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# The Call Note

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**January 2016**

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

### Happy New Year!

My new year's resolutions usually involve something like "... spending more time birding." Although that doesn't always happen – life's obligations have a real knack for getting in the way of that desire – I think it's important to start the new year with the right attitude.

I know many people don't make new year's resolutions. January 1st is not necessarily a magical day. I could just as easily have said on December 31<sup>st</sup> that I should spend more time birding. (In fact, I've probably said that on New Year's Eves in the past. And on the Fourth of July, and Labor Day, and ...) But there's something about the first day of the calendar year that inspires people to clean beginnings.

That also includes a fresh start for your bird list. What is magical about January 1st is that we can begin building our year list anew. For some, that may mean launching a Big Year while others may keep a year list for their state, county, or yard. However you plan to watch birds in the coming year, I wish you many birds and much enjoyment.

Good birding to everyone in 2016,  
**Barb Hosler**

### Last call for ER Bird Count

If you missed the East Lansing Christmas Bird Count, or you'd like to get out in the field again for another count, the Eaton Rapids Christmas Bird Count will take place on January 2. Contact **Tom Wheeler** for more information or to get involved:  
[tom.wheeker@gmail.com](mailto:tom.wheeker@gmail.com) or 628-3843.

## January 7 meeting & program

### Update on the Kirtland's warbler and its wintering grounds

Please join us on Thursday, January 7 when **Dave Ewert**, senior conservation scientist with The Nature Conservancy – Michigan, presents the program entitled, "The Kirtland's Warbler in the Bahamas: An Update on the Kirtland's Warbler Research and Training Project."

*Wikipedia Commons photo*



Building a comprehensive conservation plan for the Kirtland's warbler requires understanding the ecology and distribution of this warbler on its Bahamas archipelago wintering grounds. Since 2002 the Kirtland's Warbler Research and Training project has focused on: (1) describing the ecology and distribution of the Kirtland's warbler in the Bahamas archipelago, (2) building conservation capacity in the Bahamas by training Bahamian students, and (3) outlining potential conservation programs in the Bahamas for the Kirtland's warbler. Dave will cover the most current results of the project as well as future plans.

Social and snack time begins at 7:00 p.m., followed by a brief meeting and the program at 7:30 in Fenner Nature Center basement. Why not bring a friend?

### Thank you!

A warm thank you to our snack-bringers at the December meeting: **Joanne Harvey, Nancy Boyce, and Jim Hewitt.**

## 2015-16 CAAS membership roster

Apologies if there was a mixup on your name in the last issue of the *Call Note*. Below is a list of members as of mid-December. Thank you to all who have renewed, and a very warm welcome to new members (printed in **bold**).

Abosamra, Gamal  
 Alderman, Tom  
 Allen, Jane  
 Baltzer, Betty  
 Baumgartner, John  
 Belyea, Maryanne & Glenn  
 Best, Dave & Therese  
 Bieler, Stacey & Tom  
 Bjornson, Vee  
**Black, Randall**  
 Boyce, Nancy & Mike  
 Bratton, Clara  
 Brown/Sonea, Chris/loana  
 Burgis, Kathy  
 Caterino, Martha & Michael  
 Charles, Leslie  
 Cheney, Peggy  
 Christopherson, Deborah  
 Chung, Jenny  
 Clark, Susan  
 Cohen, Bruce  
 Curry, Georgia  
 Davis, Susan  
 Debar, Sharon  
 Deventer, Patricia  
 Eggleston, Ron  
 Febba, Liz & Sam  
 Fox, Dan  
 Gallick, Harry  
 Hammond, Nancy  
 Hancock, Ann & Jim  
 Harvey, Joanne & Ken  
 Hayes, Daniel  
 Hewitt, Jim  
 Hosler, Barb  
 Howe/Ording, Chris/Mary  
 Houston, Eileen

Jolin, Norm  
 Kacos, Jeff  
 Kendall, Susan  
 Kindel, Judy & Paul  
 Kingsbury, Bob  
**Laurence, Richard & Patricia**  
 Less, Sharon & Dave  
 Lisiecki, Jerry  
 Macdowell, Mary  
 Mahon, Zsa  
 Martineau, Cindi & Joseph  
 Marvin, David  
 McCallum, Gary  
 McCombs/Menzel, J.B./Grace  
 McWhirter, Marianne & Doug  
 Merz, Ed & Madeline  
**Moquin/Spalding, Michael/Julia**  
 Mortimer/Parnell, Bruce/Kris  
 Murphy, Peggy  
 Nott, Sherrill & Judy  
 Olson, Jennifer  
 Plotkin/Schuur, Jacob/Susan  
 Sage, Steve  
 Saheli, Joan & Habib  
 Skole/Teachout, Janet/Bob  
 Seagull, Art & Betty  
 Schmidt, Barbara  
 Skriba, Dennis  
 Smith/Benedict, Horace/Deborah  
**Spinks, Gary & Gwentyth**  
 Taylor, Gordon & Sheila  
 Thornbury, Barb  
 Tropp, Carolyn  
 Turner, Don & Lyn  
 Walker, Bruce  
 Wasserman, Gene  
 Weaver, Betty & Harold  
 Wheeker, Tom  
 White, Carolyn  
 Winter, Mary & David  
 Witcombe/Marion, Alexia/Parks  
 Wolf, Debra & Roger

## Fatty foods benefit wildlife

Around this holiday time, many of us are thinking about food. Knowing that food-centered festivities lie ahead we consider how to trim or avoid taking in too many of those fat-laden temptations in the interest of staying healthy.

But for the birds, winter is the time when high fatty foods become an essential part of their diet. Every night up to three-quarters of a bird's fat reserves are used up; reserves that must be replenished the next day. When fat reserves are gone, protein – mostly scavenged from muscle tissue – is depleted to keep up with energy needs.

Keeping your feeders filled with high energy, high fat foods can provide birds with the critical nutrition they



need to survive. High on the list of best choices to meet this nutritional need is suet, which can be in the form of suet cakes, tubs, plugs, or stackable suet doughs.

Seeds also provide fats, but in varying degrees. High on the list are peanuts, which provide 412 fat calories per 100 grams. Other high fat seeds or nuts include sunflower chips (429 fat calories per 100 grams), black oil sunflower (354 calories) and niger seed (342 fat calories).

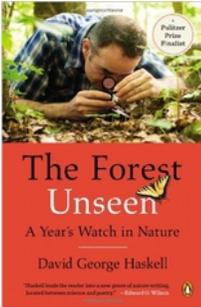
Kinda gives new meaning to the phrase “eating like a bird,” doesn't it?

*Adapted from Lansing Wild Birds Unlimited blogspot, with permission.*

Book Review

Take a walk in this woods

by Debbie Wolf



Combing through the book section at the dollar store recently I spied an unknown but intriguing title: *The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature*. The hardcover's jacket had a pleasing design and contained an enthusiastic blurb from that icon of ecology, Edward O. Wilson. That, plus a skim through its 248 pages, persuaded me to take a chance on it.

It was a fortunate choice.

Author David George Haskell is a biologist of formidable knowledge, skill and sensitivity. Earmarking a one-square-meter patch of old-growth forest on the grounds of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tenn., as his "mandala," or sacred place, he takes the reader on a poetic journey through his observations of this piece of land over the course of a year. His reverence for the place shines through his prose.

He delves into the biology of the mandala and conveys the joy of simply being in this outdoor theater. His biological and ecological knowledge is broad and deep, yet he feels ignorant of the vast intricacies of life working unceasingly in this patch of earth. Much is known, yet so much remains unknown of the inner workings beneath the leaf litter. His humble perspective and overpowering sense of wonder are refreshing in this age of cocksure experts and general know-it-alls.

Haskell's writing style is reminiscent of Aldo Leopold, John Muir, or David Thoreau – sensitive and lyrical, yet satisfyingly informative. He leads the reader on a personally guided tour into the leaf litter, teeming with creatures that are largely invisible to human eyes. He wields his magnifying lens with precision and authority, yet with deep curiosity and care, as evidence in this selection from April:

An impossible number of flowers blaze out of the mandala. Confusion sets in when I try to count them: two hundred and eighty, three hundred and twenty, too many crowded into one square meter. The flowers' valets are in attendance, buzzing and humming in smart furry dress, fussing over the floral royalty. I join them in their observance and genuflect, then prostrate myself, hand lens pressed to my eye.

(continued in next column)

▼  
And this one from December:

My first dive into the soil helped me escape my strange ecological hermitage and gave me a taste of the treasury that lives below the surface. My thirst is whetted, so I dip down again. At three spots around the edge of the mandala I peel away a small clump of leaves, create a small hole in the litter, peer down with my hand lens, then replace the leaves. The contrast with the aboveground world is striking. Aboveground, apart from a passing titmouse, I seem to be alone in the forest. Yet animals abound an inch below the surface of the litter.

This is the sort of book that you might want to pick up again and again over the years, not just to refresh your knowledge, but to savor the language in which it is presented.

*Note: If you need another reason to purchase this book, Haskell donates "at least half his author's proceeds to projects that benefit forest conservation." Had I known this ahead of time, I might have purchased the book from a local bookseller rather than a dollar store.*

Winter Bird

by Carolyn White

Were my beak red, body agile  
I'd hang upside down  
To eat cold berries  
Tail wagged in satisfaction  
Letting some drop  
As the sun  
Frisks my feathers  
And the bird below  
Admires my style



©Carolyn White, used with permission

Albatross beats the odds

The world's oldest known seabird has returned to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge, about 1200 miles northwest of Honolulu. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently announced that the female Laysan albatross named Wisdom was spotted at the remote island on Nov. 19.

Wisdom has been a banded bird since 1956. The much respected ornithologist, Chan Robbins, first put a band on Wisdom in December of that year, and multiple bands, each significantly worn away by time, the sea, and the sea air, have been replaced since. Wisdom is estimated to be at least 64 years old, but she could actually be older.

And, by the way, Chan Robbins, the ornithologist who first banded Wisdom, is also still with us, at 97 years of age.

*Excerpted from Birding Community E-bulletin, December 2015; Paul Baicich & Wayne R. Petersen, editors. Archives at <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>*

**Editor's Note:** As we enter 2016, we are launching a new feature in the Call Note: the Journal Review Corner, a (usually) monthly column by longtime CAAS member Jennifer Olson. Jennifer will summarize an article from a professional journal that deals with some aspect of nature that would likely hold appeal for our readership. Her initial column relates to birds, but the subject matter of future columns will vary. Content will typically focus on environmental matters or natural resource topics. Although all readers may not agree with the subject matter, methods, or outcome of a study, science is meant to test our assumptions, stimulate critical thinking, and limit our biases.

Access to professional journals is not always easy. If you have a journal article that you would like to share with the CAAS readership, please let Jennifer know ([hawthorn071@hotmail.com](mailto:hawthorn071@hotmail.com)). In Jennifer's words: Here's to thinking beyond our comfort zone!

## Journal Review Corner

by Jennifer Olson

**Article title:** Feeding wild birds in gardens: A test of water versus food

**Authors:** Kelly K. Miller, Veronika N. Blaszczyński and Michael A. Weston

**Location:** Centre for Integrative Ecology, School of Life and Environmental Sciences, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia

**Journal:** Ecological Management & Restoration, Volume 16, Number 2, May 2015, pp 156-158

**Introduction:** Bird feeding in residential yards is an increasingly popular human-wildlife activity. In Australia, the practice is discouraged by most government and nongovernment wildlife conservation agencies, although advice varies and the most common recommendation is to provide water and habitat for birds rather than supplementary food. This study compares birds abundance (# of birds) and diversity (# of species) when residents in a Melbourne municipality provide water for birds versus food.

**Methods:** Cameras were deployed on 26 properties (17 on watering stations, 9 on feeding stations) between early July 2013 and mid-August 2013 for a minimum of 14 days. July and August are the winter months in Australia. The homes included in the study represented a mix of suburban housing and larger bushland properties. The food provided was mostly seed and/or food scraps. Any time an animal appeared in a photo the image was coded as an 'event.' Where the homeowner provided both food and water, a camera was placed on the feeding

station only. Species presence/absence was examined as well as an index of species activity (the # of events of each species recorded). Species were also identified by primary foraging guilds or assemblages such as: (1) canopy granivore, (2) nectarivore, (3) lower strata nectarivore, (4) granivore-generalist, (5) lower strata granivore, (6) upper strata granivore, (7) omnivore-all strata, (8) lower strata omnivore, (9) carnivore-all strata, (10) lower strata insectivore, (11) upper strata insectivore, and (12) aquatic.



**Results:** 28 bird species were recorded at water stations and 42 bird species were recorded at feeding stations. The study reports there was no difference in species diversity between water and food (median = 8,  $p = 0.405$ ) and no difference in the assemblage of birds

present at food versus water ( $p = 0.274$ ). However, when the index of bird activity was used, more activity was evident at food over water ( $p = 0.011$ ) and this varied between species ( $p = 0.008$ ). The difference in species was largely driven by parrots and seed-eating species which were more active at food than water.

**Discussion:** In Australia, advice is given to urban residents to provide water rather than food to birds, which is based largely on anecdotal evidence or evidence from other parts of the world. In this small-scale study, it would appear the provision of water can provide people with the opportunity to see the same bird diversity though with fewer individuals visiting. Future research should examine the impacts on bird health, bird abundance and bird diversity associated with food versus water; and an investigation of whether the results found here can be applied across other urban environments.

## Mackinac plants for monarchs

Last fall Mackinac State Historical Parks personnel planted about 400,000 common milkweed plant seeds at the east end of Mackinac Island State Park airport, seeking to create critical habitat for a formerly frequent island visitor whose numbers have dropped sharply in recent years – the monarch butterfly. Common milkweed is native to the island.

About five pounds of common milkweed seeds were planted over a 5-acre area at the end of the island's airport runway. Officials are hoping the seeds will germinate in the spring to attract monarchs as well as bumblebees and other pollinators.

*Adapted from Detroit Free Press story by Keith Matheny, Dec. 2015.*

## Native Plants

### Poplars: Unsung heroes for wildlife

by Ann Hancock

Last week I was birding along the Saco River in Maine, looking for some lingering warblers. Part way along the path I found three VERY freshly beaver-cut poplar trees. It occurred to me that these trees, which are often overlooked because they are so common and have no flashy flowers, are actually at the base of a large wildlife food pyramid.

Beavers are poplars' most obvious herbivores; it is hard to overlook a gleaming white stump! I have also seen porcupines enjoying a snack of poplar near our house. In addition, many insects also consume poplars and cottonwood. In Tallamy's\* chart of "Woody Species Ranked by Ability to Support Lepidopteran Species," poplar and cottonwood rank #5, with 368 species documented as feeding on them! These are just the Lepidopteran species; doubtless, many more insects feed on them, furnishing abundant food for birds. A partial list of species which they host includes: cecropia moth, Io moth, big poplar sphinx, fawn sphinx, black-etched prominent, white-marked tussock moth, mourning cloak, viceroy, and dreamy duskywing. They are very important for game bird foraging as well.

The words poplar and aspen are used interchangeably, and this is confusing. Dirr\*\* classifies poplars, which include aspens, into four groups. In the first group are the aspens, which belong to the white (and gray) poplars. This group includes the bigtooth aspen (*Populus grandidentata*) and quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). The leaf stems (petiole) of aspens are flattened, which causes their leaves to tremble or "quake" in even the lightest wind and creates a very pleasant sound. The bark in this group is very smooth and pale in young trees, with darker areas around branches similar to the coloring of birches. In fact, many people confuse young aspens with birches. Aspen bark eventually becomes rougher, darker, and pitted.

The second group, the balsam poplars, are quick to leaf out in the spring. The balsam poplar (*P. balsamifera*) is best known for the sweet smell of its unfurling leaves; the bud scales are covered by a sticky gum which is the source of the fragrance. To me the fragrance is very like that of sweet fern (*Comptonia peregrina*). This group also includes several other species (*P. laurifolia*, *P. maximowiczii*, and *P. trichocarpa*), none of which are found in Michigan. I had never noticed many balsam poplars in mid-Michigan, but MichFlora does show it as occurring in Ingham, Ionia, and Livingston County.

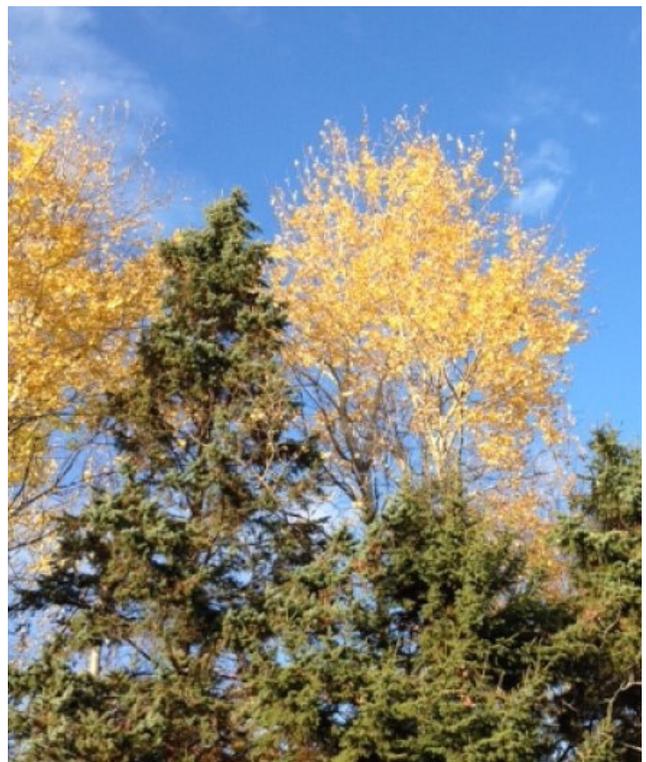
The third group, the black poplars, includes the

cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*). The bark on these trees is the most distinguishing feature; all mature black poplar species have deeply ridged and furrowed bark.

A fourth group, the Leucoides poplars, are represented by only one species, the swamp cottonwood (*P. heterophylla*). This is very rare in Michigan according to MichFlora, so we will not discuss it here.

Found in many diverse Michigan habitats, these poplars – quaking aspen (*P. tremuloides*), bigtooth aspen (*P. grandidentata*), Balsam poplar (*P. balsamifera*), and cottonwood (*P. deltoides*) – are widely adaptable and important to many wildlife species.

Quaking aspen is widely distributed across North America, thriving in diverse soil conditions. It is an early successional species, colonizing burned areas or fields that are no longer farmed. The best growth is in full sun; its growth rate is very fast. The mature height ranges from 40-60 feet with a spread of half the height. At one time the North American grand champion quaking aspen was in Ontonagon county, and measured 109 feet high by 59 feet wide! This poplar wood is important in lumber production for pulpwood, and for furniture-making because of its fine, smooth grain. The bark of young trees is handsome and the fall color, a brilliant gold, is outstanding. The tree is easy to grow and forms large colonies by root sprouts. It is not long lived but during its life supports a wide variety of butterflies and moths. Woodcock prefer to nest in young poplar stands, and quaking aspen buds are a very important winter food for ruffed grouse. ► (cont. on p 6)



Quaking aspen's gold color is a standout in fall, ©Ann Hancock 2015

**Poplars** (cont. from p 5)

Bigtooth aspen shares many characteristics with quaking aspen: fast growth rate, tolerance of a wide variety of soil conditions, and smooth light bark in young trees as well as trembling leaves. The leaves have far larger teeth, as implied by its name, and the twigs and buds are larger and coarser than those of quaking aspen.

Cottonwood makes its maximum growth along rivers and bottomlands, though it will tolerate drier conditions. You can find some very impressive cottonwood specimens in Fenner Nature Center, Scott Woods Park and along Sycamore Creek. Baltimore orioles have adapted to using this species for nesting and with patience you can spot their nests along the Lansing River Trail. In the spring these trees are famous (and cursed) for the enormous number of fluffy tufted seeds they produce. The seed tufts are the “cotton” in cottonwood. Fall color is not usually notable. It is a brittle tree and sheds quite a lot of flower catkins, leaves, and branches as well as the dreaded cottony seed masses.

It is worth noting that poplars and aspens serve yet another supporting role for wildlife, one that is even further enhanced after their death: their soft wood allows many cavity nesters to utilize them for nesting. Even small birds with tiny bills such as chickadees are able to hollow out a cavity in a dead poplar.▶



Cavity-nesting birds take advantage of aspen's soft wood (photo ©Ann Hancock 2015)

▶While poplars are not recommended for landscaping due to their weak wood and disease problems, they serve a more valuable role in natural landscapes. So although they aren't a yard species, let's salute these trees whose wildlife value is sometimes overlooked among birders. Watch for them on field trips and notice how many birds you see foraging in their crowns during migration.

\*Tallamy, Douglas W., 2007. Bringing Nature Home. Timber Press, Portland, OR.

\*\*Dirr, Michael, 1998. Manual of Woody Landscape Plants, 5 th Edition. Stipes Publishing, Chicago, IL

**Starlings declining in Europe and the UK**

Starling numbers have declined markedly across much of northern Europe and the UK. The decline in the UK started during the early 1980s and has continued ever since.

Recent data from the Breeding Bird Survey suggest continuing population declines affecting starlings in England and Wales since 1995. The cause of the starling decline in the UK is unknown.

Starlings are heavily dependent on soil invertebrates like earthworms and leatherjackets, and it is possible this food supply has either declined or perhaps become less available during dry summers.

Long-term monitoring by the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) shows that starling numbers have fallen by 66 per cent in Britain since the mid-1970s. Because of this decline in numbers, the starling is red-listed as a bird of high conservation concern.

From the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds ([www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)).

**Call Note**

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