammodramus savannarum*, Sharonville SGA, July 4 2020 (Russell Ryan)



Clay-colored Sparrow *Spizella pallida*, Rolling Hills County Park, July 16 2020 (Bill Nolting)

Up to two singing **Northern Waterthrushes** in the wet woods near the Eddy Discovery Center (7/2 – 7/28) indicate the continued presence of a small breeding population. Although it is the more common of the Blue-winged x Golden-winged Warbler hybrid complex, a **Brewster's Warbler** found at Nichols Arboretum on 8/31 was still quite noteworthy. Up to eight **Prothonotary Warblers** continued through mid-July along the Huron River near Hudson Mills Metropark and another two were at Dexter Huron Metropark through the end of the month. A lone bird observed at Crooked Lake on 8/22 may have been part of post-breeding dispersal movements. The first **Mourning Warbler** of fall migration was at the Whitmore Lake Preserve on 8/17; as many as two individuals of this handsome warbler were at Nichols Arboretum from 8/22 – 8/25.

Hooded Warbler reports came in from several locations in the northwestern corner of the County through the end of August. Up to three **Cerulean Warblers** were singing in three regular spots in the Waterloo State Rec Area until 7/17. The Hankerd Rd **Prairie Warbler** was last reported on 7/8 – we’ll have to wait and see if the pair returns for an 11th nesting season in 2021. Always a treat, a **Canada Warbler** thrilled local birders at Nichols Arboretum for four days running (8/27 – 8/30). Starting 8/22, **Wilson’s Warblers** appeared in the Ann Arbor area, with two at Black Pond Woods on 8/30.



Brewster’s Warbler *Vermivora cyanoptera x chrysoptera*, Nichols Arboretum, August 31 2020 (Karen Markey)



Mourning Warbler *Geothlypis philadelphia*, Nichols Arboretum, August 24 2020 (Bill Nolting)

After going missing for a few years after successful nesting attempts in 2015 and 2016, a male **Blue Grosbeak** spent a few days fruitlessly looking for a mate at the Sharon Mills County Park from 7/26 – 7/29. **Dickcissels** had a great year with good-sized colonies at three locations: near Vreeland & Gotfredson (4 birds, 7/1 – 7/11), at the Ann Arbor Airport (7 birds, 7/1 – 7/23), and at the Sharonville SGA (9 (!) birds, 7/2 – 8/26). Additional individuals were present at the Conservancy Farm (7/3) and at the Lehman Rd fluddle (7/12 – 7/19).



Blue Grosbeak *Passerina caerulea*, Sharon Mills County Park, July 28 2020 (Benjamin Hack)



Dickcissel *Spiza americana*, Ann Arbor Airport, July 8 2020 (Juliet Berger)

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.**

____ Renewal ____ New Member
 Additional Donation \$ ____

Membership Dues

____ Individual Household \$25 (online only \$20)

Name: _____

____ Student \$15 (online only \$10)

Address: _____

____ Senior \$15 (online only \$10)

Phone: _____ Email: _____

____ Patron \$50

We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means. **Note:** WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal and emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

WAS Monthly Programs

Washtenaw Audubon's in-person programs at the Botanical Gardens are on hold until the University allows gatherings to take place. To view our online Zoom programs, you will need access to an internet-capable computer, phone, or similar device. An announcement of the web address to view the program will be on our web site, Facebook page, and on the Birders email list a few days before the program.

We may also add more online programs for October and the future, which will be announced on the same internet platforms.

October 17, 7:30 p.m. A Virtual Nature Walk with Don Chalfant (an online Zoom program)

Back by popular demand, Washtenaw Audubon speaker and noted humorist Don Chalfant presents an illustrated talk on a virtual nature walk. To quote Don:

"If I were to lead a nature walk with you, I'd start by encouraging you to use your eyes—not just to look, but to look more closely, from a different angle, to get a new perspective. I'd encourage you to listen to the sounds made by each animal we encounter; and I'd also share a detail that might help you remember the plant or animal."

Besides his spectacular photos, Don will doubtless have a number of droll anecdotes to relate. Don Chalfant is a resident of Ann Arbor and New Smyrna Beach, a retired teacher, an avid photographer, and an ace birder.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/98564591023>

Or dial in:

Call: 646 876 9923

Meeting ID: 985 6459 1023

November 18, 7:30 p.m. Birding Oahu, with Keith Dicke (an online Zoom program)

WAS board member Keith Dickey shares his recent birding ventures on the island of Oahu, including colorful urban birds, endangered endemics, three species of Boobies, 2 species of Francolins, and nesting Laysan Albatross. Please join us for this pictorial jaunt through the cityscapes, forests, wetlands and coastal preserves of this Hawaiian island and its birdlife.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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