

The Chat



Newsletter of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, serving East Central Indiana

Vol. 35, Issue 1 Jan./Feb. 2009

Jan. 12:

Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake

On January 12, we'll begin our 2009 program calendar with a look at one of Indiana's endangered species, the Eastern Massasauga, the only Hoosier rattlesnake. Massasauga means great river-mouth in the Chippewa language, and that is where this snake was originally found – in the marshes along Midwest rivers. As with many other species, the Massasauga has suffered from habitat loss. Frequent but generally unwarranted fear of snakes has also caused them to fall victims to needless destruction.

Robert Cooper Audubon Chapter will host Bill Kingsbury, Professor and Chair of Biology at Indiana-Purdue in Fort Wayne and Director of the Center for Reptile and Amphibian Conservation and Management.

Bill will bring a special program that will help acquaint us with the Massasauga and its unique niche in our ecosystem. Research on how the Massasauga has responded to habitat restoration is just one focus of the work being done at the center.

Make a New Year's resolution to invite a friend to join you at Minnetrista Cultural Center in Muncie on January 12 at 7:00 PM. Refreshments and social time will precede our 7:30 presentation.

Feb. 9:

Program TBA

Mark your calendar for February 9 and watch for an e-mail about our February program. You can also visit our website www.cooperaudubon.org for information as it comes available.

Special Thank You's

Thanks to Cintas Linen Service, Seedy Sally's, and Resqu Hausfor donations for our November awards ceremony.

An extra special thank you to Scott Andersom of Seedy Sally's in Pendleton for helping us with our meeting night bird seed sale during December.

Great Horned Owl: January & February Bird of the Month

Great Horned Owl:
Bubo virginianus
By Helen Twibell



The great horned owl is a truly magnificent creature of the wild. It stands from 18" up to 25"-27" in height and has long, wide wings which appear very impressive in flight. The great horned owl is the largest of the "eared" owls, the female being much larger than the male. The "ears" or "horns" which are tufts of feathers, are kept flat during flight. These tufts of feathers which appear as "ears" serve as a part of the camouflage the owl uses when resting on a tree limb during the day with the "ears" sticking straight up, and the vertical position of the large body against the bark of the tree trunk along with the dark brown and gray varied plumage, the owl is well hidden while it rests with its yellow eyes closed. The dark under parts accentuate the white throat which may appear as a narrow white collar while the owl is in repose. In some regions these owls may be much lighter and in others much darker. This coloration may include many, many variations since this bird is found almost all over the North American continent excepting the very most northern arctic regions.

The great horned owl oc-

curs almost everywhere, from the deepest forest to city parks where rats are abundant. Farms with large barns which are open enough to allow the owl's entrance and exit are likely to be visited by a great owl such as this. The birds appear never to build a nest but to take over the nest of some other large bird. The nests of red-tailed hawks, bald eagles and herons are frequently used. The owls may also nest on the bare surface of protected ledges, in caves and in hollow trees. In most areas they are the earliest nesters, beginning nesting a month or two before hawks and other large birds of prey, so they can get the edge on competing with the other birds for an old established and as yet unoccupied nest. Two or 3 white eggs may be laid in February where snow may be on the ground.

An ominous warning is given to any bird fancier visiting an occupied nest. One should be cautious because the birds do not hesitate to strike an intruder on the head or back and the flight of the specially designed wings is so silent that one seldom has warning of the owl's approach. One approaching a nest where the female is sitting on eggs should stay clear of the site so that the mother owl will not become startled and fly away to leave her eggs unprotected from the freezing cold.

A large bird would naturally command a large appetite to maintain body weight and strength. On dark days the great horned owl often hunts from

mid-afternoon on. It eats every kind of animal life large enough to be worthy of its notice and small enough to get hold of, such as beetles, scorpions, fish, snakes, lizards and frogs. Rabbits are its chief food, along with other rodents. It catches and eats birds of all kinds, including ducks, chickens, grouse, guineas and turkeys. It's known to eat skunks, mink, opossums, domestic cats, red-tailed hawks and barred owls.

The voice of the great horned owl is variable, but the most common and characteristic is a series of soft hoo notes which can be heard at considerable distances. At a distance the call sounds like a dog baying, nearer like the coo of a dove. A characteristic series is hoo hoo hoo, hoo hoo. The scream is a loud, terrifying sound which is, fortunately, seldom heard.

Great horned owl eggs, nestlings and fledglings may be preyed on by foxes, coyotes or wild or feral cats. There are almost no predators of adults, but they may be killed in confrontations with eagles, snowy owls in the north and other great horned owls. The horned owl is not considered a globally threatened species by the UCN. Its conservation status is rated as Least Concern. It seems that as long as there are forests and cover areas to provide plenty of food and water and habitat for the great horned owl, it shall continue to flourish and remain to be known as the magnificent wild bird that it is.

Green Economic Stimulus Package

Economic Recovery through Investments in our Environment, Energy System and Heritage

Audubon and sixteen other national environmental groups have created a list of more than 80 projects and proposals designed to help create good jobs, grow the American economy, and safeguard public health, safety and the environment at the same time. The report, "Economic Recovery through Investments in our Environment, Energy System and Heritage," was sent to the transition team for President-elect Barack Obama.

According to the report, as many as 3.6 million jobs could be created by investing in ecosystem restoration projects, water resources and infrastructure, national wildlife refuges and parks and other public lands, green transportation and energy grid, renewable technologies, energy efficiency, and national and community service.

Audubon is particularly emphasizing ecosystem restoration in places like coastal Louisiana, Long Island Sound, the Mississippi River, and the Great Lakes as well as environmental education.

The Great Lakes watershed—containing nearly 95 percent of America's freshwater surface—is one of the most significant ecosystems in the world. A central Midwestern hub for birds, fish, and other wildlife, the Great Lakes region serves as home to many of Audubon's Important Bird Areas and as habitat more than 400 bird species, including the Great Blue Heron. The Great Lakes are also an incredible resource for the area's nearly 42 million people, providing fresh drinking water, recreation, transportation, and economic benefits. The health of the Great Lakes is critical to everything that depends on them.

Unfortunately, faced with threats from invasive species, toxic and nutrient pollution, and destruction to habitat, these treasures are degrading. Restoration projects are underway, but continued federal, state, and local funding is critical to restore health to the Great Lakes for us today, and for future generations. Audubon is committed to advocating for increased funding to Great Lakes restoration, continuing to lead efforts to fund the Water Resources Development Act, focusing on bird and wildlife habitat restoration, and protection of open spaces adjacent to Great Lakes wetlands, particularly in Important Bird Area watersheds. Visit audubon.org to download Audubon's Great Lakes Restoration fact sheet for more information on the importance of Great Lakes protection.

Information from: <http://www.audubon.org/news/greenstimulus.html>

MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHAPTER PRESIDENT

After a wonderful six months in Virginia during 2008, I am back in East Central Indiana enjoying the crisp, cold of a Midwest winter. I am glad to return to active status serving as chapter president. Thanks to the officers and members who helped make 2008 a successful year for RCAS. The conservation committee did some great work and we hosted some fine speakers. Our more casual awards night in November was a big success, and gave us a chance to get better acquainted with our award recipients than the more formal banquets we have held in previous years.

More interesting programs are being scheduled for 2009 and I hope to see us revive our field trip activities. Taking part in field trips was one of the things that got me involved in Audubon when I joined years ago. There are a number of good locations in East Central Indiana. If you would consider serving as a field trip coordinator for one or more week-end outings, please contact me or a board member. You don't need any special birding or leadership skills.

Robert Cooper Audubon Society



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The Chat is published 10 times a year by the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, serving Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison and Randolph counties.

Dates for Your Calendar

Jan. 11: Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake Program

Feb. 9: February Program

Feb. 20: March/April Chat articles due to Beth Simmons, basimmons2@gmail.com

Chapter Website: www.cooperaudubon.org
Email: cooperaudubon@gmail.com

Meetings

Program meetings are held on the **second Monday** of each month (except July & August) at Minnetrista Cultural Center
1200 N. Minnetrista Parkway
Muncie, IN

7:00 p.m.: Coffee & Gathering

7:15 p.m.: Chapter Business

7:30 p.m.: Scheduled Program



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