



[capitalareaaudubon.org](http://capitalareaaudubon.org)

# The Call Note

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**September 2015**

Dedicated to creating a greater awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the interrelatedness of all Michigan's wild places and wildlife and the need for stewardship.

## President's Corner

### A new year begins!

Welcome to the start of Capital Area Audubon Society's 2015-16 season! I am privileged to serve as president this year. The board has been working hard to put together a remarkable line-up of programs and field trips that I trust you will find entertaining as well as educational. Thanks to **Tom Conner** and **Doug McWhirter** for stepping up as new board members this year and to **Bob Kingsbury** for offering to lead the upcoming September bird walks.

**Jim Hewitt** will continue as club historian, preserving the CAAS archives, and he will also be leading a series of nature walks in the spring to explore our local flora and fauna. Jim has been maintaining the club's web page for several years, a role he is passing on to **Roger Wolf**. Having a web presence is an indispensable tool for communicating with not only our current members but also potential future members. Many thanks to Roger for taking on this task and a special thank-you to Jim for all his great work on our website!

As a friendly reminder, don't forget to renew your CAAS membership. **Cindi Martineau** will be available to collect **dues** at the September meeting. Thank you in advance for your continued support. We are looking forward to another fantastic year!

~ **Barb Hosler**

### September bird walks begin Labor Day weekend

Avid birder **Bob Kingsbury** will be leading a bird walk each Saturday in September: 5<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup>. Meet in the parking lot at Fenner Nature Center at 9:00 a.m.

## September 3 meeting & program

### A Close-up on Dragonflies and Butterflies of Michigan

Our kickoff program for the year features local nature photographer **David Marvin** who will give us a close-up look at some of our state's elegant (but featherless) winged things: butterflies and dragonflies.

David's photographic work has been featured in websites, magazines, and books published in the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain. He also volunteers his time and talent to Fenner Nature Center and the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, both of which feature his photos in their publications.

Join us to learn some behind-the-scene stories of his photographs, as well as tips and tricks for photographing these creatures up close.

Meet in the basement of Fenner Nature Center on **Thursday, September 3**. Snacks and socializing begin at 7:00 p.m., followed by a brief business meeting and the program at 7:30. Bring a friend!

***Editor's Note:** Please see page 2 of this issue for a recently published article and photos by David Marvin.*

### CAAS's 2015-16 program guide now available

A copy of our club's program and field trip guide for 2015-16 is included with this issue. Please take a moment to look through this year's line-up and mark them on your calendar. There is something for everyone — from local to exotic birding, Michigan pollinators and rattlesnakes, restoring prairie land, and a primer on eBird, the latest tool for tracking and recording bird sightings.

## Nature photography holds many delights

by **David Marvin**

With the advent of digital cameras of many different sizes, more people than ever dabble in photography as a hobby. The natural world all around us provides countless opportunities for both novice photographers and seasoned professionals to capture the beauty of the outdoors in pictures. Nature photography affords health benefits as well: getting outside and walking around exercises both your body and your creative mind.

Nature photography is a fun hobby for families to do together. If you are looking for fun ideas for nature photography projects for your family, pick a favorite tree and photograph it occasionally from the same spot for several months. You will be amazed at how much nature changes from month to month and season to season. Get up close to rocks, trees, and bugs and photograph all the different colors, lines, and patterns you see. Make a scavenger hunt list of things you can find outdoors and spend a day taking photos of those items.

The greater Lansing area provides a number of ideal and easily accessible locations to get outside and photograph nature, like the River Trail, Crego Park, or Hawk Island Park. Outside of Lansing, Burchfield Park and Riverbend Natural Area, Sleepy Hollow State Park, and Rose Lake State Wildlife Research Area teem with all sorts of wildlife and beautiful natural settings that make for interesting photography subjects.

One of the premier places for nature photography in Lansing is **Fenner Nature Center**. Fenner has open fields of radiant wildflowers, ponds with turtles and frogs, and forested areas with many different types of trees and woody shrubs. All of these areas provide habitat for many different species of birds, animals, reptiles, and insects. In the spring and autumn, migrating birds stop on their way through to and from their summer and winter habitats, and many other bird species can be seen at Fenner year-round. Whitetail deer with their fawns can be photographed scampering in the prairie. In the woods, squirrels and chipmunks often pose with their nuts and seeds for a quick portrait. Butterflies and dragonflies flit through the air just asking to have their photo taken.

Grab your camera and get outdoors to photograph the beauty of nature that surrounds you in the greater Lansing area!

*David Marvin is local photographer specializing in nature photography. This article appeared in the Lansing State Journal (7-16-2015) and is reprinted here with kind permission of the author.*

Examples of David Marvin's nature photography. All photos copyrighted © by David Marvin and used with permission.



For more of David's stunning photography, check out his blogspot: <http://marvins-gardens.blogspot.net>

## **Miniaturized GPS tags allow tracking of small songbirds for first time**

For the first time, researchers at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute's Migratory Bird Center have accurately tracked small migratory ovenbirds (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) to their tropical wintering grounds, significantly improving the understanding of migratory connectivity. Understanding this connectivity is key to future conservation efforts.

SCBI scientists have studied migration patterns of birds for decades. However, their studies are often hampered by their equipment: tracking tags were often too large for small birds, and too unwieldy, expensive or unreliable.

SCBI scientists Michael Hallworth and Peter Marra, [reporting in Scientific Reports](#), have now tested a new pinpoint GPS tag device that tracks migratory birds more reliably than ever before. The miniaturized pinpoint GPS tags give the birds' location with extraordinary accuracy: within about 10 meters (33 feet), rather than 150 to 200 kilometers (93-124 miles) from light-level geolocators.



The device is a tiny backpack, sized for a small bird and encased in durable plastic. It turns itself on for 70 seconds eight to 10 times a year, recording the location of the bird each time by connecting with GPS satellites. The pinpoint GPS tags are an order of magnitude smaller than previous GPS devices and offer dramatically improved resolution over similarly sized tracking devices. The newly developed tracker weighs about a gram (0.04 ounces) and can be carried by small songbirds weighing about 20 grams (0.7 ounces). Until now, the smallest comparable device with similar accuracy weighed about 12 grams (0.4 ounces) and could only be carried by animals weighing at least 250 grams (9 ounces).

"Tracking an animal this small, with a device of this size, and with this degree of precision has never been done," said Marra, head of the Migratory Bird Center. "Now we can identify the exact territories these birds occupied on their tropical wintering grounds. Miniaturizing technology so we can track animals throughout their annual cycle is an essential ingredient of effective conservation." ►



The team chose ovenbirds as a test species because they faithfully move between the same breeding and non-breeding sites every year. At 20 grams, ovenbirds were an ideal size for testing. The team tested the GPS tags and compared the behavior of birds with and without the devices and confirmed that the devices did not affect the birds in any way.

While researchers know the general winter range of ovenbirds, from the northern United States and Canada for breeding to [Mexico](#) and Central America and the Caribbean during the non-breeding season, no one has had the technology to precisely pinpoint individual breeding and winter territories. Marra and Hallworth tagged ovenbirds from both Maryland and New Hampshire in June 2013 and recaptured them in April and May 2014 to download the GPS data. They found that the non-breeding locations of birds breeding in Maryland and New Hampshire were non-overlapping during the temperate winter. Maryland ovenbirds had winter territories in Florida and Cuba, while the ovenbirds breeding in New Hampshire occupied winter territories primarily in the Dominican Republic.

Identifying and understanding the migratory connectivity of birds throughout an entire annual cycle, including how birds use their environment and how events occurring during these different stages of the annual cycle interact, are critical to understanding animals' biology and ecology and allows data to more strategically and effectively inform conservation efforts.

*Reprinted from Smithsonian Science News online, June 15, 2015.*

## **Mark November 8 on your birding calendar**

Plan now to join your fellow club members on the November 8 field trip to Allegan State Game Area and Lake Michigan, led by local Allegan resident and club member **Rick Brigham**.

Rick has been guiding mid-Michigan birders to birding hotspots in western Michigan for several years running. It's a great opportunity to view fall migrants in varied habitats – from the shore of Lake Michigan to inland bogs, grasslands, and woods.

Two years ago a Sabine's gull was spotted on this trip, providing a life bird sighting for nearly half of the group. We'll see what surprises await this year.

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Technology is anything that wasn't around when you were born.

— Alan Kay (computer scientist)

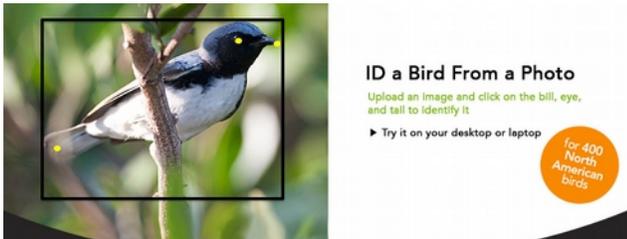
## **Merlin Bird Photo ID – a step beyond**

It was only a matter of time, but we are now about to get a glimpse of the bird-watching future.

In a true breakthrough, computer researchers and bird enthusiasts have now developed a computer program able to identify hundreds of North American bird species by photograph. Called Merlin Bird Photo ID, the results were presented at a Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition (CVPR) conference held in Boston on June 8. Essentially, the identifier is capable of recognizing 400 of the mostly commonly encountered birds in the United States and Canada.

"It gets the bird right in the top three results about 90% of the time, and it's designed to keep improving the more people use it," said Jessie Barry at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

To see if Merlin can identify the species in your photo, you can upload an image of the bird and tell Merlin where and when you took it. Then to orient Merlin, you draw a simple box around the bird and sequentially click on the bird's bill, eye, and tail. Merlin, almost magically, does the rest.



Merlin's success, according to the researchers and developers, relies on collaboration between computers and humans. The computer gets to recognize each species from tens of thousands of images identified and labeled by bird enthusiasts. It also taps in to more than 70 million sightings recorded by birders in the eBird database, reducing its search to the species found at the location and time of year when the photo was taken. Perhaps best of all, because the Merlin photo identifier uses machine-learning techniques, it has the potential to improve the more people use it.

According to Serge Belongie, a professor of Computer Science at Cornell Tech, "The state-of-the-art in computer vision is rapidly approaching that of human perception, and with a little help from the user, we can close the remaining gap and deliver a surprisingly accurate solution."

Merlin's computer vision system was developed by Steve Branson and Grant Van Horn of the Visipedia project, led by professors Pietro Perona at the California Institute of Technology and Belongie▶

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at Cornell Tech. Their work was made possible with support from Google, the Jacobs Technion-Cornell Institute at Cornell Tech, and the National Science Foundation.

You can try it with some of your own bird photos here: [www.AllAboutBirds.org/photoid](http://www.AllAboutBirds.org/photoid). The program currently cannot work on tablets or mobile devices.

What's next? Would it be broad-scale photo recognition in aerial waterfowl surveys? Could it be digital ID reliance in long-term seabird surveys? Would the system eventually be modified to be built into what we today call binoculars, so that the observer gets ID help while seeing the bird itself and in real time?

Some birders are claiming that Merlin will take "all the fun out of birding." Still, using binoculars a century ago was a step forward from shotgun ornithology. And few people today, in the age of digital images, mourn the loss of Kodachrome.

Perhaps the real question will be: How can helping us with this new technology help the birds?

*Reprinted from Birding Community E-Bulletin, July 2015, Wayne R. Petersen and Paul J. Baicich, editors.*

## **MSU gardens ranked among best in the U.S.**

According to [Best Colleges Online](#), MSU's [W.J. Beal Botanical Garden](#) and [Hidden Lake Gardens](#) are ranked among the "50 Most Amazing University Botanical Gardens and Arboretums in the U.S."

In evaluating the top university botanical gardens and arboretums, the editors of Best Colleges Online looked for schools that not only maintained a manicured landscape, but also served as environmental stewards, outdoor classrooms, and living laboratories.

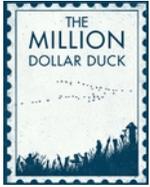
The W.J. Beal Botanical Garden is an outdoor laboratory for the study and appreciation of plants. The garden, established in 1873 by William James Beal, is the oldest continuously operated university botanical garden of its kind in the U.S., celebrating its 140th birthday in 2013.

More than 2,000 different types of flowers and other plants can be found within the five-acre garden. Although W.J. Beal Botanical Garden is an outdoor laboratory for students, the general public is invited to learn about and enjoy plants in the garden at any time throughout the year without an admission charge.

Hidden Lake Gardens, also owned by MSU, is located in Tipton, Mich., and is celebrating 70 years since the donation of the gardens. (cont. on page 5) ▶

## 2015 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest and movie set for September 18 & 19

The 2015 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest will be held on Friday and Saturday, September 18 and 19 at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, W.Va, beginning at 10:00 am each day. The event is free and open to the public. The event will also be streamed online. The USFWS will post a link to the broadcast on the Federal Duck Stamp webpage just prior to the start of the contest.



Also, there will be a free preview screening of the new film about the Stamp, *The Million Dollar Duck*, on Friday, September 18 at the NCTC auditorium from 7-9 pm. This is a feature length documentary on the strange and wonderful world of the

Federal Duck Stamp Contest, the only juried art competition run by the U.S. government.

The film explores the ambitious, obsessive, and often eccentric nature of the contestants who enter each year for a chance at wildlife art stardom, while also reflecting upon the challenges facing the continued existence of this successful conservation program.

*Adapted from WINGTIPS published by Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp, May 30, 2015, a proud Affiliate of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.*

## New field guide titles from ABA

Just when you think there is no more room for another field guide on your shelf, the American Birding Association has released a new series of ABA State Field Guides. From entry level to intermediate and beyond, these colorful and useful new books will offer an ideal state field guide companion for pack, pocket, or car.

Abundantly illustrated with high quality photographs by Brian Small and a cadre of other recognized photographers, each state guide provides concise information pertaining to identification, preferred habitat within each state, and a description of the primary song or vocalizations for each of more than 250 species for every state. Information on where and when to expect each species in each state, as

well as the species' relative abundance make these attractive guides both useful and convenient.



Authored by a leading bird authority from each state and reasonably priced at \$24.95, these new ABA State Field ▶

## Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp program now linked to AmazonSmile



The Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp is now a registered charitable organization with AmazonSmile.

So if you are a customer of Amazon.com, you can now designate that 0.5% of your eligible purchases will be donated to the Friends, at no cost to you. In turn, these funds will be re-donated by the Friends to the Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program, which benefits young wildlife artists and students of conservation.

To support the program, log on to AmazonSmile at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) with your Amazon.com username and password, and designate Friends of the Migratory Bird Duck Stamp Inc as your charity. All of your current wish lists, preferences, purchase history, and other account information will then be available at AmazonSmile. Then begin shopping. Your purchases will be totaled and the percentage donation calculated automatically. Then bookmark AmazonSmile and use for future purchases (rather than Amazon.com).

AmazonSmile has been operating for about a year, distributing funds to groups such as The Nature Conservancy, Doctors Without Borders, and nearly a million other 501(c)(3) public charitable organizations.

*Adapted from WINGTIPS published by Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp, May 30, 2015, a proud Affiliate of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.*

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Guides are useful for both the traveling birder and the student new to birding. At the time of this writing, guides for New Jersey, Colorado, Florida, California, and Pennsylvania are currently available.

A guide for Michigan is in the planning stage.

*Adapted from the Birding Community E-Bulletin, June 2015, editors Wayne R. Petersen and Paul J. Baicich. Archives available at <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>*

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## MSU gardens (cont from page 4)

Hidden Lake's mission is to maintain the gardens for the benefit and education of the public. On display are collections of plants that are of horticultural, botanical and aesthetic value to the public and professionals of various disciplines.

*Reprinted from MSU Today Weekly Update, June 30, 2015, published by Michigan State University.*

**Native Plants for Wildlife**

**Summersweet: a preferable alternative to butterfly bush**

*by Ann Hancock*

This month's plant is *Clethra alnifolia*, known as summersweet, summersweet clethra, or sweet pepperbush. I'm stretching the boundaries of "native Michigan plants" here, as this plant was not historically found in Michigan. Its native range stretches from Nova Scotia to Florida and extends to western Pennsylvania. This is a great shrub for a landscape with areas of wet or moist soil, and just as attractive to wildlife as the ubiquitous butterfly bush (*Buddleia davidii*).

I am writing about Summersweet this month because it is in bloom now in the wetlands around us in Maine. I first encountered it by scent alone as my husband and I were taking a walk along a nearby road in Cape Elizabeth. The delicious fragrance literally stopped us in our tracks. As we looked around for the source of the scent, there it was, a stately clethra shrub rising out of an area of shallow standing water. It was at least 10 feet in height, obviously a mature plant.

*Summersweet clethra blooms*



In a moist area with neutral to slightly acid soil clethra is an easy-to-grow, trouble-free plant. It grows and blooms best in sun, but will also tolerate shade. In fact, it will even bloom in the shade.

The mature height of the straight species is said to be 12 feet. It is vase shaped so the ultimate width is generally half the

height. Clethra will also sucker to form a colony in moist soils, making it ideal for stream remediation.

The leaves are deep green and shiny, and do not seem to be susceptible to insect damage or disease. Fall color can range from soft yellow to deep gold. It will do well in ordinary garden soil but will not tolerate extended drought. If it is not planted in a naturally moist area, it will definitely need to be watered deeply during dry spells. Another attribute of summersweet is its tolerance to salt; this is a good plant for seaside gardens or near roadsides that may get salt runoff from winter road treatments.



*Summersweet clethra bush*

The flowers are this plant's best feature: they are white, 3-6" in length, and borne in upright spires that look like small bottlebrushes. New varieties with pink to reddish flowers have been developed, as well as shorter varieties for smaller landscapes. The flowers are very attractive to hummingbirds, bees and butterflies. The seeds are also said to be eaten by birds, though I was unable to find any specific species cited in the literature I searched.

If you are looking for a late-blooming shrub with outstanding fragrance, please skip the invasive butterfly bush and plant clethra instead! Your hummingbirds, bees and butterflies will thank you.

**Call Note**

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PO Box 22065, Lansing MI 48909-2206.  
Deadline for submissions: 20<sup>th</sup> of the month.

**Editors:** Ann Hancock & Debbie Wolf

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