



capitalareaaudubon.org

The Call Note

April 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

Spring birding is here!

More signs of spring are finally starting to appear – the bugling of sandhill cranes, kettles of turkey vultures passing overhead, the arrival of other early migrants such as Eastern phoebe, as well as the calls of chorus frogs, spring peepers, and wood frogs. This means that the Capital Area Audubon's spring birding events will be starting soon!

Saturday morning bird walks at Fenner Nature Center will begin on April 2 and continue through May 21. These ambles through the woods and meadows of Fenner are a great way to shake off the winter doldrums and experience spring migration in all its glory. **Bruce Cohen** will also be leading the annual field trip to Maple River on Sunday, April 3.

Along with all these birding opportunities comes the need for volunteers to keep CAAS humming along. There are many ways to help out – for example, leading a bird walk, coordinating the North American Migration Count for our area, or serving on the CAAS board of directors. We are actively recruiting for all these positions now. Please see a board member for more details.

I'd also like to pass on one last reminder that the silent auction of the great blue heron print by CAAS member **Ed Merz** will conclude at the April meeting. Hope to see you there!

– **Barb Hosler**



April 7 meeting & program

eBird – what's it all about?

Join us on Thursday, April 7 as **Caleb Putnam of the National Audubon Society** explains the latest citizen-science tool for expanding our knowledge of the bird world.

eBird enables you to:

- record the birds you see
- keep track of your bird lists
- explore dynamic maps and graphs
- share your sightings and join the eBird community
- contribute to science and conservation



Caleb will explain how this all works, and more. As the coordinator of Michigan's Important Bird Areas (IBA) for the National Audubon Society and member of Team eBird Michigan, Caleb is one of the most knowledgeable birders in the state. Whether you're a non-eBirder, a

novice, or a veteran, you're sure to learn more about all things eBird.

Come early to Fenner! Social time and snacks begin at 7:00 p.m. The meeting/program begins at 7:30, which also marks the close of our **silent auction** (see related article on page 2)

You won't want to miss this! Bring a friend!

Thank you, Clara Bratton, for all the delicious snacks at our March meeting. Exceptional effort!

Bird walk at Maple River set for April 3

Bruce Cohen will lead a bird walk to the Maple River State Game Area starting at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, April 3. There is no sign-up or pre-registration; everyone is welcome.

Meeting place: parking lot at the corner of Taft and Baldwin roads (see Directions, below).

Tundra swans (Cygna columbianus) NF&WS



This is a week later than **Tom Wheeler** used to lead this walk in search of migrating tundra swans. Weather and timing may

create favorable conditions for sighting these swans, and more. Spring viewing in the game area from March through May is especially productive, as thousands of ducks, geese, and swans use the wetlands as a stopover on their migration to northern breeding grounds.

Maple River SGA is mid-Michigan's largest contiguous wetland complex, an extensive area of floodplains, lowlands, and marshes along the Maple River that begins in Gratiot county and spills into Clinton county. The 9,000-acre game area is divided into two sections with the West Unit containing most of the acreage but no established trails other than short access trails for handicapped hunters.

The East Unit is the site of the April 3 bird walk. Straddling US-27, the East Unit features pools and diked-in ponds that serve as the water basin for the Maple River and attract migrating birds. Hiking difficulty: Easy.

Directions: From Lansing, take US-27 north past St. Johns. After crossing the Maple River, continue to Ranger Rd. and turn right. Follow Ranger Rd. one mile east and turn right onto Baldwin Rd. Parking lot is at the end of the road (at Baldwin and Taft roads).

Saturday morning bird walks at Fenner begin April 2

Capital Area Audubon Society will once again lead Saturday morning bird walks at Fenner Nature Center in April and May. Enjoying spring migration in the company of fellow birders is a great way to expand your birding knowledge, and enjoy the outdoors.

Start time is **9:00 a.m.** for **April 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30.**
Start time is **8:00 a.m.** for **May 7, 14, and 21.**
Meet in the parking lot near the Nature Center Building.

Silent auction for unique artwork ends at April meeting

Proceeds to benefit CAAS

If you missed the March membership meeting, you still have a final opportunity to participate in the silent auction at our April meeting.

Club member **Ed Merz** has generously donated his matted and framed watercolor print entitled "The Resting" to the CAAS Board, which decided to offer the artwork to the membership via a silent auction.

The artwork will be on display at the April 7 membership meeting. Bids will be accepted during snack and social time but will end at 7:30 p.m., with the artwork going to the highest bidder at that time (cash or check, please).

The 12x14" print is based on a photo Ed took on August 25, 2014 at the Looking Glass River, his favorite haunt. It features a great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) resting on dead tree trunk, one of *its* favorite haunts. Another print in Ed's "The Resting" series hangs in the headquarters of the Michigan Audubon Society in Okemos.

The watercolor print is beautifully matted and custom framed in cedar wood handcrafted by Ed. It will include an envelope on the back which contains a copy of the original photo and background for the scene depicted in his painting.



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

"The Resting"

This species can be a year-round resident, weather permitting. The photo taken on August 25, 2014 captured the bird on a favorite bird resting spot. The painting is another in a series I called "The Resting" because I have photographed many different birds lounging on this dead trunk. Notice the white feathers in the water; they are residue of molting birds who have utilized this location. This unique log is situated on the edge of a marsh bordering the main channel of the Looking Glass River. The marsh edges are a favorite location for this long-legged marsh bird to forage.

Rusty blackbird blitz ends May 7

As flocks of blackbirds return to Michigan, there may be a few migrating rusty blackbirds among them, a species that is in serious decline. Data from survey suggest that rusty blackbird numbers have plummeted a staggering 85-95 percent since the mid-1990s.

Various causes for this severe decline have been suggested – loss or degradation of preferred habitat, increased competition, exposure to unknown disease – but it is likely that a convergence of multiple stressors is responsible. More data are needed.

Rusty blackbird photo by Gerhard Hofmann



Rusty blackbirds (*Euphagus carolinus*) are ecologically distinct from other blackbirds, depending upon boreal wetlands for breeding and bottomland wooded-wetlands for wintering.

This is the final year of the 3-year Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz, a citizen science effort championed by the International Rusty Blackbird

Working Group (IRBWG) to better understand migratory stopover ecology of the rusties.

Michigan Audubon is again supporting this conservation effort by sponsoring a contest to win a pair of Eagle Optics binoculars. Visit the website for details: www.michiganaudubon.org.

Birding for the Blitz is easy:

Step 1: Refresh your ID skills for male and female rusty blackbirds (www.rustyblackbird.org). Sibley offers useful tips for finding and identifying rusties too: www.sibleyguides.com/2012/11/my-trick-to-finding-rusty-blackbirds/

Step 2: Search for rusty blackbirds as you bird through May 7, 2016. Their preferred habitat is flooded fields, agricultural fields, wetland edge, flooded forests.

Step 3: Count all bird species that you saw, including the number of rusty blackbirds, and enter in your eBird checklist.

Step 4: Enter your data on eBird using *Observation Type: Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz* (not available on mobile apps). Enter your data under the Blitz observation type **regardless of whether you saw rusties or not**. It is equally important for

researchers to know where there is seemingly appropriate habitat, but no rusties.

Step 5: If you would like to be entered into Michigan Audubon's contest to win a pair of Atlas Optics Black Eagle 8x42 binoculars, share your eBird checklist with "MAmonitoring." Then be sure to sign up for the contest via the link on the Michigan Audubon website Blog.

If you do not use eBird, you can still participate in the Blitz. Visit <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/collecting-and-reporting-data/> to download a data sheet. Complete and send the data sheet to the Michigan Audubon office, **or** just type up your observations (include location, time, date, and duration) and email them to the Michigan Audubon office.

For more information on the Blitz and optional protocol, visit <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>

Please consider becoming a citizen-scientist by keeping an eye out for rusties, especially through May 7. Every sighting helps to guide research and further conservation of this critically declining species.

Sources: Michigan Audubon and IRBWG website.

Maple River SGA tour offered on April 2

Ducks Unlimited and the Michigan Waterfowl Legacy are co-sponsoring a migration tour of the Maple River State Game Area on Saturday, April 2, 9:00 a.m. to noon.



Join waterfowl experts and enthusiasts in watching the skies during spring migration. This is the site of CAAS's bird walk on Sunday, April 3 led by Bruce Cohen (see related article page 2).

This Migration Tour will feature a photo contest, giveaways for kids, and waterfowl experts throughout the game area talking about habitat and waterfowl. Further details at www.ducks.org/Michigan.

Member news

Welcome to our newest CAAS members:

Mike and Sean Berry
Roger and Jan Eberhardt

Great Thicket NWR would be a boon to Northeast wildlife

Shrublands and young forests in the northeastern U.S. often have two fates: they are either cleared for development, or they grow into mature forests.

The first option ultimately means a loss of habitat, a loss that cannot be reversed. The second option is beneficial for woodland-oriented birds and wildlife, but it has a downside in that there are both winners and losers in the process. Those species that depend on dynamic, short-lived shrubland and young forest habitat eventually get squeezed out as the forests mature into habitats that are no longer acceptable to them. They then become the losers.

Fortunately, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has determined that more permanently protected and managed shrubland habitat is needed to restore wildlife populations and return an ecological balance to the Northeast.



Prince Edward County Bird Observatory Shrubland (Wikipedia)

To accomplish this, the USFWS has proposed establishing a Great Thicket National Wildlife Refuge, in 10 separate focus areas in Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York. Many of these landscapes are intended to secure habitat for the New England cottontail rabbit, however many early-successional bird species are also expected to benefit.

Not surprisingly, the 10 sites overlap or touch already-designated Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in these six states. Depending on the stage of vegetative growth in each site, benefits would accrue to such species as American woodcock, Eastern whip-poor-will, prairie warbler, blue-winged warbler, brown thrasher, and Eastern towhee.

If the Great Thicket plan is approved, the USFWS could begin working with willing and interested landowners to acquire about 15,000 acres of land through conservation easements and fee-title acquisition. The Service stresses that it will work only

with willing sellers, and that no owners will be forced to sell land for the new refuge unless they want to. Not surprisingly the land acquisition process could take decades to finalize.

You can read more details and access the proposal itself here, with **the comment period extended to April 3:** <http://www.fws.gov/northeast/refuges/planning/lpp/greatthicketLPP.html>

For additional information about worldwide IBA programs, including those in the U.S., check the National Audubon Society's Important Bird Area program website: www.audubon.org/bird/iba/

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A positive monarch report

According to Mexico's National Commission of Protected National Areas, the monarch butterfly population in Mexico has increased 255 percent this season. At 150 million butterflies, the annual overwintering count of monarch butterflies released in late February shows an encouraging population rebound from last year's second lowest-ever count of 42 million butterflies, but still a decline of 78 percent from the population highs of the mid-1990s.

During their international migration, monarch butterflies breed along the way, and their northward journey is ultimately finished by their offspring. Dwindling amounts of milkweed habitat – vital as food for egg-laying monarchs – as well as erratic weather patterns, use of some pesticides, and illegal logging in Mexico have led to a serious decline in the monarch population.



"We are seeing the beginning of success," said Daniel Ashe, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "Our task now is to continue building on that success." The United States is trying to replace about 7.5 million acres of milkweed – either by planting or by halting pesticide use, Ashe said. He said that areas of milkweed increased by about 250,000 acres last year.

Creating and sustaining this kind of habitat not only provides food for monarchs, it also supports other pollinators such as honey bees, homes for other important insects, and, yes, provides habitat and nesting material for grassland birds.

From The Birding Community E-Bulletin, March 2016, with permission.

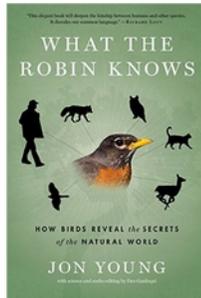
Book Review:
***What the Robin Knows* (paperback 2013)**
 by Jon Young

Birds can tell us much, but only if we really listen

reviewed by **Debbie Wolf**

Bird vocalizations. We hear them all the time, but do we know what they mean? Is there any way to know?

Naturalist and author Jon Young will guide you in how to discover the answers to these questions and more in *What the Robin Knows*.



Unless the bird's language (vocal or body) is unmistakably explicit – a redwing diving at you, a Canada goose hissing – it is usually pretty difficult to interpret. But Young shows us a way. He conveys a wealth of information and wisdom about what he calls deep bird language, derived from decades of observation and experience in the field. Birds, as we discover, are the gatekeepers to all things wild.

When we enter any habitat where birds and other creatures make their home, we are the intruder. When we approach in haste, loudly, or rudely, birds are the first to sense a threat and retreat. Their calls instantly alert other birds and creatures to potential danger. We have interrupted their baseline behavior of normal activity, the alarm has been sounded, and we are left with little or no wildlife to see, says Young.

Mentored by famed naturalist and wilderness tracker Tom Brown Jr., Young has absorbed his lessons well. He offers us a gentler approach to viewing and observing nature, a more instinctual one:

...the more keenly our antennae are tuned to the sounds, sights, and other sensory input from our world, and the more of our brains we engage, the more we get in touch with our ancient instincts and the instinctive abilities that all animals automatically manifest.

Such harmony is achieved through purposeful attention to the world around us, and this comes through practice, a lot of practice. He recommends establishing a “sit spot,” a convenient nearby place where one can simply sit quietly and observe the birds and what they're doing in an unobtrusive and respectful manner. He strongly encourages that this become our daily ritual.

By such focused observation we will gradually expand the sphere of awareness and shrink the sphere of disturbance as we learn and practice good jungle etiquette. Gradually, we will learn to see and interpret

bird sounds and signs, which tell us what is really going on with the birds and wildlife that surround us.

The author knows his stuff, no question, and I learned a lot about bird behavior from reading this book. So from that standpoint, it was definitely a worthwhile read. But I couldn't help but feel daunted at the prospect of attempted to follow his recommendations on a daily basis, investing so much time and energy to acquiring this deep bird knowledge. Sounded a bit too deep for me.

Good birding reminders

Ethics. The mid-March sightings of snowy owls in high concentration in the eastern U.P. was an undeniable treat for birders and wildlife photographers alike. However, subsequent reports of owls being unduly stressed by overzealous enthusiasts were disheartening.

With spring migration upon us, it may be a good time to review some basics. The prime directive of ethical birders everywhere is, of course: ***the welfare of the birds and their turf comes first.***

The Code of Ethics issued by the American Birding Association specifically urges birders to:

- ✓ avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger
- ✓ exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming
- ✓ stay on trails where they exist and keep habitat disturbance to a minimum
- ✓ respect all laws and the property of others (no trespassing)

Etiquette. Birding etiquette is all about common sense and respect while you're keeping an eye out for birds, no matter whether you're birding alone or with a group. Some of the basics include:

- ✓ minimize noise (speak in low tones, move quietly, turn cellphone off)
- ✓ keep to the trails and respect the habitat
- ✓ take extra care when in a potential or active nesting area
- ✓ yield the right of way to passersby on the trail (hikers, joggers, etc.)
- ✓ pay respectful attention to the guide and learn all you can
- ✓ be willing to share your knowledge, scope, field guides
- ✓ avoid blocking someone else's view
- ✓ help others to get on a bird if they are having trouble spotting it
- ✓ be patient with newer birders
- ✓ share your sightings and attempt to describe a bird's location using landmarks
- ✓ be courteous – it's contagious!

And enjoy yourself!

Nonnative plants

Chapter 2: Beautiful but deadly bittersweet

by Ann Hancock

Last month was an introduction to America's most UNwanted plants, invasive plants to avoid in your landscape. Here's another one to eradicate.

Chinese Bittersweet: *Celastrus orbiculatus*

Also known as oriental bittersweet, this plant was brought to our shores in 1870 because of its dazzling orange and yellow fruit – when in fruit it is truly beautiful.

C. orbiculatus (National Park Service photo)



Bittersweet has been made into wreaths, Thanksgiving arrangements, and trained to cover fences and other features that homeowners wished to hide.

Unfortunately, it did not stay put. Birds will eat this fruit in the winter when all other more palatable fruits have been stripped, and they have spread it far and wide. The native species is very close in appearance; the difference is the location of the flowers: terminal for native bittersweet, and axillary for oriental bittersweet. Scientists believe that the two species may have now hybridized, making positive identification even trickier.

Wild Ones native plant sales ahead

It's certainly not too soon to begin thinking about and planning your spring plantings, and Wild Ones can help you fulfill those plans.

On Saturday, **May 14** the Wild Ones Red Cedar Chapter will hold a native Michigan plant sale at the Lansing City Market, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

A second sale will be held on Saturday, **May 28** at the Meridian Farmers Market, 8 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Locally grown native perennials for both sunny and shady sites will be available. Natives are the most beneficial and effective plantings for attracting birds and butterflies to your landscape.

Proceeds from this fundraiser will help the Wild Ones Red Cedar Chapter continue educational programs and provide grants to establish native gardens and fight invasive species in the greater Lansing area.

Oriental bittersweet has both huge numbers of seeds as well as a very aggressive spreading root system. This ability to spread both asexually and via fruit makes it very difficult to eradicate. Most natural area managers that control it successfully choose to use herbicide as a tool to eradicate it. Otherwise, when a portion of the root system is left in the ground it will re-sprout vigorously and indefinitely unless ruthlessly pruned back. Goats are another management tool being used to control it.

C. orbiculatus (Minn. Dept. of Agriculture)



As bittersweet climbs a tree it wraps around its host for support. As the vine grows and increases in girth, it will strangle the host and eventually kill it. As the bulk of the vine increases, it can bring down a tree that is not strong enough to

support it. If the vine is removed early enough the host tree can recover, but the damage inflicted by the vine often leads to weak spots in the trunk; when the host is then subjected to strong wind, it may snap.

Substitute plant: Virginia creeper. It has excellent fall color in sunny locations, grows quickly, and offers fruit that is very attractive to birds. Avoid planting too close to houses that are shingled or have wood siding because the holdfasts are difficult to remove. It may be pruned hard to keep it from outgrowing its boundaries.

Call Note

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CAAS board elections in June

The June membership meeting will include our annual election for vacant board positions. The full Board consists of 9 members, each serving a three year term.

Susan Schuur has served two consecutive 3-year terms, which is the limit per our bylaws. Susan served ably as our Treasurer and past Recording Secretary. **Cindi Martineau** has served one term, including the role of Membership Coordinator, but will not seek a second term. **Eileen Houston**, our Hospitality and Publicity Chair, has competed one term and will seek re-nomination for a second term. This leaves us with two vacancies to be filled.

Sincerest thanks to Susan and Cindi for their very fine service, and to Eileen for her willingness to run for a second term.

If you have not already enjoyed a term on your CAAS Board (and maybe even if you have!), please consider doing so. It is a great way to become more involved with the club and a great opportunity to make a unique difference. We rely on our members to occasionally step out of their comfort zone to lend a hand, and a voice, to keep our group going.

Nature walks focus on birds and more

First walk is on Earth Day 2016

Jim Hewitt will be leading a series of weekday nature walks at local parks this month and next. The focus will be birds, of course, but also flora and herps (amphibians and reptiles). This will be an opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds of spring in local areas of interest.



The first walk begins at 9:30 a.m. on **Friday, April 22** at **Legg Park** in Meridian Township. Meet in the parking lot.

The second walk will be one week later on **Friday, April 29** at **Scott Woods Park** (City of Lansing). Meet at 9:30 a.m. in the parking lot at the south end of Clifton St., adjacent to the park.

Jim will lead two more walks in May, with dates and time to be announced.

The Board used to meet fairly often during the year, but in the digital age meetings are much less frequent. Most business is carried out through email.

After the election, the new Board meets and decides on officers and divides up responsibilities. This includes working together to plan the monthly programs for the coming year, managing the club's finances, and membership duties.

Other roles, often filled by Board members but necessarily so include: preparing the monthly newsletter, coordinating the student backpack program, arranging bird walks and field trips, and other tasks that keep the club and meetings running smoothly.

Please consider making a small time and work commitment to your club and volunteer for the CAAS Board!

If you are considering this and would like more information, speak to (or email) any board member. Email addresses of board members can be found in the 2015-16 Program Guide that was mailed out in September. Phone numbers are listed in the *Call Note* masthead on page 6.



North American Migration Count is May 14

Mark your calendar now for this event on **Saturday, May 14**. The NAMC is a continent-wide count of the spring migration, in which all local counts are conducted on the same day. It is similar to the Christmas Bird Count, but done by county rather than by birding "circle."

The count aims to get a "snapshot" of the progress of spring migration throughout North America, and to obtain information on the abundance and distribution of each species.

Jeff Pavlik has graciously volunteered to coordinate this year's count for Ingham county.

If you are interested in participating in this count, please contact Jeff at michbirds@yahoo.com to let him know.

The more counters in the field, the more completed this snapshot will be.