

# The Chat

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

Volume 39 , No. 3

May/June 2013



Monday, May 13, 7 pm

## The Hearing Side of Bird Song

When we think about communication in birds, we are more likely to think about how birds sing than we are about how birds process these songs. However, an understanding of the auditory side of communication can give us great insight into how birds process these songs, how habitat constrains the use of songs, and how seasonal changes in communication are matched with seasonal changes in hearing physiology.

Dr. Jeff Lucas, Professor of Biology at Purdue University, will address a comparative study of bird hearing that his lab has been conducting. Please join us for an in-depth discussion on the auditory sciences of bird-song communication!

Chapter business and refreshments will begin at **7 pm at Kennedy Library**, followed by the program at **7:15**.



*The "peter-peter" sound of the tufted titmouse is one of many that will be explored in Dr. Lucas's presentation.*

Monday, June 10, 7 pm

## Nature Highlights: As Told by You!

This is an official call-out to each and every one of you to bring your most interesting and wildest nature stories to the table! The format for this program will be a casual "show and tell" style, giving members and friends of our Audubon chapter the opportunity to share unique, funny, exciting, or worthwhile nature experiences.

If you would like to share your experiences, please send a 1-5 slide Powerpoint presentation to Jen Wagner at [jrwagner7@gmail.com](mailto:jrwagner7@gmail.com). Your "show" need not be restricted to birds; we encourage submissions of other fauna – and flora – as well.

As always, all are welcome as "tellers" or as part of our audience, where you'll learn about these firsthand encounters from other RCAS members in your community. Come share stories and relive your favorite tales!

Chapter business and refreshments will begin at **7 pm at Kennedy Library**, followed by the program by **7:30**.



*Ever seen the sandhill crane migration firsthand? We would love to hear more!*

### Board Elections

At this meeting we'll vote on the following positions for the coming Audubon year (July 1, 2013, to June 30, 2014): president, vice-president, treasurer, recording secretary, and 2013-15 directors.

If you're interested in serving on the board in any capacity during the coming year, please contact Co-president Sarah McKillip, at [smregister@bsu.edu](mailto:smregister@bsu.edu) or 287-8464. Several positions will need to be filled!

# Field trips, conservation and more

*Saturday, May 18*

## Mounds SP: birds & plants

Get ready for a trip to Mounds for birding and its native plant sale! We'll meet at Mounds State Park at the front of the Interpretive Center at **8 am**. We'll bird in the park for a few hours and then visit the Native Plant Sale, sponsored by the Friends of Mounds Park. This is a very nice sale with bloodroot, Jack in the pulpit, rattlesnake master, and plenty of other plants native to Indiana.

*Carpoolers* will leave from the Cooper Science parking lot on Ball State's campus at **7:30**.

*To get there on your own:* Head out from Muncie on State Rd 67 west. At the I-69 exchange in Daleville, go under the I-69 overpass and continue straight, as the road becomes Old State Rd 67. Follow that road for about 2.3 miles and turn right (a sharp right) onto S County Rd 300 E (aka Markleville Rd). Go to the stop sign and turn left on Mounds Rd. The park will come up quickly on the right. The address is 4306 Mounds Rd, Anderson.

*Saturday, June 8*

## Eagle Creek Park

June will be an adventure in Eagle Creek Park! We will begin at the Ornithology Center at **8:20 am** and then, if we have time, we'll explore other areas. There is a park entry fee of \$5 per car. Consider bringing a picnic lunch and exploring the Earth Discovery Center afterwards!

*Carpoolers* will leave the Cooper Science lot at **7 am**.

*To get there on your own:* Take I-69 south to Indianapolis. Get onto I-465 west and take it all the way around the north side of Indy to exit 21. Turn right onto westbound 71<sup>st</sup> St. After junctions with Lafayette Rd. and I-65, 71<sup>st</sup> St. turns into Eagle Creek Parkway. The park will be on the right. After entering the park follow signs for the Ornithology Center. The Park's address is 6515 Delong Rd.

## Volunteers Needed!

We are looking for volunteers to help staff our Audubon table at this year's Garden Fair at Minnetrista. The fair runs from 8 am to 4 pm on **Saturday, June 1**, and 10 am to 3 p.m. on **Sunday, June 2**.

Please contact Sarah McKillip at 765-287-8464 or [smregister@bsu.edu](mailto:smregister@bsu.edu) if you're willing to help for a two-hour shift either day. And be sure to visit the fair for plants to peruse and buy, demonstrations, refreshments, and more! See [www.minnetrista.net](http://www.minnetrista.net) for details.

**Don't forget about the Magee Marsh Birding Festival field trip on May 3 & 4! Visit our website – [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org) – for details!**

*Saturday, May 25*

## Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary & Shrader-Weaver Excursion

Welcome the summer with some birding and wildflowers! We'll begin the day with Amy or Carl Wilms at the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary at **8:40 am**. Carl and Amy are Resident Caretakers of the Sanctuary, located just outside of Connersville. We will likely see vireos, indigo buntings, tanagers, and warblers.

We'll have a picnic lunch, so bring food and drink.

After lunch we'll head up to Shrader-Weaver Nature preserve, an old-growth forest close to Bentonville. A self-guided ½-mile tree trail includes the largest black walnut tree in Indiana and plenty of wildflowers. There is also a shorter Succession Trail. We will spend about an hour and a half on the trails.

*Carpoolers* will leave from Cooper Science Parking lot at **7 am**.

*To get to Mary Gray on your own:* From Muncie, take US 35 southeast about 14 miles to State Rd 1, and turn right (south). Follow S.R. 1 to Connersville, where you will pick up State Rd 121 south. Continue south on S.R. 121 to W County Rd 350 S, where you'll turn right and travel about 3.4 miles. Mary Gray is located at 3499 S. Bird Sanctuary Rd, Connersville. Estimated travel time is 1 hour, 36 minutes.

## Tree seedling project

Our chapter has arranged for 1,900 tree seedlings – grown at the IDNR nursery in southern Indiana – to be planted around East Central Indiana this spring.

Jon Creek, Jeff Ray, Dave Cramer and Charlie Mason were the primary funding forces. Sponsors included the Muncie Children's Museum (100 seedlings), Jay County's Loblolly Nature Preserve (300), the Ball State Landscape Architecture Department (400), the Ball State Theatre Department (50), the Red-tail Land Conservancy (100), Hartford City (150), Camp Adventure (150), three anonymous individuals (450) and the Robert Cooper Audubon Society (200). We would like to thank everyone who donated to this venture.

# Bird of the Month: Blue-Winged Teal

by Helen Twibell

*Anas discors*



Sources tell us that the blue-winged teal is one of the best known ducks in Indiana, since it is widespread, relatively tame and readily observed during

spring and fall migrations.

One of the smallest North American ducks, it is 16 inches long with a wingspan of 23 inches and a weight of 13 ounces. It is nearly half the size of the female mallard. The adult male has a grayish blue head with a prominent white facial crescent, a light brown body with a white patch near the rear and a black tail. The adult female is mottled brown, in a scalloped pattern, with a whitish area at the base of the bill

In flight, both the male and female reveal a bold powder blue patch, or speculum, on the upper wing coverts. On the breeding male the secondary wing feathers below the blue patch form an iridescent green speculum, and the under-wing is white.

People who have seen the blue wing patches displayed *en masse* in flight have certainly seen a beautiful sight. Blue-winged teals often fly in tightly packed flocks, much like those of the passenger pigeon. They soar in unison, twisting and turning as a single bird, allowing the blue patches to come into view, and then become hidden, as all the birds simultaneously turn their bodies.

Blue-winged teals inhabit shorelines more than open water and prefer calm water or sluggish currents to fast water. They inhabit inland marshes, lakes, ponds, pools and shallow streams with higher growing or emergent vegetation. Protruding rocks, muskrat houses, trunks or

limbs of fallen trees, bare stretches of shoreline or mud flats may be used for resting places.

Blue-winged teals belong to the group of ducks called dabblers because they primarily feed, or dabble, on the water's surface by straining water through the bill and by upending to reach deeper food items such as snails, aquatic insects and crustacea. Musk grass, pond weed leaves and duck weed are also taken. The fall and winter diets are made up of sedges, pond weeds, grasses and smart weeds. While walking on land, they pick up food with the nail of the bill or strip seed heads and foliage with the edge of the bill.

Unless badly persecuted, blue-winged teals are inclined to be tame and unsuspecting. As a result, they tolerate civilization and proximity to humans. (Their lack of suspicion and habit of flying in compact flocks makes them easier to shoot than most.)

The onset of courtship often starts in late January or early February. (In areas south of the breeding grounds, blue-winged teals are more active in courtship during the spring migration than most ducks.) They are among the last dabbling ducks to nest, generally nesting between April 15 and May 15. Weather conditions may cause this timing to vary from year to year.

Blue-wings generally nest within several hundred yards of open water. However, nests have been found as far as one mile away from water. They may build nests on dry ground in grassy sites such as bluegrass meadows, hay fields and sedge meadows. They will also nest in areas with short, sparse vegetation.

The nest is a shallow depression on the ground lined with soft grasses, and the 9 dull white eggs are covered

with a heavy blanket of down from the female's breast. The nest is usually surrounded by vegetation. Incubation takes 21 to 27 days and is attended by the female. The ducklings can walk to water within 12 hours after hatching but do not fledge until 6 to 7 weeks.

During the incubation period, the drake leaves his mate and moves to a suitable molting cover where he becomes flightless for a period of 3 to 4 weeks. The blue-winged teal male is slow in molting the "eclipse," or brown female-like feathers that he assumes in summer, before shedding the wing feathers and becoming flightless. He then takes on his normal breeding body plumage in December, when he appears in his beautiful pale pinkish-brown body colors, white flank patches and distinctive facial crescents.

As fall migration begins, the adult drakes depart the breeding grounds well before adult hens and immatures. As a result, most blue-winged teal flocks seen after mid-September are composed of adult hens and immature teals. Teal populations diminish rapidly through October, with a very small number remaining until December.

Large numbers of blue-winged teals appear on wintering grounds in Florida, Louisiana and Texas, and many more go on to Central America or South America. Ninety-five percent of the population is estimated to winter south of our borders, which means that the continued well-being of the species depends largely on the conservation practices of our West Indian and Latin-American neighbors. At present the conservation status of the blue-winged teal is "*least concern*."

The hunting dates in Indiana for blue-winged teals are Sept. 1-16.

## **Robert Cooper Audubon Society**

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### **See you in the fall...**

The *Chat* is going on summer vacation but will resume with the Sept./Oct. issue. Likewise, our chapter meetings will be on hiatus during July and August but will be back in action for the fall picnic on

Sunday, September 8.

To stay informed about Robert Cooper Audubon Society activities over the summer, visit our website, at [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org), or find us on our Facebook page (search for Robert Cooper Audubon Society”).

We'll be looking forward to even more activities and trips coming up this autumn! Until then, have a wonderful summer, and we'll see you all very soon.

### **Dates for Your Calendar**

- May 3-4:** Magee Marsh Birding Festival
- May 13:** “The Hearing Side of Bird Song”
- May 18:** Mounds Trip: Birding, Native Plant Sale
- May 25:** Mary Gray/Shrader-Weaver Trip
- Jun. 1-2:** Minnetrista Garden Fair
- Jun 8:** Eagle Creek Park Trip
- Jun. 10:** “Nature Highlights: As Told by You!”
- Sept. 8:** Fall Picnic

**Chapter Website:** [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org)  
**Email:** [cooperaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:cooperaudubon@gmail.com)

Program meetings are held on the second Monday of each month (except July, August, & September) at the

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



**7:00 pm:** chapter business  
**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.

### **Officers**

Co-Presidents:	Sarah McKillip	765-287-8464
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Treasurer:	Robert Williams	765-730-8427

### **Directors**

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2012-2014:	Dave Cramer	260-726-9492
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### **Committee chairs**

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