



# Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

## A Tale of the 2021 Bird Mortality Event and the Legacy It Left Behind

March 9 RCAS Program

In late May, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) received reports of sick and dead songbirds in Monroe County with symptoms of eye discharge, crustiness, swelling, and neurological problems like tremors, disorientation, and uncontrollable limbs. These symptoms were primarily seen in Blue Jays, American Robins, Common Grackles, and European Starlings, but other species may have been affected. Songbirds from several states including Virginia, Maryland, Ohio, and Kentucky were also affected, so a cooperative effort was made to determine the cause of the disease.



Juvenile Blue Jay exhibiting symptoms of the mysterious songbird disease in 2021.  
Photo by Brent Drinkut, staff photographer, Indiana DNR

However, no definitive cause was determined and we still do not know what led to songbirds dying across the Mid Atlantic and Midwestern states in 2021.

Allisyn Gillet will show a documentary summarizing the bird mortality event in

2021 and then discuss its relevance to Indiana, address misconceptions, and provide a summary of lessons learned from this event.

Gillet is the state ornithologist for the Indiana DNR. She has degrees from Rutgers University, Columbia University, and the University of Missouri-St. Louis. She was a school science teacher in an underserved community in St. Louis prior to coming to Indiana. She has worked with a variety of species, from Red-winged Blackbirds and Bobolinks to Galapagos Hawks, to study various conservation issues such as environmental contamination and disease transmission. She is excited to be with us and to have the opportunity to inspire bird advocates in Indiana. Join us via Zoom on March 9 at 7 pm. Preregister for this event [here](#), or visit our website for a link.



## RCAS Celebrates the 2021 Conservation Awardees

At our monthly meeting in December about 36 members of RCAS had the pleasure of hearing from our 2021 conservation awardees about their work. Their stories are truly inspiring. In a first for RCAS, we streamed these presentations on Facebook, where they are still accessible at <https://fb.watch/aOoGnfWcfo/>

RCAS 2021 Awardees from left to right: John and Carolyn Vann, Bill Hubbard, Randy Lehman, Amy Wilms, and Tom McConnell  
Photo by Jim Flowers

## Field Trips

*Everyone is welcome at field trips and programs. Binoculars are available on request.*

*Spring means bird migration and woodland ephemerals. Come out with us and enjoy the fleeting pleasures of the season.*

March 26, April 30, and May 28, 9 am to 11 am: 4306 Mounds Road, Anderson, IN

### **Mounds State Park**

Our last-Saturday-of-the-month walks at Mounds State Park continue. Join us for spring walks and see if we can add any new species to the 103 that RCAS has recorded at this site.

Meet at the Visitor's Center at 9 am. State Park fees apply.

Saturday, March 19, 3 to 5 pm: 5993 N. Messick Road, New Castle, IN

### **Summit Lake State Park**

We had good luck with ducks here in the fall. Let's see if it holds for early spring. Meet in the boat ramp parking lot at the north end of the park road. State Park fees apply.

Sunday, April 10, 1 to 3 pm: 4407 West Kilgore Avenue, Muncie, IN

### **Service Trip at Dutro-Ernst Woods**

Take action by joining us to weed-wrangle at Dutro-Ernst Woods, an urban oasis in Muncie. We will focus on pulling garlic mustard and also pick up some trash. Dress for outdoor work and bring gloves and drinking water. We will supply bags for disposal.

This Red-Tail Conservancy park is only a few years old, but it is already becoming a refuge for wildlife. Fewer invasive plants will help the native ecosystem to thrive.

Saturday, May 7, 8 to 10 am: 5964 W 400 S, Farmland, IN

### **Phyllis and Frank Yuhus Woods**

On May 7, we have arranged for a field trip at the Red-tail Conservancy's Yuhus Woods, not normally open to the public. The spring wildflowers should be putting on a show. Park in the paved lane outside of the gate. The gate is located down a short gravel drive off W 400 S, next to a fenced equipment yard.

Saturday, May 14, 9 to 11 am: E 650 S Rd, Muncie, IN

### **Red-tail Nature Preserve**

The eBird list for this site includes 174 species, and 78 of them have been reported in May. Which ones will we find? Meet

in the parking lot at 9 am.

Saturday, May 21, 8 to 11 am: 12302 E Strawtown Avenue, Noblesville, IN

### **Strawtown Koteewi Park**

The largest park in Hamilton County should be hosting spring migrants for our walk on May 21. Meet at the Riverside Parking area, on the north side of Strawtown Road, west of the Natural History Center.

Saturday, June 11, 9 am to 2 pm: 7324 Yohne Rd, Fort Wayne, IN

### **Fox Island County Park, Fort Wayne**

We will meet at 9 am at the Nature Center parking lot. Pack a lunch!



Spring garlic mustard pull at Dutro-Ernst Woods  
Photo courtesy of Red-tail Nature Conservancy

*For events scheduled at the BSU Alumni Center, note that parking is free and available on the north side of the building, with handicap parking near the entrance on the east side of the building. For in-person events, please follow current guidelines on face masks and social distancing. Please monitor [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org) for cancellations and updates.*

## Programs and Events

March 9, 7 pm: Zoom meeting (To register, click [here](#), or visit our website for a link)

### **A Tale of the 2021 Bird Mortality Event and the Legacy It Left Behind**

Allisyn Gillet, the state ornithologist for the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, will speak on last summer's mysterious bird illness.

April 13, 7 pm: Location to be determined. Check the website for updates

### **Long-distance Dispersal Patterns of Cerulean Warblers in Southern Indiana**

Cerulean Warblers are endangered in the state of Indiana. Lara Jones, a second-year master's student at Ball State University (BSU) will tell us about her research into their dispersal patterns after breeding.

May 11, 7 pm: Zoom meeting (To register, click [here](#), or visit our website for a link)

### **Use of Nocturnal Heterothermy in North American Songbirds during Migration**

Ryan Leys, a master's candidate at University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, will speak on his research into how migrating birds can save energy while at stopover sites.

June 8, 7 pm: Location to be determined. Check the website for updates

### **Bird Banding at Ball State University**

BSU graduate student Bethany Darby will tell us about bird banding at Christy Woods, Cooper Farm, Ginn Woods, and Whitetail Tree Farm. The program has been ongoing since 2017.

## **Delaware County Christmas Bird Count**

By Jim Schowe

Have you ever wondered about how many birds are in an area. . . What kinds there are and where they are to be found? Over 120 years ago members of the National Audubon Society did. They organized a Christmas Bird Count to find out, and it has been an annual event ever since. Data collected have contributed to the establishment of several conservation laws. Though focused mostly on birds, our entire environment has benefited.

Today the count continues, and members of RCAS took part in the 2021 Christmas Bird Count for Delaware County on December 19th. I serve as the volunteer coordinator for the count and I joined thirteen other birders in covering our count circle that morning. They included Barb Stedman and Martha Hunt in the northeast, and Erv and Lois Rockhill and Catherine Kubo in the northwest. Taking the south eastern section were Jim Flowers and Annette Rose. Taiping and Sandy Ho were situated in the southwest. A very dedicated birder from Ohio, Nick Boutis, took the western section of Muncie's 'central city' and I covered the eastern part. Rose and Jim Jeffery and R. Brian Wolfe were feeder counters for the day. Thank you, counters,

one and all!

I had a bit of an ulterior motive in assigning myself to east Muncie. I hoped to count the Wild Turkey that has been hanging out not far from Walmart south, and also the Peregrine Falcon who likes to feed on Rock Pigeons in the downtown area. It was a a good plan, but neither bird made an appearance. We did have some nice sightings though, including Double-crested Cormorants and a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

With all the collected data in hand I sat down to do a little compiling. We counted a total of 2,413 individual birds in 51 species. Total time all the counters spent was 26.33 hours, and the teams spent 217.81 miles driving and 7.63 miles walking. The weather in the morning was partly cloudy, clearing in the afternoon, with temperatures from 28 to 33 degrees.

All this and more will be reported to the National Audubon Society. Seems like a lot of work doesn't it? I have been compiler for this count for the last four years and I find it very rewarding. The data are important and the activity is a fun team effort. If you have a free day just before Christmas next year why don't you grab your binoculars and join us?

**51**

**Number of species counted on this year's Delaware County Christmas Bird Count**



# The Common Loon

By Terri Gorney Lehman

“The loons! The loons! They’re welcoming us back,” exclaimed Katharine Hepburn to her co-star Henry Fonda in the movie *On Golden Pond* when they had arrived at their lake cottage in New Hampshire, where the film takes place. It is a place where Common Loons nest in the summer.

Indiana has hundreds of lakes, and every year we welcome Common Loons on their way further north to their breeding grounds in Canada and the northern United States. They are striking birds in appearance, with black round

heads and black-and-white-patterned bodies. Loons are large diving birds with dagger-like bills that are perfect for fishing. Their diet is mostly fish, but they also consume aquatic insects, frogs, leeches, and mollusks.

first one arrived on March 17. The earliest I have seen the first was on March 10, in 2017. Usually it is a little later in March when the first loon appears on the lake. According to the late Jim Haw’s birding records, the earliest date of a loon being spotted in Northeast Indiana is February 28.

In the spring of 2017, we had loons on the lake for four weeks, a succession of north-bound migrants. It was a long migration period that year. In 2020, a single loon, seen all day on the lake on April 10, broke the record for latest migrant of the season.

March 29, 2014, was memorable. Fourteen loons appeared on the lake, and one was calling. The sound of a loon call is eerie and hauntingly beautiful. On March 28, 2020, a record Twenty-three common loons were on the lake, an incredible sight! Further searching that day revealed eight loons on the old gravel pit and two more on a private lake in Geneva. The

next day there was an immature or non-breeding loon, the first one I had seen in that plumage. Unfortunately, in 2021 no loons were spotted on the lake.

I eagerly await the migrating waterfowl each spring and hope to see several loons at the lake this year. I hope that you will get to see some, too. It is a sign that spring has arrived!



Adult Common Loon in breeding plumage  
Photo by Jim Cumming,  
Audubon Photography  
Awards

For the last several years I have looked forward to seeing the first Common Loon that appears on Rainbow Lake in Geneva. In 2020, I was not disappointed as the

## Second-Best Outcome—the Reed Property Project

By Willy DeSmit

Regular visitors to Loblolly Marsh may know that Friends of the Limberlost (FOL) own and maintain a building there on a two-acre property. We call it “the Pavilion.” It is used for programs at the marsh, and it has restrooms, a covered area, and a small storage area. Few people know that the wooded area east and north of the Pavilion is not actually part of Loblolly Marsh. This 78-acre property sits between Loblolly Marsh and the Royer plot that FOL bought in 2020. Although it has been a functional part of

the Loblolly habitat for many years, it was owned privately by Reed Enterprises, a group of hunters that restored the property in 1984-85. It has three ponds, woods, and grass-shrubland. A pair of Bald Eagles like it well enough they took up residence and built a nest that has been active for several years.

The owners were good stewards of this natural habitat. FOL had asked them to let us know if they ever considered selling it. So it was unexpected when they informed us in November that the

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[www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org)

# Rare? Or Just Not Yet Listed?

By Willy DeSmet

On a rainy Tuesday mid-July last year, my wife Phyllis pointed to where a large dragonfly was struggling in a spider web outside our window. I thought it was so big and heavy that it would manage to escape but Phyllis wanted me to go to the rescue. I extracted him and he kept clinging to my hand, vibrating his wings to get the raindrops off. I snapped a few pictures on my cellphone with my other hand. They are not the greatest: one-handed cell phone photography isn't my forte.

I am a casual dragonfly observer. There are a few species I will venture to identify on sight, but not many. My observations are mostly accidental. If I have a camera ready when one perches long enough, I may take pictures and try to identify it with a field guide and the internet.

I had seen, photographed, and identified Unicorn Clubtail dragonflies (*Arigomphus villosipes*) around our pond before and I first thought this one to be a Unicorn Clubtail. But some things seemed a bit off. So I sent an email to someone who knows a lot more about dragonflies than I do. He identified it not as a Unicorn, but as a Jade Clubtail (*Arigomphus submedianus*.)

Unicorn is the most common clubtail in our area. Jade is rare. It is not in the *Stokes Beginners' Guide to Dragonflies*, but it is in James Curry's *Dragonflies of Indiana*. Curry lists the species as observed only in Gibson and Elkhart Counties. Dennis Paulson in his Princeton Field Guide, *Dragonflies and Damselflies of the East*, describes the Jade as an eastern-prairie clubtail, and his map



Jade Clubtail  
Photo by Willy DeSmet

shows them distributed to the west of us. I was pretty "chuffed" (as the Brits say) to find this unusual species right in our front yard!

In August Marc Weldon, retired curator of the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, stopped by the Limberlost visitor center and told the naturalist, Curt Burnette, that he had found a Blue-faced Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum ambiguum*) at one of the ponds in the Goodrich addition to the Bird Sanctuary. Don't panic, fellow birders, if you don't recognize that bird! It's not a bird, it's another dragonfly. And not a common one—Curry's does not list it for Jay County.

Mark is into dragonflies. Mark thought that the Bird Sanctuary had the right habitat for this dragonfly, and he found it there. It likes temporary pools with sedges, wetland grasses, and, often, mosses. It prefers shaded areas and is usually found in or around woods. Mark told Curt where to look for it. Of course Curt didn't keep this to himself, and a few days later I was able to take some pictures myself.

So, in about a month we had observed two unlisted species of dragonfly in Jay County. It is very likely that we would find many more species of dragonflies, butterflies, moths, etc., in our state or county that are not in the register, if we would go out and look for them. Follow your curiosity—Nature is ready to reward our careful observations if we take the time to make them!

***It is very likely that we would find many more species of dragonflies, butterflies, moths, etc. in our state or county that are not in the register, if we would go out and look for them***



Blue-faced Meadowhawk  
Photo by Willy DeSmet

# The SANJO Christmas Bird Count—A New Year's Tradition

By Terri Gorney Lehman

January 1 provided mild temperatures in the 40s with fog in the morning and rain in the afternoon for the SANJO (Southern Adams Northern Jay Ouabache) Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Highlights this year included: Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Sandhill Cranes, Carolina Wren, Northern Pintails, Gadwall, Pileated Woodpeckers, Red-headed Woodpecker, Ring-billed Gulls, and, one of my favorites, Northern Mockingbird.

Historically, the Berne Witness newspaper published the species and number of birds for some of the early CBCs. The first Adams County Count was held in 1948. In 1956, the CBC included a Snowy Owl and 100 Lapland Longspurs. The date of January 1 for this CBC was set around 1968.

In 2014, I was asked by Larry Parker to become the compiler for the Adams County CBC. Larry had been the compiler for a number of years. I was not as experienced a birder as Larry or other compilers, but I agreed. Fortunately, Larry continued to help with the count. He could always find an unusual bird, as

he was an excellent birder and knew the area well.

In 2015, we changed the Adams County CBC to a 15-mile diameter count circle for inclusion into the records of the National Audubon Society. The new circle included the entire Limberlost Conservation Area and Ouabache State Park. Randy Lehman came up with the acronym SANJO. We now feature a chili lunch on count day at the Limberlost Visitor Center, in keeping with a tradition at many other Audubon CBCs.

We have also reached out to the Audubon chapters in Muncie, Marion, and Fort Wayne and to others who enjoy birding in the Limberlost Conservation Area. Every year, members of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, Mississinewa Audubon Club, and Stockbridge Audubon Society join the local team to count. We may have been strangers in the beginning, but now we are old friends and look forward to seeing everyone on count day. This year as we gathered, we remembered and missed Larry Parker, who passed away this last October. I am sure, had he been with us, he could have added another good bird to our list.

## Second-best Outcome...continued

***The Reed property has three ponds, woods, and grass-shrubland habitat. It sits between Loblolly Marsh and the Royer plot that FOL bought in 2020.***

property was to be put up for public auction on December 11.

The property was advertised for hunting: "prime deer, turkey, waterfowl habitat." But it is still classified as agricultural land, and the advertisement noted that the woods had not been logged in more than 40 years. We were afraid that someone would buy it and log all the wood, or even start farming the land.

If FOL were able to purchase it, we could ensure that it would legally become part of Loblolly Marsh and be permanently protected. As an added benefit, it would make it easier for us to control the hydrology of the adjacent Royer property, which we are currently restoring. The second-best scenario would be purchase by a conservation-minded new owner who would keep the habitat undisturbed.

For many years this property has been a "high priority" acquisition for FOL and the

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Unfortunately DNR had no funds available for at least two years.

Had we been able to work with Reed, we would have had more time to line up large donors, and I personally think we could have met Reed's financial objective. With only a month's lead-time before auction, an FOL financial planning committee started working on a plan. We knew we would not be able to buy a 78-acre property outright, so different financing scenarios were devised and discussed with our bank.

Plan in hand, we attended the auction. The bidding ended beyond our limit, at \$12,400 per acre. However, the good news is that the winner turns out to be conservation-minded, and the habitat will most likely be preserved. It is the second-best outcome we could have hoped for. Sometimes second-best is good enough.



## Young Biologists Series

The April RCAS meeting will continue a mini-series of talks by young biologists that we started in January with a presentation on urban Canada Goose populations by Ball State University (BSU) PhD candidate David Shearer. Details of the April and May talks are below, and the summer newsletter will highlight the fourth of these talks, to be given at the June meeting. Join us to find out what these young researchers have been up to!

### Investigating the Long-distance Dispersal Patterns of Cerulean Warblers in Southern Indiana

On April 13, Lara Jones, a BSU master's student, will tell us about her Cerulean Warbler research. The Cerulean Warbler is a small migratory songbird that breeds in northeastern and midwestern North America and winters in South America. This brilliantly blue bird has faced severe declines in recent decades, largely due to habitat loss, and is endangered in the state of Indiana. Previous studies suggest that the species exhibits high rates of dispersal (large movements between breeding seasons) and that populations may be shifting away from the peripheral edges of its past breeding range. The effects of these long-distance movements remain unknown.

Lara's research focuses on a population breeding in southern Indiana. She has investigated previously unstudied aspects of their dispersal, including the



Lara Jones banding a female Cerulean Warbler  
Photo by Kamal Islam

effects of immigration on reproductive success and whether sex affects the rate of dispersal.

Lara is originally from New Jersey. She received her bachelor of arts in biological sciences from Wellesley

College in 2018. She then spent two years as a seasonal field technician working on various bird and wildlife projects in New Hampshire, Florida, Oregon, and California, prior to her studies at BSU.

### Use of Nocturnal Heterothermy in North American Songbirds during Migration

Our May 11 program will feature Ryan Leys, a master's candidate at University of Waterloo. His research is focused on how small, migratory birds conserve energy during migration. In the past, most research has been centered on how birds can conserve energy during flight, but little emphasis has been put on how birds can save energy while at stopover sites. Migratory flight is energy intensive, but research shows that birds use twice as much energy during stopovers, mainly to keep themselves warm. Migrating songbirds are thought to defend a constant body temperature, which would make maintaining their fat stores (their most important migration energy source) on cold nights extremely challenging.

Ryan's target species for his research are all native to Indiana at some stage of their annual cycle. They are Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. So, the big question is, do these species lower their body temperature at night to conserve energy? To answer that, Ryan will be presenting the key findings of his research to date and will discuss research plans for the future.

Ryan graduated from the University of Western Ontario (UWO) before taking three years off to travel and work. He returned to academia in 2019 for a year-long master of environment and sustainability degree at UWO, which included a four-month co-op experience at Birds Canada's Long Point Bird Observatory (LPBO). While there, he was involved in many different programs, including migration monitoring, a marsh monitoring program, and managing the Tree Swallow project. He continues to work at LPBO as a part of his current research.



Brown Creeper after being banded  
Photo by Ryan Leys



# Robert Cooper Audubon Society

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## About RCAS

### Membership

Robert Cooper Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society serving Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison, and Randolph counties. To join, visit the RCAS website.

### Officers

President:	Mary Annette Rose	765-774-3134
Vice-President:	Rose Jeffery	
Treasurer:	Jim Jeffery	
Recording Secretary:	Bethany Darby	

### Directors

2020-2022	Catherine Kubo	Jim Schowe
2019-2021	Kamal Islam	Kim McKenzie

### Programs and Field Trips

Most RCAS programs and field trips are free and open to the public. Programs are generally scheduled from October through June on the second Wednesday of the month. For updates on the schedule and meeting locations, refer to our website.

### Contact us

Chapter Website: [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org)  
Find us on Facebook!  
Email: [admin@cooperaudubon.org](mailto:admin@cooperaudubon.org)

## RCAS On Line

RCAS has a redesigned website, after lots of work by Sophie Gordon, a Ball State graduate who now works in Chicago for iCivics, a non-profit company providing civics resources to students and teachers nationwide.

Barb Stedman, our webmaster, reports that the site has been updated for better compatibility with mobile devices and easier maintenance. Most features are now working, but a few things are still in progress. If you encounter difficulties, you can email [admin@cooperaudubon.org](mailto:admin@cooperaudubon.org) to let us know. The website address is still [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org).

In other news about RCAS's presence on line, Lois Rockhill has agreed to take over our FaceBook page, and Gwen Jones will now be managing our emailouts. Kim McKenzie has been doing both of these.

Thanks to all of these folks for making it easier for all of us to stay informed about RCAS, when and where it suits us!

## About Cooper's Talk

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Cooper's Talk is published four times per year for members of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society. All are invited to submit photos, articles, and events for publication by emailing items to [admin@cooperaudubon.org](mailto:admin@cooperaudubon.org)