



Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

Rails: Secretive, Understudied, and In Decline

An overview of rail research conducted at the University of Central Oklahoma and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

June 21 RCAS Program



Yellow Rail
Photo courtesy of
Tabitha Olsen

Rails, a group of marsh birds, are traditionally challenging to monitor, especially during their winter and migratory periods. Ongoing work aims to improve and compare monitoring techniques for six species of rail along the Texas Gulf Coast: Yellow Rail, Black Rail, King Rail, Clapper Rail, Sora, and Virginia Rail. This presentation will showcase three projects/discoveries

from 2022 and 2023:

- Discussion of monitoring of all six rail species using passive and active survey methodology,
- Discovery of a new Yellow Rail winter vocalization and how this has helped locate the species in the winter, and
- Showcase of drone thermal imaging

The elusive Black Rail
Photo courtesy of Tabitha Olsen

results and how they were successfully used to detect Black Rail and Yellow Rail in 2023.

Our presenter, Tabitha Olsen, is a Master of Science student at the University of Central Oklahoma, and last year's Fox Student Research Award recipient. The meeting will start at 7 pm at the Ball State University (BSU) Nature Lab at 2500 West University Avenue on the BSU Campus. Parking is available in front of the greenhouse, and is free after 5 pm. The building is handicap accessible.



Election of Officers at the June RCAS Meeting

Also on the agenda for the June 21 RCAS meeting is the election of chapter officers and directors for two-year terms beginning July 1. The slate of candidates proposed by the Nominating Committee follows, but nominations will also be accepted from the floor. If you are interested in taking a role on the RCAS leadership team, please contact Annette Rose at rosenflowers@hughes.net. There

are numerous ways to serve. See page 5 for a summary of what our small group of dedicated volunteers achieved in 2022.

For two-year terms, ending on June 30, 2025	
Vice President.....	Rose Jeffery *
Treasurer.....	Jim Jeffery *
Director.....	Kamal Islam *
Director.....	Brian Wolfe
For a one-year term, ending on June 30, 2024	
Recording Secretary..	Brit Nahorney *
	*Indicates incumbent

Field Trips

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

June 10, July 8, and August 12, 9 am to 11 am: 4306 Mounds Rd., Anderson, IN



Mounds State Park in summer
Photo by Catherine Kubo

Mounds State Park

Second Saturday walks at Mounds State Park continue through the summer. Check in on the progress of our summer breeders! Meet at the Visitor's Center. State Park fees apply.

Saturday, June 3, 8:30 am: Pefley Rd., Lagro, IN

Salamonie River State Forest

This beautiful forest should be a great place to see some migrants, as well as birds returning to their breeding grounds and those who never left. The reservoir hosts a variety of waterfowl.

We will meet at the Hominy Ridge Picnic Area in the Salamonie River State Forest at about 8:30 am. We will bird in the morning and then picnic, weather permitting. After lunch we will explore areas around the reservoir. Bring a sack lunch.

Sunday, June 18, 1 pm to 3 pm: 4407 W. Kilgore Ave., Muncie, IN

Service Trip at Dutro-Ernst Woods

Take action by joining us to weed-wrangle at Dutro-Ernst Woods, an urban oasis in Muncie. Our focus will be on pulling garlic mustard, and we will also pick up some trash. Dress for outdoor work, and bring gloves and drinking water. We will supply bags for disposal.

This Red-Tail Conservancy park is only a few years old, but it is already becoming a refuge for wildlife. Fewer invasive plants will help the native ecosystem to thrive.

Programs and Events

June 21, 7 pm to 9 pm: BSU Nature Lab, 2500 W. University Ave., Muncie, IN

Rails: Secretive, Understudied, and In Decline

Join us for a talk by Tabitha Olsen, Master of Science student at the University of Central Oklahoma, and last year's Fox Student Research Award recipient. She will present an overview of rail research conducted at the University of Central Oklahoma and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Attend in person or register in advance for the webcast at:

<https://bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJIpc--urDwiHNUoAgmQHvuqwrDyUkKojAcv>

Save the Date

**RCAS Fall Picnic
Mounds State Park
September 23, 2023,
Noon to 3 pm**

June marks our final monthly meeting for the 2022-2023 year. Second Saturday walks at Mounds State Park continue through the summer. Meetings and other field trips will resume in September.

On September 23 we will have our annual RCAS picnic at Mounds State Park, from noon to 3pm. The fall newsletter will have more detail, but mark your calendars now to save the date for an enjoyable gathering filled with food, friends, and fun!

My Thoughts: Sunny Days

By Jim Schowe

Recently the weather was just warm enough and the ground just dry enough for me to take my four Brittany Spaniels for a run through the countryside near my house in Randolph County. We spent most of our time in a field of over forty acres that is bordered by woods and heavily wooded fence rows. I have in the past seen a few coveys of bobwhite quail here, which is always exciting. Saturday did not reveal any quail.

But what I did spot in the next field over more than made up for the lack of quail. There were what must have been 25 or more Wild Turkeys. I was thrilled! This is east-central Indiana, not Michigan or Pennsylvania. Imagine, Wild Turkeys here! This was a rare and special occurrence for me. Once, several years ago, I captured a Wild Turkey on a trail

camera, and last spring I heard one in the distance. But I have never before seen one so near to my house. Spotting a whole flock made me feel truly fortunate.

My shooting of feathered creatures ended many years ago, but searching and counting quail is still a priority for me. I have now dug my turkey calls out of my junk drawer. Perhaps this flock will stick around, and I will have the opportunity to count turkeys as well as quail.

Isn't nature wonderful, giving us opportunities to experience new thrills on a sunny day?

In Madison County, Wild Turkey sightings are even rarer than in Randolph. However, this winter a lone tom took possession of a bridge crossing Pipe Creek in the northwest corner of the county, eager to defend his territory against any intruder, whether avian, human, or automotive. Here he is, in a side-view mirror image captured by Jeff Timmons.



There's a Name for That!

By Catherine Kubo

This winter has also been a good one for American White Pelican sightings in east-central Indiana. Flocks have spent significant time at Eagle Creek, Geist Reservoir, Summit Lake, and Prairie Creek, among other spots. Watching these birds on the wing and as they churn the waters in their group feeding maneuvers is a treat.

If you have had the pleasure of observing them, you have probably noticed the protuberance on the impressive beaks of these creatures. But have you ever wondered what it is called? Ornithologists refer to it as the **sail**. The sail develops in breeding season and is shed after the eggs are laid. The American White Pelican is the only one of the eight pelican species to sport such a feature.

American White Pelicans do not have a zoological monopoly on the term sail. There are sailfish and wind sailors (a cool-looking hydrozoa that lives on the surface of the ocean), to name just two more.

Have you recently learned a new term for something you have seen in the field? Or have an old favorite? E-mail the editor at admin@cooperaudubon.org and we will feature it in a future column. Photos welcome!

American White Pelican at Prairie Creek Reservoir
Photo by Drew Bailey



Wetland Restoration and Spring Migration

By Terri Gorney Lehman

About four years ago, Robert Cooper Audubon Society gave the Friends of the Limberlost a donation toward the purchase of the Royer property, ten acres of previously farmed land destined to be added to the Loblolly Marsh Nature Preserve in northern Jay County. Restoration of this plot was completed in the fall of 2022 with the help of US Fish & Wildlife biologist Scott Fetters and retired East Central regional ecologist Ken Brunswick.

The plantings have taken hold and, with the removal of the drainage tile, the area is retaining water. This

spring an encouraging number of spring migrants have used the new wetlands. A nice thing about this area is its location at the corner of County Road 250W and County Road 850N, thus affording good, close views of the waterfowl and shorebirds.

The first migrants noted were two female Buffleheads on March 10, which my husband, Randy Lehman, and I saw. He was able to photograph them. They were still there the following day, along with an

Eastern Phoebe singing from one of the small trees. Brian Daugherty saw a Wilson's Snipe on March 21 and

photographed the bird busily feeding along the water's edge. By mid-March, Killdeer were using this new area. On March 31, J. Swygart had a Greater Yellowlegs feeding not far from the road. He managed to get a nice photograph of it.

Two male Blue-winged Teal arrived April 1 along with a female Gadwall. The

teal were still there on April 2. Naturalist Curt Burnette noted Pectoral Sandpipers on April 13 and ecologist Ryan Smith later reported 80 Pectoral Sandpipers there. On April 14, Randy and I had 131 of the birds and about a third of that number the next two days. We recorded three Greater Yellowlegs on April 15.

Besides the migrants, Red-winged Blackbirds, Mallards, and Canada Geese have also discovered this area.

We are pleased with this first spring migration at the new wetland addition. And we see this area as only getting richer in bird life over the next few years. Thank you to Robert Cooper Audubon Society and to everyone else who made this wetland possible.



Female Buffleheads
Photo by Randy Lehman



Wilson's Snipe
Photo by Brian Daugherty



Greater Yellowlegs
Photo by J. Swygart



Blue-winged Teal (above)
and a female Gadwall
(below)

Photos by Randy Lehman



Spring Birds and Wildflowers

By Catherine Kubo

April 22 turned out to be a lovely day for the RCAS field trip to Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. Five participants enjoyed a walk through the spring woods. We had a few early warblers, singing Field Sparrows, House Wrens burbling forth at every turn, and copious wildflowers. After a somewhat chilly picnic, and inspired by Ryan Smith's recent presentation on the nature preserves of east-central Indiana, we decided to stop at



Shrader-Weaver Nature Preserve on the way home. We thought it would be too early for the blue-eyed Mary to be in bloom but figured it would still be a nice end to our outing. Well, we were wrong about the blue-eyed Mary! The woods were a carpet of blue and white, interspersed with stands of nodding trillium and many other spring-time delights. A great reminder to get out and enjoy the natural spaces we are fortunate to have access to—thanks, Ryan!



Bristly buttercup and blue-eyed Mary at Shrader-Weaver
Photo by Rose Jeffery

2022 at Robert Cooper Audubon Society

By Annette Rose

In 2022, a small group of dedicated volunteers served Robert Cooper Audubon Society by planning and implementing a variety of events for members and citizens of east-central Indiana. The board of directors and chairs of standing committees have dedicated over 1,030 hours toward our mission to enjoy, learn, educate, and protect our natural environment and wildlife. We were pleased to return to face-to-face programming at the Nature Lab on the Ball State University campus for programs this year, but also to use our COVID experience to expand the reach of these programs by simultaneously streaming them, a practice that we plan to continue. Streaming has also permitted us to access a wider range of speakers, a nice bonus.

At our June 21 program, we will hold elections for three leadership and two director positions prior to Tabitha Olsen's presentation on rails. Current incumbents are candidates for four of these five positions. For the fifth, we are grateful that Brian Wolfe has agreed to assist in the governance of the Society and has offered new ideas for engaging Ball State students in our programming.

2022 Programs and Projects Sponsored by Robert Cooper Audubon Society	
Conservation Projects: <u>Messick Road Trail</u> <u>Wilbur Wright Trail</u> <u>Dutro-Ernst Woods</u>	22 (149 hours)
Programs	10 (232 attendees)
Fox Student Research Grant	1 recipient
Conservation Awards	4 recipients
Education	7 programs (179 participants)
Field Trips	20 trips (289 participants)
Christmas Bird Count	1 in Muncie Circle (11 participants)
Cooper's Talk Newsletter	4 editions
Publicity: Website, Email, Facebook	Weekly and as-needed updates

Finally, we offer our sincere thanks to Kim McKenzie who will be stepping down as director, after serving for eight years. During her tenure, Kim led our efforts to oppose the Mounds Lake Reservoir, in collaboration with the Heart of the River Coalition. She also kept our membership apprised of RCAS events via our email distribution service. She has been an engaged and enthusiastic member of the team, and we look forward to her continuing contributions in other capacities.

**Furthering our mission to
Enjoy
Learn
Educate, and
Protect
our natural environment**



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	

Directors

2022-2024	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 third Wednesday of the month. For updates and reminders on the schedule and meeting locations, refer to our website or join our distribution list by sending a request to admin@cooperaudubon.org.

Contact us

Chapter Website: www.cooperaudubon.org
Find us on Facebook!
Email: admin@cooperaudubon.org
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From the Gallery



Pine Warbler, at Crab Orchard National Wildlife Refuge
March 2023
Photo by Jim Jeffery

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