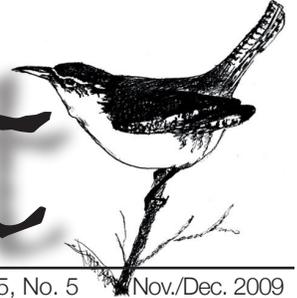


The Chat



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

Volume 35, No. 5 Nov./Dec. 2009

Nov. 16: **Annual Awards Banquet** *Reservations due Nov. 9*

Join us for a very special evening on Monday, November 16, at Minnetrista, as we honor the 2009 recipients of our chapter's annual conservation awards. This year's banquet is set for **Monday, November 16, from 6:00-8:30 p.m.**, at Minnetrista.

The evening will begin with dinner, followed by door prizes, then presentation of conservation awards, which includes an opportunity for all award winners to show and tell us about their accomplishments in protecting natural resources in East Central Indiana. Our award winners served as our "program" last year, and the result was an inspiring, fun evening, creating one of the most enjoyable, lively banquets in recent memory. We know you won't be disappointed!

Dinner will feature a buffet catered by Bella Avanti's, of Muncie. You'll have your choice of lasagna (regular or vegetarian) and pasta with grilled chicken and vegetables (or just vegetables, if you prefer), plus au gratin potatoes, green beans, salad, bread, an assortment of pies, and coffee, iced tea, or water. The cost is \$15.00 per person, and reservations are required.

Please send your check, payable to Robert Cooper Audubon Society, to Nona Nunnelly at 1302 N. Alden Rd., Muncie, IN 47304. Reservations must be received by **Monday, November 9**, and the vegetarian option MUST be selected at the time you place your reservation. See p. 3 for the registration form.

Please bring a guest or two and join us for what we expect to be a wonderful evening! If you have questions about reservations, contact Nona Nunnelly at 284-0751 or nanunnelly@aol.com. For all other questions, contact Barb Stedman at 765-288-2890 or bastedman@gmail.com.

Dec. 14: **New Mexico National Parks**

Bonnie Nicholson, who currently works for Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico, will be our December speaker. A longtime Cooper Audubon Society member, Bonnie has served on the local chapter's board of directors in various capacities, including president.

Her December 14th program will be a slide presentation of images from each of New Mexico's thirteen National Park sites - Bonnie has visited all of them! She will talk briefly about the different plants, birds, and other wildlife she has seen since and the places she has visited since moving to New Mexico.

Join us at Minnetrista for refreshments and socializing at **7:00 p.m.**, with the chapter meeting beginning at **7:15**, followed by Bonnie's program at **7:30**.

Field Sparrow: November/December Bird of the Month

Field Sparrow:
Spizella-pusilla
By Helen Twibell



In the years before discovering the fascinating world of bird watching, I considered the sparrow a dull, drab, undesirable and useless bird---just a sparrow. After much observing and researching, I found that there are many species in the sparrow family, each one contributing its own appearance, abilities and appeal to the bird society and to the countryside. I have encountered, by sound or by sight, four varieties that have proved to possess special qualities that attracted my attention and have become more to me than just 'sparrows'. The sweet song of the song sparrow just outside our living room door was the first. The second sparrow was the chipping sparrow, identified by its clear, distinct staccato chipping song in the crisp spring air. The third was the white crowned sparrow with a bold black and white striped crown atop a typically brown sparrow body. The fourth sparrow was the field sparrow which had been a mystery bird for many years. While hanging laundry on the clothesline or working in the vegetable or flower garden, I heard over and over again the sweet, plaintive, melancholy song of this bird. It seemed to come from the overgrown, brushy old fencerow which separates our field from the neighbor's. This was a song of one pitch repeated first in long whistled and slow notes,

then the notes would become shorter and come faster until it became a trill which would rise or fall as it faded out. Last summer I noticed this often repeated song coming from the smaller trees in our backyard. This triggered the idea that I might find it on one of my bird song cassettes, but to no avail. I did find a website with the field sparrow's song and it matched closely enough that I really believe I have found the true identity of the mystery bird at last.

The field sparrow habitat consists of brushy overgrown pastures or similar locations with low trees. Our overgrown fencerow seems to furnish the cover the sparrow needs. For this reason the field sparrow, while plentiful, may seldom be seen in public parks, golf courses or any other such places. The early nests are built generally near the ground in a clump of grass or a low bush. They are well-made cups of grasses and stems, lined with hair. Second or third brood nests will be built up to three feet higher as leaves come out. There are usually four eggs of pale green and spotted with reddish-brown. The male may tend to the first family while the female starts a new nest and a new family. The couple may raise up to three families of fledglings in a season. The field sparrow is purported to be monogamous.

The food needs of the field sparrow seem simple--insects for added protein during breeding period and seeds for the rest of the year. An interesting observation is that the field sparrow may land on a weed stem and ride it down so that it may

eat the seeds while they are on the ground. Whether there have been field sparrows to our winter bird feeders, I don't know, but you can be sure I'll be watching for it this winter now that I know what to look for. I'll be looking for a small sparrow about 5 ½ inches in length with a long-like tail, a distinctly pink bill and rusty cap. This sparrow also has a white eye ring, and unlike other sparrows does not have a streaked breast, but has a buffy wash on its breast and flanks. The other back markings are of a blurred character.

The field sparrow is found in most of the eastern United States. In Indiana it is considered an abundant migrant and summer resident in all sections of the state. Some may be found in all regions in winter, but most will be possibly in the southern third in milder climate. Fewer are found in the north from year to year. If there is a decline in the total field sparrow population, which is believed to be so, it could most likely be attributed to the use of the habitat of this bird for farming and building purposes.

It is hoped that the information shared with you can help you find and appreciate a new and not so well-known bird. We're told that an old abandoned, grassy, weedy field or a woodland border is a good place to start looking for old abandoned nests and listening for its song. The field sparrow is retiring and rather drab. But to us who know it and listen each year for its sweet song, it is another early harbinger of spring.

Nov. 14 Field Trip: Beautiful Summit Lake State Park

What: Summit Lake State Park has more than 2,680 acres, including a large lake. There are excellent bird watching and wildlife observation areas.

When: Saturday, Nov. 14th, 8:00-11:00 am

Where: Meet at the Nature Area, which is at the intersection of County Roads 500 E and 750 N.

How: From State Road 3 (south of Muncie), head east on U.S. 36 about 3.5 miles. Turn left (north) on Messick Road, which will take you to the entrance of Summit Lake State Park (5993 N. Messick Rd., New Castle). Once inside the park, turn right on 600 N., left on 500 E., right on 750 N. This will put you in the Nature Area.

Also, please feel free to carpool with the field trip coordinator from the BSU Cooper Science parking lot at 7:30 AM. My vehicle seats 3-4 passengers.

****Please note that Summit Lake charges an entrance fee of \$5.00 per car****

Questions or comments: please email Sarah R. McKillip, smregister@bsu.edu

Christmas Bird Count

The National Audubon Society Muncie Christmas Bird Count will be held this year on Sunday, December 20. CBC participants count birds in the field or at feeders within a fifteen-mile diameter circle. The count circle for the Muncie CBC is centered in downtown Muncie. More information on CBCs can be found on the NAS website. Interested birders of all skill levels are encouraged to participate. The count is sponsored by RCAS. If you have questions or would like to join in this citizen-science outing, please contact Bill Grummer at 254-1943 or billcarolee@comcast.net as soon as possible, but no later than December 10.



The Canada Goose, pictured at left, was the most common bird counted in Muncie in last year's Christmas Bird Count. Audubon members and count participants counted 2,490 Canada Geese from December 2008 to January 2009.

Banquet Reservations

Number of guests (@ \$15 per person): _____

Amount enclosed: \$ _____

Dinner option (please indicate number for each guest): _____ Vegetarian _____ Non-vegetarian

Name(s): _____

Phone number _____

Email: _____

Please print out this form, complete it, and return it, along with your check, payable to Robert Cooper Audubon Society, to:

Nona Nunnally, Treasurer
1302 N. Alden Rd.
Muncie, IN 47304

Reservations must be received by November 9.

Robert Cooper Audubon Society



Robert Cooper Audubon Society.
Nona Nunnelly
1302 N. Alden Rd.
Muncie, IN 47304

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The Chat is published 7 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

Nov. 9 Registration due for banquet
Nov. 14 Field Trip to Summit Lake
Nov. 16 6 p.m. Annual Awards Banquet
Dec. 10 Deadline to participate in CBC
Dec. 14 New Mexico State Park program
Dec. 18 Articles due to Beth Simmons for
Jan./Feb. Chat: basimmons2@bsu.edu

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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