

The Chat



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

Volume 34, No. 3 March 2008

A peek at what's ahead

Spring is just around the corner and the RCAS calendar is filling up. Purple Martin landlord, Tom Jonker will be our guest speaker at our April 14 meeting and we have an invitation to visit his property near Coatesville during nesting season (date to be announced.)

May is Limberlost month. We will host photographer Bill Hubbard on the 12th to learn about the birds of the Limberlost along with some history from the land of Gene Stratton Porter. A field trip to the Limberlost will take place on May 17.

At our June meeting we'll be learning more about how to identify and help eradicate invasive plant species. Contact Conservation Committee Chair Charlie Mason if you want to become an RCAS "Weed Warrior" and participate in some work days.

Watch for more information is upcoming Chats or check the website.

Christmas Bird Count Results

The Muncie Christmas Bird Count was held on December 22, 2007 as part of the 108th Christmas Bird Count. Started on December 25, 1924, the Muncie CBC had not been conducted for 68 years. After winter storms cancelled most local CBCs the previous weekend, participants were treated to relatively mild winter weather on the 22nd. Six groups went out into assigned areas of the 15 mile-diameter count circle to identify and count birds while nine people did the same at their feeders. Overall, the total species count was only one less than the previous high count on the Indiana Audubon Society Delaware CBC in 1978. Six species were seen that had not been noted on previous counts. Bill and Jean saw one each, Wood Duck, Gadwall, Double-crested Cormorant and Bald Eagle at Prairie Creek Reservoir. After leaving her station about noon, Carolee Grummer was riding south between Cowan and Oakville when she spotted twelve Sandhill Cranes in a low flyby. The sixth new species was fifteen Snow Buntings seen near Reese Airport by Bill and Jean during count week. To no one's surprise, the most seen species was Canada Goose with 1,427 tallied, or about one in every four birds observed. (Forty years ago it was hard to find a Canada Goose in Delaware County!) That's what the Christmas Bird Count is all about: citizen scientists helping to document the changes in the avian population.....and having fun doing it.

If you enjoyed participating in the CBC, consider the upcoming event, the Indiana Audubon Society Big May Day Bird Count which is on the second Saturday in May. I plan to compile the IAS Big May Day Count for Delaware County this year. Both of these counts are open to field participants and feeder watchers.

Compiled by Bill Grummer

Chimney Swift: March Bird of the Month

Chimney Swift:
Chaetura pelagica
By Helen Twibell



The swift family is an interesting one, the chimney swift being the only one listed for eastern and central N. America and is common throughout Indiana in spring, summer and some fall months. Swifts are believed to be closely related to the hummingbirds. In the research reading for the article, every bird guide listed the chimney swift and hummingbird in the same section. I thought this was odd, and so as I read on, found the two to be related in an unusual way. The two families share wing structures that are similar--the humerus (the wing's inner part) and elongated distal elements which allow the birds' fast wing movement. We are aware of the hummingbird's swift wing movements and likewise the chimney swift is fast-flying, except in a different manner.

The chimney swift may appear a sooty black as it emerges from a chimney, but may seasonably become a lighter brownish color. The swift is the size of a small song sparrow, about 5 ½ inches, but due to the length of its wings appears much larger in flight. When it is overhead it appears almost tail-less and headless,. This along with its long narrow slightly curved wings has given the swift the two popular names: 'bow and arrow bird' and 'cigar with wings'. The long paddle-like wings are usually

fully extended in flight and never deeply folded like the wings of swallows. The wings give a false impression of beating alternately as the bird tips from side to side on its rapid gliding and quivering erratic dash across the sky. Swallows, for which the swifts might be mistaken, exhibit a more graceful movement. In the evening the swift might even appear bat-like but its wing movement is different from the flapping flight of the little insect-eating mammal.

Chimney swifts cannot perch and spend most their lives in the air. They cling to vertical surfaces at nest and roost sites in chimneys, hollow trees and once in a while in deserted buildings. Swifts have strong feet for clinging to upright surfaces--three toes in front and one in back, with curved claws. They also have stiff tail shafts which they use as props when roosting. The bird flies and sails alternately, moving in circles, even when migrating. Its main food consists of flying insects. Chimney swifts forage over distances of up to several miles. They sometimes look for concentrations of insects such as nuptial flights of termites, ants and mayflies. They also consume ballooning spiders when available. (Ballooning spiders are spiders which have risen into the air, floating on their own silk threads with the wind's action.) Large numbers of chimney swifts may congregate at these feeding sites, often accompanied by swallows.

The chimney swifts build their half-saucer-shaped nest out of small twigs, broken off by the birds in flight from the tops of dead trees. A salivary cement is used to glue twigs together and also to attach the nest to the inside of a hollow tree or chimney. Chimney swifts may have 4 or 5 eggs in a clutch. They feed the nestlings one or three times an hour, carrying smaller boluses (lumps of food) of up to several hundred insects and ballooning spiders that often stretch the floor of the mouth downward.. These swifts use salivary cement from enlarged salivary glands to glue the bolus together.

As insects decline in the winter months, the chimney swifts migrate to Peru in S. America. Before the flight, scores of swifts aggregate at traditional stopovers to accumulate the fat reserve needed for the long trip. Residents living near these locations may be treated to a nightly spectacle of several thousand swifts going to roost in a single chimney. A gathering flock as it swirls in circles over the chimney is a remarkable sight. Toward dark they begin dropping in, and the whole flock may disappear in a few minutes.

The populations of chimney swifts seem to be declining. Swift declines may be due to recent closings of household chimneys that were once used for nestings. Artificial chimneys and nest boxes may offer great promise for reversing the decline of this bird.

West View Letter to the Editor

At the February meeting of RCAS I began a regular monthly 5 minute talk about central Indiana's habitat and the environment as it relates to Audubon members. We hear so often that birds are in danger from loss of habitat. I hope a series on habitat and what the ordinary citizen (that would be you and I) can do to improve it. INPAWS (Indiana Plant and Wildlife Society) says that fully 25% of our non-cultivated vegetation is non-native. These invasive plants crowd out the plants which have been here for millennia and that makes it harder for the rest of the environment to remain healthy - - you know, plants, animals, birds, soil, run-off, etc.

Bush honeysuckle, garlic mustard and purple loosestrife are among the top 10 worst offenders. Learn what they look like. Pay attention to your own property. Eradicate them or ask for help from RCAS and we will help you. Look around your neighborhood to identify invasives and take some steps to deal with them.

With the permission and help from the Muncie School system and the principal of West View Elementary School, my friend Jon Creek and I have cut and treated some 150 bush honeysuckle plants from a small woodlot behind West View. We expect to remove the garlic mustard and improve the mix of trees so as to increase the integrity of the woods. I hope to enlist my neighborhood association in the continuing care of this little woods. How else will our school children have the experience of a healthy Indiana woodland? We hope to encourage some teaching and experience of plants, trees, birds and animals to students at West View so that they will know what an environment actually is. Do you know? Would you like to learn? Even help? I'll bet there is some roadside property near your house which is begging for some similar restoration.

Local organizations like the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, the Sierra Club and the Red-Tail Land Conservancy would welcome your interest and help you learn and participate in restoring our local land resources which we have neglected for far too long.

You don't have to be a scientist - all you have to do is care about the creation. Remember, there's nothing like citizen action to begin the revolution.

Charles Mason, conservation chair

Understanding Global Warming: **Why is it a problem?**

Part 2 of a 6-part series on the facts about Global Warming

Even small increases in average global temperatures can have devastating effects on people, wildlife, and the places we live. Rising temperatures in the Arctic have already reduced average ice cover, disrupting the feeding habits of polar bears and the way of life of Inuit communities. Reduced rainfall in parts of the tropics and subtropics is wreaking havoc on food production and wildlife habitat alike. Like many other organizations around the world, Audubon believes that the actions we take today can slow and eventually reverse these and other damaging patterns, protecting the quality and diversity of life on Earth for present and future generations.

Robert Cooper Audubon Society



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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

March 10: March Program

March 21: Articles due for *April Chat*. Send to
Beth Simmons at 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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