

The Chat

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

Volume 34, No. 4 April 2008

April 14:

Purple Martin Landlords



Have you ever considered being a landlord?.....a purple martin landlord that is! Native Americans were the first to put up housing for these well-loved birds by hanging dried gourds. They are now almost completely dependent on man-made or supplied housing.

Our April 14 program will be presented by veteran purple martin landlord and mentor Tom Jonker, whose Coatsville, Ind. property is home to several purple martin families. Please feel free to invite a friend and join us at Minnetrista Center to learn about these wonderful birds, and hear Tom's interesting experiences as a purple martin landlord. Social time with refreshments begins at 7 p.m. with our program commencing at 7:30.

Tom has also invited us to visit his home on May 31 so mark your calendar for that date. We will be assisting with nest checks, getting some how-to tips for building nest houses, and doing a little hiking. Besides purple martins, Tom also monitors bluebird and swallow nests, and his lake property attracts eagles, osprey and other wildlife.

Volunteer Opportunities

April 24 & 25

Help Kellie McClellan with Muncie Urban Forestry plant trees. If interested, contact Kellie at the Parks Department at 765-747-4858 for more information.

June 7

RCAS will have a booth on Saturday only at the Minnetrista Garden Fair. We need someone to coordinate, someone to set up and take down our table, and volunteers to work the day of the garden fair. Contact Bonnie Nicholson at nickrb69@yahoo.com

Upcoming Fieldtrips

APRIL 9 INPAWS-ECI Ginn Woods Flatwoods and Spring Flora. Northern Delaware County.

MAY 3 INPAWS-ECI Duning Woods Nature Preserve, Wayne County. Spring flora and mesic woods. Leader: Tom Swinford, regional biologist, Indiana DNR.

When more information is available, detailed e-mails will be sent out.

If you have any questions contact Jon Creek at 513-931-7509.

The Ovenbird: April Bird of the Month

Ovenbird:
Seiurus aurocapillus
By Helen Twibell



The first question that may pop in your mind about the ovenbird may be how did it get its name. After experiencing this query in my own mind, I asked my husband, who responded in the same way. The reason given for the common unscientific name of the bird is because it is a bird of the forest floor where it builds its “Dutch oven” type nest. The nest, which is completely arched-over with a side entrance, is built on the ground, usually in the open. It is constructed of dead leaves and plant fibers, lined with grass and hair. It is almost impossible to detect, since it is worked into the forest floor and covered with dead leaves. The four or five eggs deposited there are white spotted with brown. After the eggs hatch, it has been known for two males, as well as the female, to feed the young. Also it has been observed that a male frequently has more than one mate---as many as three sometimes.

Having identified the architecture and location of the ovenbird’s nest, we need to know what to look for in coloration and form of the bird itself. The ovenbird, being of a species of the wood-warbler family, is the only warbler which looks like a miniature thrush. It is 5” to 6” in length and is said to be heavy-bodied with olive green above, white below with dark streaks similar to those of a thrush. It

has a conspicuous white eye ring, an orange-brown crown bordered with black stripes. The legs are pinkish. It feeds mostly on the ground and its mincing walk is dainty and distinctive.

The voice of the ovenbird is one of the most obvious in the woods, once it has become familiar. The song is a loud staccato---teacher--teacher--teacher--teacher--teacher. The delivery is vigorous, and the song grows louder as it progresses, becoming louder at the end. The flight song is an indescribable jumble of notes of various pitches, a combination of warbles and twitters with generally a few teachers thrown in. This flight song is usually given at night and is not as familiar as the common song. As it sings the bird will rise above the ground, sometimes to the treetops. Then it flies about beating its wings in a high arc over its back while warbling a musical series of notes.

The ovenbird has become a fairly common summer resident and common migrant all over the state of Indiana. This may have been brought about by the widespread cutting of timber and other habitat changes in the southern part of the state where once, more larger, rougher, forested areas existed as suitable habitats for the ovenbird. Driven to find additional suitable forested lands suitable for nesting, the ovenbird has enlarged its territory within the state. It prefers deciduous forests, primarily mature woodlands which are dry and not thick with underbrush and other low growths. Most of its feeding is done on

the ground, but it may use a low branch for a lookout and singing perch. Recent research has studied the effect of forest fragmentation on the breeding success of songbirds such as the ovenbird. Even though this species uses a relatively small breeding territory, it is found that the birds have much better breeding success in large, continuous stands of forests than in smaller forest patches. For one thing, the ovenbird might tend to be safer in the deeper woods from the prey of the feral cats, dogs, foxes, crows and jays. Food for the ovenbird might be more plentiful under the leaves and on the cool, dark ground of the larger areas.

The ovenbird is definitely a migrant bird and breeds from Newfoundland, central Quebec and southwest Mackenzie in Canada to eastern N. Carolina, northern Georgia, Arkansas, Colorado and southern Alberta. It winters from eastern S. Carolina and the Gulf Coast south to the Lesser Antilles and through Mexico to Columbia.

The ovenbird does not seem to be an endangered species yet. It may be very abundant in one location and absent in another. The long-term conservation of wood-warblers such as the ovenbirds, will require monitoring, habitat preservation and restoration and cowbird control.

I must confess this researching of the ovenbird and of its unusual nest has given me the secret urge to steal into a quiet, dark woods one summer day to see if I could find an ovenbird and its nest.

Conservation Update

The invasives group of Jon Creek, Bill Grummer, Charlie Mason, Frank Meeker and Jeff Ray have been working at Summit Lake State Park in the Nature Ponds area cutting honeysuckle, autumn olive, multiflora rose and white mulberry. We have treated about 30 acres, which lies east of CR 500E and north and south of CR 750N to Pintail Pond. The honeysuckle has been grueling to say the least. Our project area is roughly 600 acres total, of which 230 acres will be the treatment area. The plan is to break up the treatment area into manageable blocks. Thankfully many blocks have minor invasive impact now, but left untreated will take over the bird areas in the future. Everyone is welcome to help with the project. If you have two to three hours to help, the wildlife will thank you and the fresh air will do you good. During our time, we have seen woodcock, sandhill cranes, and greater white fronted geese to name just a few. Call Bill Grummer for the long list of birds we have seen migrating north this spring.

The team has also been working at Robin Scott's cutting and treating invasives while we wait for the ground to dry so we can plant 18 acres of prairie. The conservation committee has met with the Minnetrista staff to talk about conservation ideas for RCAS' service area. After our next meeting we will have a more complete report. At our next RCAS monthly meeting we will hand out a "Natural Areas of Henry County: A Guide" booklet. The sponsors are Henry County Soil & Water Conservation District, IDNR - Division of Nature Preserves, and Henry County Community Foundation. We hope to have a field trip so you all can see what is being accomplished in helping wildlife habitat.

Thanks for your support.

RCAS T-Shirts

Is your RCAS tee showing a little wear? Or, maybe you never got one? We need a minimum order of 12 shirts to print up a new batch. If interested in coordinating an order, please contact Bonnie Nicholson @ nickrb69@yahoo.com.

Information about RAS tees can be found on our web site at cooperaudubon.org by clicking on the "Other Happenings" link.

Understanding Global Warming: **What causes it?** *Part 3 of a 6-part series on the facts about Global Warming*

In its February 2007 report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, established by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, expressed more than 90 percent confidence that global warming is caused by human activity — namely, an increase in the amount of carbon dioxide, methane, and other heat-trapping "greenhouse" gases in the atmosphere.

Like glass in a greenhouse, these gases allow the sun's heat through the atmosphere, but then trap much of it near the Earth's surface. For billions of years they have played an important role in maintaining the proper temperatures for life to thrive. But since the Industrial Revolution, human activity has led to a dramatic increase in the amount of these heat-trapping gases. Carbon dioxide levels have risen from pre-Industrial levels of 280 parts per million to 379 parts per million. The amount of methane, another greenhouse gas, has more than doubled. The result has been a measurable warming trend called global climate change or, more specifically, global warming.

Robert Cooper Audubon Society



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Dates for Your Calendar

- April 9:** Fieldtrip to Ginn Woods, North Woods, and spring flora
April 14: Purple Martin Program
April 18: Articles due for May *Chat*. Send to Beth Simmons at basimmons2@bsu.edu
May 3: Fieldtrip to Dunning Woods nature preserve

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



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- 7:00 p.m.:** Coffee & Gathering
7:15 p.m.: Chapter Business
7:30 p.m.: Scheduled Program

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