

The CHAT



Volume 41, number 2
March/April 2015

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



Alex Forsythe: Saw-whet Owl Banding

Wednesday, March 11

Alex Forsythe is one of the most active and passionate young birders in Indiana—you may remember her as the 2013 recipient of RCAS's Charles D. Wise Youth Conservation Award! At our March meeting, she will be discussing the Northern Saw-whet Owl banding program at Indiana Dunes State Park, where she volunteers. The Dunes banding station has been running since 2009 with a focus on studying this species during migration, and Alex will share some of the station's research as well as her own experience with these adorable but secretive owls.

Chapter business and refreshments will begin at **7 p.m.** at **Kennedy Library**. Speaker will begin around **7:15**.

Amy Wilms: Mary Gray Research

Wednesday, April 8

Amy Wilms is one of the Resident Managers at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, which is the headquarters of the Indiana Audubon Society. Free and open to the public year-round, the sanctuary spans 700 acres with forests, meadows, and trails for birds and birders alike! Amy will be speaking about some of the new and upcoming research being conducted at Mary Gray, including their hummingbird banding efforts, as well as the sanctuary's goals and programs.

Chapter business and refreshments will begin at **7 p.m.** at **Kennedy Library**. Speaker will begin around **7:15**.



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Upcoming Events



Summit Lake

Sunday, March 8, 1 p.m.

We will be looking for migrating waterfowl. We will gather at Henry County Roads, 500 E. and 750 N. at 1 p.m.

Carpoolers will leave from the Cooper Science parking lot at Ball State at 12:15.

Mounds State Park

Sunday, March 29, 9 a.m.

Sunday, April 26, 9 a.m.

We will continue our monthly bird hikes at Mounds State Park, hopefully seeing the beginnings of the spring migration. Join us on the last Sunday of each month from 9-11 a.m. at the Visitor Center as we tally the birds that we can find at the feeders and around the park. As always, these hikes are open to the public and accessible to birders of all ages and abilities. Binoculars are available.

Eagle Creek

Sunday, March 22, 9 a.m.

We will join members of the Amos W. Butler Audubon Society on their weekly Eagle Creek bird hike from 9-11 a.m. We will gather at the Ornithology Center in the park. The park entry fee is \$7.

Carpoolers will leave from the Cooper Science parking lot at Ball State at 7:30 a.m.

To get to Eagle Creek Park, take I-69 south to Indianapolis and merge onto I-465 West. Follow I-465 on its north loop. Take exit 21 for 71st Street and turn right onto westbound 71st St. After the Lafayette Road intersection and entrances onto I-65, 71st Street turns into Eagle Creek Parkway. The park will be on the right. After entering the park, follow signs for the Ornithology Center.

Limberlost/Loblolly

Saturday, April 18, 9 a.m.

We will join members of the Stockbridge Audubon group for a morning of birding. Bring a sack lunch for a picnic. If the birding is good, we will continue after lunch. We will meet at the Limberlost Visitor Center in Geneva.

Carpoolers will leave from the Cooper Science parking lot at Ball State at 7:45 a.m.

To get there on your own, take N. Broadway from Muncie and continue north on SR-67. Follow 67 through Albany to Portland. In Portland, SR-67 takes a left. Continue on 67 into Bryant where you should continue straight onto North-27 at the traffic light. (SR-67 turns right at this point: don't turn there or you'll end up in Ohio!) Once in Geneva, turn right into the Visitor Center parking lot. The address is 200 E. 6th Street, Geneva, IN.



Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge

Saturday, April 25, 9:30 a.m.

Muscatatuck was Indiana's first National Wildlife Refuge and was established in 1966. Its mission is to restore, preserve, and manage a mix of forest, wetland, and grassland habitat. Management for waterfowl, other migratory birds, and endangered species is a high priority. We will hope to find warblers and other returning migrants. David Crouch, an expert local birder, will meet us at the visitor center and lead our walk.

Carpoolers will leave from the Cooper Science parking lot at Ball State at 7 a.m.

To get there, take I-69 south to I-465 S in Indianapolis. Take I-465 south 17 miles to I-65 and head south for about 57 miles. Exit at 50A to merge onto US-50 E/E. Tipton St. towards N. Vernon. The park is 3 miles east of the I-65/US 50 interchange at Seymour, IN. The main entrance is on US-50.

Salamonie Reservoir

Saturday, May 2, 8:15 a.m.

We will meet at Hominy Ridge picnic area in the Salamonie River State Forest at about 8:15 a.m. We will bird in the Forest during the morning and then picnic at Hominy Ridge. Bring a sack lunch and something to drink. After lunch we will check out other areas around the reservoir and Nature Center.

Carpoolers will leave from the Cooper Science parking lot at Ball State at 7 a.m.

To get there, follow I-69 north to IN-218 towards Van Buren/Warren/Berne. Turn left (west) onto IN-128 and follow it to IN-105. Turn right (north) on IN-105. Take IN-105 to IN-124 and turn left. Look out for Dam Road, which comes up quickly on the right. Turn right onto Dam Road and take the left fork-Pefley Road-into the Salamonie River State Forest. Follow signs to the Hominy Ridge picnic area. A site map is available at the Salamonie Lake DNR website.

NOTE: We will not have an official field trip to Magee Marsh this year. The Biggest Week in American Birding Festival has become so popular that it is difficult to reserve a block of rooms at a reasonable rate. Many from our area are making arrangements to attend the festival on their own. Check out the festival website for more information:

www.biggestweekinamericanbirding.com

Indiana Dunes Birding Festival

May 7-10

Members are encouraged to attend part or all of the inaugural Indiana Dunes Birding Festival. The Indiana Dunes is home to some of the state's best birding in early May. This year, the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival will host a wide array of speakers and trip leaders for four days of birding excellence. For more information, check out the festival website: www.indunesbirdingfestival.com. There is also a Facebook page (Indiana Dunes Birding Festival) and a Twitter account (@indunesbirdfest).

Mounds Reservoir Update

On February 26, the Robert Cooper Audubon Society co-sponsored a panel discussion at Yorktown High School about the environmental impacts of the proposed Mounds Reservoir Project. This remains the most relevant environmental issue in our region and we encourage chapter members to continue to speak out against its implementation.

To learn more about the project and our chapter's stance, visit our website (www.cooperaudubon.org) and click on the link for "Conservation and Education."

We also encourage you to contact our local legislators regarding this issue:

Governor Mike Pence: (317)-232-4567

Muncie Mayor Dennis Taylor: (765)-747-4845

Anderson Mayor Kevin Smith: (765)-648-6000

Spotlight on Citizen Science

NestWatch

By Danny Pirtle

As the spring migration kicks into full gear in the next few months, returning migrants will begin searching for places to build their nests and raise their young. The “NestWatch” citizen science program provides an opportunity for the general public to make observations about any nests in their area and submit this data for further study.

Orchestrated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, NestWatch is an effort to better understand the reproductive biology of birds across the country by monitoring the status of various nests. This data can be used to answer questions about when and where nesting occurs in certain species, how many eggs a given species lays in an average clutch, and the survival rate of nestlings and fledglings. By collecting data across space and time, scientists can assess long-term trends in bird breeding biology. Especially relevant today is the effect climate change is having and will have on reproductive biology now and into the future.

Anyone can sign up to participate in NestWatch (but of course, children should probably have adult supervision). The first step is to become a “certified NestWatcher” through the NestWatch website. Potential citizen researchers are given some basic information about searching for and monitoring nests and then are asked to complete an online quiz to demon-

strate their knowledge and ability to treat nests and their respective bird inhabitants safely.

Once a nest has been identified, NestWatchers are asked to visit the nest every 3-4 days, recording observations during each visit. All information collected is reported through the NestWatch website. Observations are made from the time the nest is found until fledglings leave the nest or parent birds abandon the nest.

To learn more about this project and to sign up to become an official NestWatcher, visit: www.nestwatch.org.



So Long, Snow Buntings!

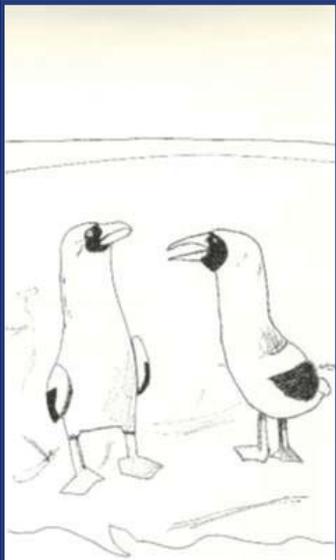
As the winter months give way to spring, it is our last chance to see some of the birds that spend their winter in Indiana before heading back north for the summer. Snow Buntings spend their breeding season in the high Arctic, migrating into the Northern United States in the winter, where they are found foraging in agricultural fields along beaches. A small songbird, weighing no more than 45 grams, the males return to the Arctic early in April, sometimes in the face of -22°F (-30°C) temperatures!

(Illustration by chapter member Claire Nemes)

Birds Throughout History

Howland Island's Unique Past

By John L. McKillip



Masked Boobies comprise one of several species and tens of thousands of individuals routinely make extended visits to Howland Island.

A smaller, more isolated and featureless landscape could scarcely exist. Imagine an island one mile in length and less than half that distance in width. A treeless, flat, and barren island with no lagoon, no freshwater resources, and only low-lying scattered grasses. Howland Island is 50 miles north of the equator and 1,600 miles southwest of Honolulu – some 4,300 miles west of San Francisco. The only sign of humans ever having been on the island is a crumbling day beacon, a non-

illuminated stone edifice some 25 feet tall, known as the Earhart light, named after the aviatrix Amelia Earhart. Howland Island is best known as the island Earhart was attempting to land on but never reached during her ill-fated 1937 around-the-world flight. However, this tiny spot of land holds a strong connection to birds and has recently been included in a renewed conservation initiative. Discovered in the 1820s by whalers, the island was noteworthy throughout the 19th Century guano trade. The U.S. took possession of Howland in 1856 as part of the Guano Islands Act passed under President Buchanan. This legislation allowed the U.S. to take control over any uninhabited island (that was not already under foreign rule) containing substantial guano deposits. At the time, bird guano was prized as a source of saltpeter for gunpowder as well as an agricultural fertilizer. Howland and several other small islands in the Pacific were the site of active guano mining for over 25 years.

As little else is offered to sustain wildlife, seabirds largely claim Howland Island as their own.

Ten species of seabirds use this speck of sandy coral in the Pacific as a roosting habitat. These comprise some of the estimated hundreds of thousands of individuals simultaneously spotted on the island on a regular basis. Commonly sighted on Howland are Sooty Terns, Gray-backed Terns, Red-footed Boobies, Brown Boobies, Masked Boobies, shearwaters, frigatebirds, Red-tailed Tropicbirds, and Brown Noddies. Additionally, shorebirds such as the Ruddy Turnstone, Pacific Golden Plover, Bristle-thighed Curlew, and Wandering Tattler are frequently spotted by passing ships. The latter two species are considered species of High Concern in the national conservation priority scheme for shorebirds. Howland Island provides crucial wintering habitat for many of these species, and likely serves as a rest stop for arctic-breeding shorebirds that winter farther south (1). Howland Island is part of the Pacific Remote Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, the total protected area of which was expanded some five-fold over previously existing area during late summer of this year by President Barack Obama.

Reference

(1) http://www.fws.gov/refuge/howland_island/



Earhart day beacon on Howland Island is visited every two years by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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Special Thank You to chapter members Sarah Fischer and Claire Nemes for providing many of the photographs used in this edition of The Chat.

Save the Date! May 16: BIOBLITZ!

Our local INPAWS chapter is planning to participate in this all-day event in South Central Indiana. More details to follow.

Dates for Your Calendar

- March 8:** Summit Lake
- March 11:** Monthly Meeting/Alex Forsythe
- March 22:** Eagle Creek
- March 29:** Mounds State Park
- April 8:** Monthly Meeting/Amy Wilms
- April 18:** Limberlost/Loblolly
- April 25:** Muscatatuck
- May 2:** Salamonie

Chapter Website: www.cooperaudubon.org
Find us on **Facebook!**
Email: cooperaudubon@gmail.com

Program meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except July, August, & September) at
Muncie Public Library, Kennedy Branch
1700 W. McGalliard Rd., Muncie, IN
7:00 pm: chapter business & refreshments
7:15 pm: scheduled program

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

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