

Bluebird Basics

We all know February is the month for love and valentines. However, it is also the perfect time of year to court the Eastern Bluebird by putting up a bluebird house or two in your own backyard.

Join us on **February 12** when we welcome Greg Beavers, Vice President of the Indiana Bluebird Society. We will learn about this statewide organization which is dedicated to one of America's favorite birds. We will also be able to pick up some tips on attracting bluebirds and monitoring nest box activity. Bluebird boxes will be available for purchase.

Bring a friend and join us at 7:00 for refreshments and fellowship before our program begins at 7:30.

Great Backyard Bird Count

Don't forget this month's tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count, sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society. This opportunity will allow everyone a change to discover new birds in their neighborhood and "Count for the Record."

In order to participate, simply count the highest number of each species seen during an outing or sitting during February 16-19, and enter the tally on the Great Backyard Bird Count website at www.birdsource.org/gbbc.

All levels of expertise are encouraged to take part, from beginners to experts. Include children and help them learn about the wonderful world of nature and birds.

Nominations are now being sought for individuals and organizations that have made noteworthy contributions to the environment in our region, perhaps even the state, for the Robert H. and Esther (Munro) Cooper Conservation Award, Phyllis Yuhas Wildlife Habitat Preservation Award, Richard Greene Public Service Award, Clyde W. Hibbs Conservation Education Award, and the Youth Conservation Award. For further details, see inside.



Eastern bluebird

Inside...

- Discover the world of Cedar Waxwings in a new "Bird of the Month Article."
- Learn about upcoming award nominations you can easily take part in.
- Take note of changes to the chair board and learn about positions still open.

The Cedar Waxwing: February Bird of the Month

by Helen Twibell



The cedar waxwing is a fascinating study! Its unique, regal appearance belies the fact that it is closely related to

starlings, plus the flycatchers, dippers and thrushes, according to DNA studies. The stately, upright posture of the waxwing, long head crest, plump body with soft, sleek, gray and brown plumage and small feet and legs are qualities not found in other flocking birds such as the starlings or blackbirds. The cedar waxwing can also be easily identified by the black coloring extending from the back of the head, around the eyes and over the bill, forming the appearance of a mask. It is 6½” to 8” in length.

The waxwing is named for the dense concentration of red pigment which forms on the tips of the wing feathers. This red pigment appears waxy, but is like plastic to the touch. This unique red coloring at the wing tips is believed to be directly connected with the bird’s diet of fruit. The color of the droplets comes from carotenoid pigments that are found in the fruit the bird eats and that cannot be synthesized by the bird directly. In the tail, yellow pigments are normally incorporated into the vanes at the tips of the feathers, producing a yellow band across the tip of the tail. This yellow band is not waxy like the wing tips. Some waxwings in eastern N. America have been seen in years since the 1960’s with more orange tail tips. It is believed

the introduction of the exotic honeysuckles for landscaping purposes have caused this shift of coloration.

As may be surmised, the waxwing diet is basically fruit, so the cedar waxwing is easily found in open habitat where berries are growing. The birds spend most of the year in flocks of twenty five, even hundreds or thousands, whose movements may be quite unpredictable. A large group may move into an area to feed on a crop of berries, only to vanish when that crop is eaten. Their flight is strong and flocks may turn abruptly in unison, like starlings, as they fly in formation in the quest for food. Waxwings feed on rotting or fermenting fruit in the late winter or early spring and may become intoxicated and fly into buildings near the feeding site. Mumford and Keller report that on the Purdue campus one winter, more than a dozen waxwings were found dead or injured near a group of Washington hawthorn trees where they had been feeding. Also it is said that these sociable birds in an inebriated state become very approachable by humans.

Waxwings also feed on flying insects, especially during insect outbreaks. Dense gatherings of insects would have been, before the late 1970’s, a target of DDT applications and the birds would have been poisoned. Since the banning of DDT, the waxwing population, which had been waning, has had a great comeback and is ever increasing.

The nesting season of the waxwing coincides with the fruit

season and usually begins in late June and continues through early August. The birds breed in open woods, often near streams or still waters that provide aquatic insects, as well as in woodland edge habitat that affords fruiting plants. Pairs nest twice during a season and place nests in deciduous, coniferous trees or shrubs. The cup-shaped nests are made of twigs and grasses, and lined with finer grasses and materials. Old nests may be recycled or repaired for use, unless the nesting site changes because of availability of fruit. Active nests may be built adjacent to each other in “clumps”, presumably near fruit supplies. Four to six black and brown spotted eggs grace the nest, 6’ to 35’ up in the trees. The young are fed caterpillars.

In Indiana cedar waxwings are present throughout the state, although numbers may vary. Most flocks tend to go toward northern counties in the summer and to southern counties in the winter. The planting of exotic shrubs in suburbs has also helped increase the waxwing numbers. There seems to be no danger of extinction of the species in Indiana.

Did you know...

To clean your hummingbird or oriole feeder easily, remove the bottom, invert, fill with hot tap water and drop in ½ of an Efferdent tablet. Allow this to sit and bubble up for five minutes; then rinse thoroughly. Your feeder will be sparkling clean without using a brush or other utensil. The other half of the tablet may be used to clean the bottom of the feeder. Repeat if necessary.

Award Nomination News

Kat Craig has resigned as Membership Chair and Alyssum Foltz has stepped down as Publicity Chair. The Board has approved Jane Duckworth and Lis Mitchell to co-chair membership duties and Barb Stedman will be serving as Publicity Chair.

After some discussion, the board approved holding the chapter awards banquet as a fall event for 2007. Date for the banquet is November 12 but nominations are already being sought for this year's recipients. If you know of an individual or organization that deserves recognition for its service to the natural environment, please send your nomination, which should include a description of the nominee and his or her accomplishments, to Bonnie Nicholson at: nickrb69@yahoo.com OR 9898 College Corner Rd., Greens Fork, IN 47345.

Include your name, number, and email or street address.

Awards are as follows:

- Robert H. and Esther (Munro) Cooper Conservation Award: the chapter's highest honor, for overall contributions to, conservation of, and appreciation for, the natural environment
- Phyllis Yuhas Wildlife Habitat Preservation Award: for development or preservation of habitat that contains significant wildlife and/or native plant life populations
- Richard Greene Public Service Award: for active involvement in serving the public's environmental interests and concerns
- Clyde W. Hibbs Conservation Education Award: for excellence in educating the area's children, youth, and /or adults on conservation issues and practices
- Youth Conservation Award: for excellence in conservation practices by a youth under the age of 18

Indoor houseplants clean air

Former NASA researcher Dr. Bill Wolverton examined the effects of houseplants on indoor air quality. He determined that indoor plants can absorb airborne chemicals commonly found in homes and offices. About two or three plants for every 20-25 square feet of space should suffice.

According to the NASA study, the ten plants which are most beneficial to indoor air are Reed palm, dwarf date palm, Boston fern, Janet Craig dracaena, English ivy, Australian sword fern, peace lily, rubber plant and weeping fig.

Azalea, dieffenbachia, philodendron, spider plant, golden pothos, bamboo palm, corn plant, chrysanthemum, mother-in-law's tongue, and poinsettia will specifically target the formaldehyde released by foam insulation, plywood, particle board, clothing, carpeting, furniture, paper goods, household cleaners and water repellents. Benzene, a toxin released by tobacco smoke, gasoline, synthetic fibers, plastics, inks, oils, and detergents, can be diminished by English ivy, marginata, Janet Craig' dracaena, chrysanthemum, gerbera daisy,

Warneckei dracaena and peace lily. Trichloroethylene, released by dry cleaning, inks, paints, varnishes, lacquers, and adhesives is offset by gerbera daisy, chrysanthemum, peace lily, Warneckei and marginata.

Most of these plants are best kept indoors. Some of them, such as English Ivy, can be invasive and displace native plants when grown indoors.

Quick News

Volunteers Needed!

If you are looking for a way to become involved in our chapter, consider the position of Vice President or Field Trip Chair! Both are excellent and fun ways to give back to the chapter and meet new people. For more information, contact Bonnie Nicholson.

Minnetrista Information

Because the Robert Cooper Audubon Society is an affiliate organization of Minnetrista, our members are entitled to a 10% discount off Minnetrista membership and are encouraged to volunteer at Minnetrista. If you have time and talent to share, call 765-282-4848.

Garden Fair

Mark your calendars for June 2 & 3 for Minnetrista's Garden Fair. Seedy Sally's (our bird seed supplier) will be helping RCAS create a special display for this year's event. Volunteers will be needed, so watch for more info to come!

Robert Cooper Audubon Society



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Dated Material — Please Deliver Promptly

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Dates for Your Calendar

Feb. 9: Articles due for February *Chat*. Send to Beth Simmons at basimmons2@bsu.edu.

Feb. 12 7:00 p.m.: Bluebird presentation presented at Minnetrista, beginning with refreshments. Program will begin at 7:30

Feb. 16: Begin the backyard bird count!

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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