

The Chat



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

Volume 38, No. 2

Mar./Apr. 2012

March 12, 7:00 p.m.

The Beauties of Belize

Belize, a tiny country in Central America, provides an ideal field laboratory for students to examine and experience biological and cultural diversity. Subtropical rainforests and the second largest coral reef system in the world allow students to compare terrestrial and marine ecosystems both equally rich in biodiversity. Cultural experiences include visits to excavated and unexcavated Mayan sites and local villages.



Keel-billed toucan, the national bird of Belize

Join Dr. Kamal Islam, Professor of Biology, on a journey with students from Ball State University to explore the biodiversity and cultures of Belize. Chapter business will begin at **7 p.m.** at **Kennedy Library**. Kamal's program will commence at 7:15.

April 9, 7:00 p.m.

Forest Fragmentation: Why It Matters

Dr. Josh Gruver, Asst. Prof. of Natural Resources & Environmental Management at Ball State, will address results from a recent study concerned with how private forest landowners make decisions about the future of their forest land. As land near urban/suburban areas is increasingly parcelized and fragmented to make way for housing and other forms of development, forest ecosystem services are compromised.

The talk will address factors that landowners consider as they make decisions to subdivide, gift, or conserve their forested parcels. Chapter business and refreshments will begin at **7 p.m.** at **Kennedy Library**, with Josh's program at 7:15.



RCAS Conservation Plans for 2012

By Charles Mason, Conservation Chair

Over the past several years, the RCAS Conservation Committee, along with chapter members and friends, has accomplished a tremendous amount of conservation work within our chapter area.

Many of the following projects have been undertaken collaboratively with other organizations in East Central Indiana. All of them have been made possible through grants, private donations, and your chapter dues.

- 5,000 tree seedlings distributed and planted (by us and others)
- 2,500 tree seedlings on order for this spring
- Hughes Nature Preserve restoration: removal of invasives, planting of native species
- Zeigler Woods Nature Preserve and prairie: removal of invasives, planting of native species
- Cummings property (adjacent to Red-tail Preserve): planting of native species
- 6 osprey nesting towers

- Prairie Creek: invasive removal
- Cardinal Greenway: plantings
- Summit Lake: invasive control, planting of sedges
- Westwood Park: planting of sedges
- Mechanicsburg Woods: plantings
- Northern Delaware Co.: invasive control, tree planting
- Westview School woodlot: invasive control and tree planting
- Purdue Extension: tree giveaway to school children at Ag Days
- Buley Center, Motivate Our Minds and Whitely neighborhood (Muncie): tree planting
- Many churches, a few schools and individuals: tree planting

This work has been done largely in Delaware, Jay and Madison Counties. We want to broaden our work to Henry

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Upcoming Field Trips

Sunday, April 1: Summit Lake

Meet at the Nature Area, on Henry County Rd 500 E, at 1 pm.

Directions: From Muncie, head south on U.S. 35. Just before the small town of Mt. Pleasant, turn right on Buck Creek Road. Follow it to a "T" in the road and turn right, onto CR 750 N. Go to the first intersection and turn left, onto 500 E. We'll gather along that road.

Friday & Saturday, April 13 & 14: overnight trip to Goose Pond

We'll join forces with a Ball State ornithology class for a trip to Goose Pond, in Linton (southwest of Indy). We'll travel to McCormick Creek State Park on Friday, April 13, and stay at the Canyon Inn, in order to get an early start the next morning.

We're holding a block of rooms at the inn until March 10. To make a reservation, call 877-563-4371. The reservation code is 0413RC. See www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/inns/canyon/ for details about the inn.

Directions: To get to McCormick Creek SP from Indianapolis, take I-70 west to US 231 south (Cloverdale exit) to IN-46 east to the park entrance.

To get from McCormick Creek to Goose Pond (about 40 minutes), follow IN-67 south to IN-54 west, which is the 3rd street in Linton. Turn left (south) on Main St., which is IN-59. This will lead right to Goose Pond.

Carpoolers will leave from Muncie mid-afternoon on Friday, to have time for a hike at the state park before dark. Contact Rose Jeffery for details about the departure time and location. Email: rosemariejeffery@gmail.com. Phone: 765-747-9699.

Saturday, April 21: wildflower hike

Details are pending and will be posted on our website (www.cooperaudubon.org) as they become available.

Saturday, April 28: Fox Island

Fox Island Count Park is a 605-acre park in Allen County; 270 acres are a State Nature Preserve. The park has a variety of different habitats, including marsh, seasonal ponds, wetland forest, and even a dune! Jim Haw will lead this joint field trip with the Stockbridge Audubon chapter. Meet at Fox Island at the Bird Observation Bldg parking lot at 8 am. Carpoolers from Muncie will meet at 6:30 am at the Cooper Science parking lot.

Directions: Take I-69 north to exit 99--Lower Huntington Rd. toward the airport expressway. Turn right onto Lower Huntington Rd., then take the first left to stay on Lower Huntington Rd. Take the second left onto Branstrator Rd. Turn right onto Yohne Rd. Fox Island, at 7324 Yohne, is on the left.

Nature Odysseys

Audubon Nature Odysseys allow you to engage in environmentally friendly travel with other nature-lovers, under the leadership of expert Audubon guides. These trips are scheduled for the coming months:

- Alaska Wildland Adventure: June 11-19
- Voyage to the Great Lakes: July 14-21
- Great Lakes Grand Discovery: August 1-11
- Galapagos: December 7-16
- New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: December 9-16

For full details and pricing, visit <http://getoutside.audubon.org/upcoming-trips>.

RCAS Plans, (cont. from page 1)

and Blackford Counties in 2012, eventually working in all seven of our chapter's counties.

We propose to do this by buying year-old commercially sold potted seedlings and placing them on public property. These will be much sturdier plants than DNR bare-root seedlings, will require much less attention, and will have a much greater chance of survival. We propose to place 30 trees in each of four counties: Delaware, Blackford, Henry and Grant. These will be placed in each county

on some piece of public property.

At its January 2012 meeting, the RCAS Board passed a motion allotting \$340 for this project. The remaining three-fourths of the cost will be underwritten by chapter donors. The Board believes that such a contribution to this work will spread legitimate pride and a greater sense of responsibility amongst our membership. We believe RCAS and its members will grow in stature in the community and become even more of an activist organization.

How you can help:

You could share directly in this project by helping plant seedlings (when the time comes) and/or by making a financial contribution.

To donate your time, contact Charlie Mason, at chas.mason@sbcglobal.net or 765-288-9937. To make a financial donation of any size, send your gift to: RCAS, c/o Nona Nunnally, 1302 N. Alden Rd., Muncie, IN 47304.

March/April Bird of the Month: Mallard

Mallard:
Anas platyrhynchos
By Helen Twibell



Mention the word “duck,” and it will usually bring up the image of a colorful mallard.

The mallard is considered the most

the resulting birds are a patchwork of the characters of each parent species. Seldom is there blending of characters to any degree.

In Indiana, during nesting season, they are most numerous across the northern three tiers of counties, where the best habitat is located. Courtship begins in winter, and mallards are paired up in January.

The name “mallard” comes from the Latin *masculus*, meaning “male,” which refers to the habit of males not taking part in the raising of ducklings. The female makes the nest on the ground in a shallow bowl of grass lined with down that’s hidden in marsh grass or on a brush pile near the shore. She incubates 8 to 10 greenish-buff eggs 26 to 30 days, and in 42 to 52 days she leads the ducklings to food. These easily domesticated birds will sometimes return to the place of hatching.

Food for the mallard consists of seeds of sedges, grasses, and smart grass. It eats the leaves and stems and seeds of pondweed, duckweed and coontail. Sometimes seeds of bottom-land trees like water elm, hackberry, oak and hickory are taken in large quantities. In recent years mallards have learned to visit dry stubble fields for waste grain

after the harvest, and they will visit land feeders if corn is offered. Mallards eat animals such as freshwater mollusks, especially snails and aquatic insects, and they are opportunists that will eat fish eggs, grasshoppers and, on occasion, dead fish.

The mallard is an early spring migrant, arriving in Indiana as early as late February before peaking in March. Many more mallards are in the state during fall migration, some of them preparing for their yearly trek to the southern states, while others are wintering groups that stay in the state all year. Of the latter, the major concentration during winter is in the southwestern corner of the state.

Some mallards, however, are year-round residents on northern lakes like Tippecanoe, according to family members who live and hunt there in season. It is assumed that the birds move just far enough south to open water when the northern lakes freeze over, and then they migrate homeward after the thaw.

The mallard population is not as large in numbers as it was in the 1940s and '50s, but we have no reason to believe it is an endangered species at this time. It has always been held in high esteem by wild-bird hunters.

Introducing Education Chair Debbie Brown

We are pleased to announce that in Nov. 2011 Deborah Brown became our chapter’s Education Chair.

Deborah, a former gifted/talented teacher for Muncie Community Schools, was chosen as Muncie Community School’s **2010 Teacher of the Year**. She also received the Muncie Chamber of Commerce **2010 Outstanding Contribution to Education Award**. After the publication of *What If I Help Save Our Environment?*, a book written by her class and illustrated by local watercolorist Jim Faulkner, Deborah became the recipient of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society’s **2006 Clyde W. Hibbs Conservation Education Award**. Mrs.

Brown’s class also received Scholastic’s **2010 Kids Are Authors Award** for their book, *Vincent van Gogh’s Cat*.

She is currently volunteering at Indiana Public Radio for an upcoming children’s program, and continues to teach children about Indiana owls at a local school. Mrs. Brown is excited about this opportunity to work with young nature-lovers through the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, and is looking forward to encouraging and fostering their enthusiasm and appreciation for our natural environment. She is also the author of *The Tweet*, our new children’s section of the *Chat*.

abundant duck in the world. In the U.S. there are more mallards in the Mississippi Flyway, which includes Indiana, than anywhere else in the country.

Mallards are often seen around shallow shorelines because they are bottom feeders: they prefer water 12-16” deep, the maximum they can reach when “tipped up.” As with other “puddle ducks,” mallards can launch themselves off the water into the air with a single almost-vertical leap. These ducks are typically river, pond or surface-feeding water birds, and any shallow freshwater may harbor a few pairs.

A colorful bird, the male mallard has a large green head, white necklace and rust brown or chestnut-colored chest. The sides are a combination of white and gray, and on the wings is a small violet-blue and white wing mark called a speculum. The male has a yellow bill, legs, and feet, and the black central tail feathers curl upward. The female is all brown with an orange and black bill. In the air, the two white borders of the violet-blue speculum, white under the wing linings (in males), and largely white tail are distinctive. This duck should be memorized for comparison with other ducks in the air – an idea suggested by John J. Audubon.

Mallards many times interbreed with domestic stock, producing a confusing variety of colors and patterns. Also, they hybridize with wild species such as the closely related American black duck and occasionally with northern pintails. Usually the parentage of duck hybrids is not difficult to guess, since

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

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The Chat is published 5 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. Send address changes to cooperaudubon@gmail.com.

Dates for Your Calendar

March 12: Beauties of Belize program
April 1: Summit Lake field trip
April 9: Forest Fragmentation program
April 13 & 14: Goose Pond field trip
April 21: Wildflower Hike
April 28: Fox Island field trip

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 the

Muncie Public Library Kennedy Branch
1700 W. McGalliard Rd.
Muncie, IN



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recycled
paper 25%
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7:00 p.m.: Chapter Business

7:15 p.m.: Scheduled Program

Officers

Co-Presidents:	Sarah McKillip	287-8464
	Jon Creek	348-4019
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Treasurer:	Nona Nunnely	284-0751

Directors

2010-2012:	Dave Cramer	260-726-9492
	Joel Jeffcoat	286-2896
2011-2013:	Phil Tuttle	289-4251
	Willy DeSmet	260-726-6693

Committee Chairs

Conservation:	Charlie Mason	288-9937
Education:	Deborah Brown	747-9332
Field Trip:	Rose Jeffery	747-9699
Hospitality:	Doris Cheney	288-0981
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