

The Chat



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

Volume 34, No. 1 Jan. 2008

January 14: Karst Conservancy

karst \ noun : an irregular limestone region with sinks, underground streams, and caverns

Webster's Dictionary defines the word karst as being of Chinese origin, having found its way into English usage about 1902. It was first used to describe a region of Yugoslavia but now refers to such regions worldwide.

Indiana is home to one of these unique systems, which are rich with geological, biological and archaeological significance. The Indiana Karst Conservancy is dedicated to the preservation and conservation of our states karst features.

Join us on January 14, 2008 as we welcome Nick Noe from the Indiana Karst Conservancy (IKC) as guest speaker for our monthly program meeting at Minnetrista Cultural Center in Muncie. Mr. Noe will present a video presentation of "Caves: Life Beneath the Forest" and spend a few minutes telling us about the work of the Indiana Karst Conservancy.

For more information about IKC and karst systems, visit their website at www.caves.org/conservancy/ikc.

As always, the meeting begins with fellowship, refreshments and announcements at 7:00 PM with our program commencing at 7:30 PM. Guests are always welcome.

Board Changes

We welcome new and continuing board members to the 2008-09 RCAS board. After experiencing a number of board vacancies during 2007, it is great to have a full board. We look forward to providing great programs and field trips. Our active conservation committee will be offering opportunities to get members involved. 2008 should be a good year for RCAS.

Bonnie Nicholson, President

New Member Procedures

To simplify membership record-keeping, chapter-only memberships will now follow the calendar year, January 1 to December 31. Individuals who join the chapter or renew their membership after May of any given year will have their membership run through December of the following year.

If you would be interested in becoming a member, speak with a board member, or download the form from the December Chat, available online.

The Painted Bunting: January Bird of the Month

Painted Bunting:
Passerina ciris
By Helen Twibell



The painted bunting has been called the most distinctive and most spectacularly colored of all the songbirds of N. America, and up to this point it has been a mystery bird to most bird fanciers of Indiana. The painted bunting has traditionally been a resident of the southern states from Mississippi down through Florida. Recently, however, discoveries have been made which lead bird experts to believe that these tropically-colored birds may be in the process of enlarging their territory.

In the book, *The Birds of Indiana*, by Mumford and Keller, we read in a very brief painted bunting article that an adult male specimen was taken in Indianapolis in April of 1866 and placed in the California Academy of Science. It is also stated in this book that a dead male was found next to the City-County Building in Indianapolis in May of 1983. This specimen was prepared and placed in the Joseph Moore Museum at Earlham College. We quote verbatim: "Recently there have been a number of extra-limital records of the painted bunting in the Midwest; this gorgeous bird may be expanding its territory."

In November of this year

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2007, an appliance repairman happened to espy a copy of one of my bird books on my kitchen table. He commented that he enjoys birds and went on to describe an unusual neon-colored bird he has seen on his way to work. His home is in the rural area around Upland, Indiana, and in the spring on driving to and from his work in Muncie, he passes a large woods where he sees this bird in great numbers, near the road in a swampy area where the undergrowth is tangled and bushy. He said that the small-like, sparrow-sized bird is colorful with feathers of red, blue and green and shows up brilliantly, even in the shadowy forest edge. He also said that the songs of the birds, sung from the treetops, paired with the din of so many croaking frogs in the swamp is almost deafening in its intensity. I found this multicolored species in the Audubon Guide which established that our mystery bird is indeed the painted bunting.

The adult male has a deep blue head, red underparts, a green back and a red rump. The female has an overall greenish plumage which is more darkly above than below. The buntings eat seeds primarily, and insects during breeding season. Fox-tail seed is a favorite. The nest is an open cup, woven of roots and animal hair.

The population of the painted bunting in the southern states has declined in the past

few decades. This may be due to loss of habitat, parasitism by cowbirds and trapping for pet trade on the wintering grounds of Mexico. In 2001 Audubon worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Mexican government to establish an endangered species status for the painted bunting. Audubon also recommended to the Mexican government that the painted bunting be removed from local trade since they are popular as cage birds, and in Mexico thousands are taken to export to bird dealers in Europe.

If you have happened to spot any of these wonderfully colored painted buntings in Indiana, you are indeed fortunate. If this be so, please let us hear about it at: bandhtwibell@pcdoctors1.com.

Field Trip

Indiana Audubon Society will have its annual eagle watch field trip on Saturday, January 26, 2008. RCAS members are invited to join the group. The Cayuga Duke Energy Power Plant will be open that week-end as well for the public to enter the station property to view wintering eagles. The IAS trip is an all day auto tour. If you are interested, contact Bonnie Nicholson at nickrb69@yahoo.com or 765-238-0543 or visit the IAS website at www.indianaaudubon.org.

The 2007 Audubon WatchList



A Call to Action

Audubon and the America Bird Conservancy have joined forces to rally conservationists around America's most imperiled birds. WatchList 2007, a new analysis from these leading bird conservation organizations, uses the latest available research from the bird conservation community along with citizen science data from the Christmas Bird Count and the annual Breeding Bird Survey to identify 176 species in the continental U.S. and 38 in Hawaii that are in need of immediate conservation help. It is a

call to action to save species fighting for survival amid a convergence of environmental challenges, including habitat loss, invasive species and global warming.

A Tool for Conservation

Identifying the species at greatest risk is the first step toward saving them. It helps target public policies, funding support, conservation initiatives and public commitment on the species and habitats that need it most. The newest chapter in Audubon's ongoing State of the Birds Reports, WatchList 2007 lays the groundwork for an "industry standard" to guide conservation priorities among conservation organizations and government agencies. By dividing imperiled birds into 59 continental and 38 Hawaiian "red" species, and 117 "yellow" species, WatchList 2007 helps focus highest attention on the species of greatest concern (red), while also highlighting "yellow" species while there is still time to keep them off the red list. The names of these species may be less familiar than those on Audubon's roster of Common Birds in Decline, but WatchList birds need even more urgent attention. In many cases, by helping them we can also help many of the other birds at risk.

Which Species? Why?

Birds that rely on virtually every kind of habitat found in the U.S. are found on WatchList. Global warming threatens feeding grounds for seabirds like Xantus' Murrelet and breeding grounds for songbirds like the Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Drought is having devastating consequences for grassland birds like Gunnison's Sage-Grouse and the Lesser Prairie-Chicken. Hawaiian species are losing ground to invasive, non-native species of animals and plants. Meanwhile, coastal development, industrialized farming practices, pollution, energy development and suburban sprawl are eliminating and degrading the places many of these species need to feed, rest and breed.

Together We Can Make a Difference

WatchList is about the power of concerned people to make a difference for birds and for tomorrow. The citizen scientist volunteers who report their observations in Audubon's Christmas Bird Count and/or the U.S.G.S Breeding Bird Survey provided the data needed for this comprehensive analysis. Now, the same commitment and dedication that produced the findings is essential to addressing their cause. Only citizen action can fuel the changes that will improve the outlook for WatchList species.

Information from: <http://web1.audubon.org/science/species/watchlist/>

To view more information about the WatchList, please visit the above Web site.

Robert Cooper Audubon Society



Robert Cooper Audubon Society
Lis Mitchell
2700 S. Cecil Rd.
Muncie, IN 47302

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Dated Material- Please Deliver Promptly

The Chat is published 10 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

Jan. 14: Karst Conservancy Program
Jan. 18: Articles due for February *Chat*. Send to Beth Simmons at basimmons2@bsu.edu
Jan. 26: Annual Indiana Audubon Society Field Trip

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

Officers

President: Bonnie Nicholson 886-5099
Vice President: Jon Creek 348-4019
Recording Sec.: Barb Butler 284-5661
Treasurer: Suzanne Groshong 759-5713

Directors

2007-09 Phil Tuttle 289-4251
Marcia Johnson 288-5629
2006-08 Dave Cramer 260-726-9492
Jane Duckworth 282-2161

Committee Chairs

Education: Pam Kistler 284-0946
Field trip: Blanche Townsend 284-0391
Hospitality: Cynda Turner 289-9390
Membership: Jane Duckworth 282-2161
Lis Mitchell 289-0513
Newsletter ed.: Beth Simmons 812-343-8927
Program: Bonnie Nicholson 886-5099
Publicity: Barb Stedman 288-2890
Conservation: Charles Mason 288-9937