



Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

Bird Banding at Ball State University

June 8 RCAS Program

Dr. Kamal Islam and his graduate students began bird banding at Ball State University (BSU) in 2017. Bird banding takes place on several BSU properties throughout the year, including Christy Woods, Cooper Farm, and Ginn Woods, as well as one non-BSU property, Whitetail Tree Farm. The primary focus of BSU banding includes passerines, near-passerines, and Northern Saw-whet Owls. In this presentation, Bethany Darby will describe the procedures for catching birds in mist nets and banding them with United States Geological Survey (USGS) bands. She will discuss the reasons why researchers band birds, as well as the importance of banding for avian conservation. Bethany will also examine trends in catch-rate and species diversity at BSU properties from 2017 to 2022.

Bethany is a master's student in Dr. Islam's Cerulean Warbler lab at BSU.

She is studying the spatial distribution patterns of Cerulean Warbler nests and landscape features that may be associated with clustered nest distributions in Southern Indiana. Bethany is from Ocean County, New Jersey, and completed her undergraduate education at Drexel University with a degree in biology and a concentration in ecology and evolution. Since graduating, she has worked with songbirds, shorebirds, and seabirds on various research projects throughout the eastern United States and Canada. She has enjoyed co-leading the Ball State Bird Banding project since 2020.

Please join us via Zoom at 7pm on June 8. Register in advance at: <https://bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJwsdu2srjorG9G0meqWzcshVO4L7355jvvr> After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.



Golden-winged Warbler
Photo by Lara Jones

Avian Influenza Outbreak

By Catherine Kubo

On top of last year's songbird die-off event (see article on page 4) comes a 2022 outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). HPAI outbreaks occur periodically, and they of particular concern to poultry raisers: an infection can spread rapidly and cause the loss of an entire flock to disease or culling. We contacted Indiana State Ornithologist Allisyn Gillet for the latest guidance on what responsible backyard birders should do about their feeders and received the following response:

"At this point [as of late April], Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is not requesting the public to remove their

bird feeders. Multiple songbirds from the Hoosier state have been tested for avian influenza but we have yet to find any positive cases. Further, wild bird species most likely to carry HPAI, waterbirds and raptors, do not typically visit bird feeders.

"We are also monitoring the situation closely and will adjust our guidance in the future, if necessary.

"More information about avian flu and wild birds is at:

<https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/wildlife-resources/wildlife-diseases-in-indiana/avian-flu-bird-flu/>

For more on what you can do, see page 5.

Field Trips

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



Scarlet Tanager at Fox Island Park
Photo by Rose Jeffery

June 25, July 30, and August 27, 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. Come see what our local breeding birds have been up to.

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

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. This walk is a good opportunity to see Scarlet Tanager and Prothonotary Warbler, among others. Pack a lunch! Admission to this Allen County park is \$2.00 per person, cash or check only.

Programs and Events

June 8, 7 pm: Zoom meeting. See page 1 for registration information

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 banding program has been ongoing since 2017.

Chasing Dead Birds

By Terri Gorney Lehman



Stockbridge collection mount of a Pied-billed Grebe
Photo courtesy of Earlham College

I developed an interest in genealogy as a teenager but I never thought that I would trace dead birds.

Earlham College has a collection of Charles Stockbridge's bird mounts. I was told by the archivist and staff that they had been there a long time but that no one knew the date or circumstances under which they were acquired. That led me to research the life of Charles Stockbridge. He was born in Fort Wayne in 1856. His father, Nathaniel, owned one of the first bookstores in the town. Charles loved books. At age four, he received a nature book with illustrations of birds and it began a life-long passion. As a twelve-year-old, he began collecting birds and preparing their skins, not an uncommon practice at the time. He was largely self-taught in ornithology and had only two formal lessons in taxidermy. He learned in the fields and woods around his home.

From articles in the Fort Wayne newspapers, I gleaned that Charles became a professional taxidermist and owned a large collection of bird mounts that he prepared. One article reported that he had given away some of the mounts to those who attended one of his lectures. In the early 1900s, the Fort Wayne library had created a museum room and in 1909, he placed some of his mounts on loan to the library so that all could enjoy and learn from them.

One of Stockbridge's passions was teaching children about birds. He helped start Junior Audubon programs at schools and helped Boy Scouts on their bird and nature studies. He was a founding member of the Allen County Audubon Society, in 1898. When he died, in 1934, the society changed its name to the Stockbridge Audubon Society to honor him. He had become one of the foremost authorities on birds in Indiana.

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My Thoughts: Nature's Lessons

By Jim Schowe

Mother Nature can't be fooled—she knows. She knows when to cover the earth with cold and snow, and when to warm the soil with the sun's heating rays. She knows how to sprout the seeds left from last year's growing season to begin a new life cycle and when to cause those plants to release the promise of new life in the coming year through their seeds or spores. Mother Nature just knows. Me, I'm just a human and I have to use my senses to follow the clues given me by the environment.

Now after seventy-one years on this earth I have compiled some basic observations that help me understand Nature's clock for the return of spring. For example it was just about twenty years ago that I became aware of a male cardinal singing in the tree tops in mid-February. That by itself is something that could be easily dismissed or even ignored. But stored in my memory I could refer to this information and use it in the future. It must have been about eight years ago that I noticed Turkey Vultures soaring in the sky not long after the cardinals started their tree top orations--more information added to my mental spreadsheet. These two pieces of data allowed me to confirm that spring was not far away. Just

yesterday, Feb 27th, I looked on the ground outside of my remote workshop and saw daffodils and irises starting to pop their stalks above the ground—another clue that warm weather is out-competing winter's cold. This morning I saw a male Eastern Bluebird staking claim to the nesting box below our pond, perhaps the same box where he fledged a few years before.

Those indicators by themselves don't signal the end of winter. They just hint at nicer days and nights to come. Remember, in early March 2004 we were inundated with ice! At least an inch of ice covered everything. The old, mature trees in my neighborhood were snapping under the weight. It was dangerous to be under any overhang, whether tree, patio roof, or powerline. I am not sure if the daffodils were above the ground before the ice storm or not but we all can remember the fallen limbs and trees, not to mention the four days without electrical power. Ice storms are not a sign of spring we look forward to. I think Mother Nature was playing an early April fools joke on us. Little did she know I thought the stunningly beautiful scene created by light playing on the ice was almost worth the damage it caused.

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I noticed Turkey Vultures soaring in the sky not long after the cardinals started their tree top orations--more information added to my mental spreadsheet.

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The History Center in Fort Wayne has in its collection some great photographs from the 1950s of Charles's daughter, Althea Stockbridge, teaching staff how to clean and care for the mounts. The Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society Museum acquired the mounts on a loan from Charles in 1933 when the museum was located at the Swinney Homestead.

Finally, I located an article in the Richmond Palladium-Item newspaper from September 1968. It stated, "One of the finest single collections of mounted skins in the Midwest, the Stockbridge collection, has been given to the Joseph Moore Museum of Earlham College by Althea Stockbridge of Fort Wayne." At that time, James Cope was director of the Joseph Moore Museum. The museum lacked sufficient storage space so Cope

worked out an arrangement with Charles F. McGraw, the director of the Hayes Arboretum, to store the collection there. Both institutions benefited from having these specimens available to students for use in their studies.

In 1968, the Stockbridge collection consisted of 235 specimens and represented 173 species of birds. Included were 13 species of warblers and 15 species of ducks and geese. One of the rarest specimens was a Passenger Pigeon.

Stockbridge's collection has stood the test of time, with many of the mounts now being well over one hundred years old. They are still used today. A few are on display at the museum. It is fitting that his collection, thanks to his daughter, found a permanent home at Earlham College.



Stockbridge collection mount of a Double-crested Cormorant
Photo courtesy of Earlham College

Cicadas, Pesticides Mentioned in 2021 Songbird Deaths

"I didn't know people loved birds that much," state ornithologist says

By Seth Slabaugh

**Last year's
widespread wave of
songbird deaths
remains under
investigation**

Scientists investigating last year's widespread songbird illnesses and deaths have eliminated some causes of the outbreak, including: Avian influenza, West Nile Virus, mosquito-borne encephalitis, salmonella and chlamydia (bacterial pathogens), Newcastle disease virus, herpes viruses, pox viruses and the *Trichomonas gallinae* parasite. The list of suspected origins still holding the attention of state ornithologist Allisyn-Marie Gillet includes cicada-heavy diets, which possibly had bioaccumulated pesticides. "The cicada hypothesis, personally I thought that seemed like a really plausible, credible cause," Gillet told members of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society recently.

"The cicada theory was really compelling because the timing was perfect. The emergence of cicadas ended up coinciding really well with the emergence of this disease," she said, referring to the billions of periodic cicadas that emerged from the ground over large swaths of the eastern United States last year. The timing wasn't the only connection. So was the distribution. The outbreak that caused eye discharge, crustiness, and swelling, as well as tremors, disorientation, and uncontrollable limbs in the birds, mostly occurred in Eastern and Midwestern states where the cicadas also were found.

One argument was that eating a diet of mostly cicadas, due to their abundance, led to a vitamin A deficiency in the birds. Gillet cited scurvy, a condition in people caused by not having enough vitamin C in their diets, as an example of how the lack of a vitamin can cause disease.

What sickened the birds, including many fledgling Blue Jays, Common Grackles, European Starlings, Northern Cardinals, and American Robins, remains under investigation by state and federal agencies, such as the Animal Disease Diagnostic Laboratory at Purdue University. Tests completed thus far, Gillet reported, include necropsy (bird autopsy), histology (microscopic structure of tissues), virology (DNA), microbiology (growing cultures of

bacteria from samples), and parasitology. Ongoing tests, she went on, include transmission electron microscopy (direct visualization of tissues), metagenomics (study of genetic material), and toxicology (vitamin A deficiency or pesticides, specifically, dichlorodiphenyl-dichloroethylene (DDE)).

DDE is a breakdown product of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT), a pesticide once widely used to control insects in agriculture and insects that carry diseases like malaria. DDT's use in the U.S. was banned in 1972 because of damage to wildlife. But DDE persists in the environment, Gillet said, as a legacy contaminant.

The birds were eating a lot of cicadas, "which were underground for 17 years," during which they "could definitely bioaccumulate" pesticides that "perhaps leached into the ground" and were absorbed by tree roots "that the cicadas were feeding off of," Gillet said.

"However, there are some events that do not support this theory," she went on. "We ended up with birds that were being tested in other states ... like North Dakota ... and Florida ... and that's not where cicadas were emerging, so that kind of made that theory more skeptical, not as strong a theory as one would have thought."

Cicadas and pesticides sound more likely to Gillet to have sickened the birds than some of the other theories she has heard, such as fifth-generation cellular technology (5G).

It was in late May of 2021 that Gillet's agency, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), first began receiving reports of sick and dying birds in Indiana, starting with Monroe County.

In early summer, DNR announced a statewide moratorium on bird feeding to slow the spread of the illness, given the possibility that it was infectious.

The DNR says "wildlife disease events are often related to several interacting causes consisting of a pathogen, the environment, and the health of the host." Though the investigation continues, unless the event repeats itself it is

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unlikely investigators will be able to identify a cause in the short term.

However, Gillet says the agency did learn several important things:

1. There was a huge media response to the developing story. The DNR couldn't deal with all of the one-on-one interview requests. Instead, the agency hosted a press conference on July 2 in which 20 media outlets participated. The bird event "made a huge impression across the country," Gillet said. "People were really worried. I knew people loved birds, but I didn't know they loved birds that much."

2. "After the news releases, now came the public response to the huge media outpouring. . . .The public was really concerned about birds dying, which is very heartening to hear. It makes me really happy to know that people do care about wildlife. And so a big lesson we also learned is that people do not want to be told to take down their bird feeders. This was a voluntary guidance moratorium. It wasn't against the law to keep feeders up. . . .But there were a lot of very angry people responding to us, and. . . .we learned people really were listening."

3. By the time the moratorium was lifted in September, the DNR had received about 4,300 reports from the public of sick or dead birds through its Sick or Dead Wildlife Reporting System.

4. "People were interested in songbirds and they were worried and they were on the lookout and provided help in tracking the disease. That was the biggest win of this event." The agency could track the outbreak's "severity and geographic extent pretty much in real time thanks to the public."



Allisyn-Marie Gillet, Indiana State Ornithologist, at the RCAS meeting in March

How you can help

- Clean your bird bath and bird feeder regularly. Gillet recommends a solution of nine parts water/one part bleach. Other experts suggest a vinegar/water solution. "It certainly takes effort and dedication to keep them clean," says Annette Rose of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society.
- Donate to the Indiana Nongame Wildlife Fund. "A lot of my work depends on donations from people like you," Gillet said. Changes in how individuals can donate to the fund on their state income-tax filings starting in 2017 greatly reduced donations to this fund, which helps hundreds of wildlife species in Indiana — from songbirds and salamanders to state-endangered Trumpeter Swans and Spotted Turtles.
- If you have an injured bird, please immediately contact your local wildlife rehabilitator, found here: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/wildlife-resources/orphaned-and-injured-animals/wildlife-rehabilitators/>
- If you find a dead bald eagle, please contact your local conservation officer (CO), found here: <http://www.in.gov/dnr/lawenfor/2755.htm>. The local CO will retrieve the dead eagle for you.
- If you have concerns over trapped birds or birds causing property damage, please call your local wildlife biologist, found here: <https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/wildlife-resources/wildlife-biologists/>
- If you find a fully feathered young bird on the ground, please leave the bird where it is unless it is in danger (e.g. on a well-traveled road). Young fledglings that are learning to fly will remain on the ground. Their parents are able to find and care for them even if you do not see them in the area.



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
2021-2023	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
Find us on Facebook!
Email: admin@cooperaudubon.org

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Spring of 2022 may make me rethink my conclusions. A week ago I found two bats in my bat house. They were whispering sweet bat love words. The temperature that day was almost 70 degrees. Yesterday and today the air temp was barely above freezing; I hope my bats have enough fat stores to last until flying insects fill the air. My friend Linda B. posted that she has Purple Martin scouts at her gourds and she worries they may die due to lack of food. Linda does supplement their food with cooked eggs and a few dried mealworms. I am sorry I can't supplement the flying insects the bats need.

Nature is teaching me now that this is her way. Individuals who cannot adapt will not survive, and those that can manage early hardships will get choice nesting areas to raise their young. I hope there are enough of them to make the entire species stronger still. I guess that you can't fool Mother Nature, but you can teach an old dog new lessons.

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