



capitalareaaudubon.org

The Call Note

February 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 Leap Year!

Every 4 years, birders everywhere get a special treat – an extra day of birding! Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could designate those 24 “bonus” hours as some kind of special birding holiday? You could use it to spend an additional day birding farther afield, or enjoy a quiet day at home while watching birds at your feeders, or plan your big birding trip for the year.

Depending on what the groundhog has intimated to us about the rest of winter, February is often a time when birders begin to think more fervently about warmer weather and spring migration. CAAS is no exception, and we have a number of field trips planned for the spring. Stay tuned to upcoming issues of the *Call Note*, or check our website capitalareaaudubon.org

As we look ahead to May, I also hope you will mark your calendar for the **North American Migration Count on May 14**. Similar to the Christmas Bird Count, this event utilizes volunteers to record all birds observed in a 24-hour period within the entire county. This is a bigger area than the Christmas Count, so we can use all the help we can get. This year, we are also in need of a coordinator for the Ingham County count. **Jim Hewitt**, who has organized this for CAAS for the last 7 years, is stepping down and we would like to give him a big round of thanks for a job well done. If you would be interested in coordinating this year's count, please contact me or **Doug McWhirter** (see page 7 for contact info).

Good birding,
Barb Hosler

February 4 meeting & program

Trinidad & Tobago provide perfect winter getaway

Take a break from winter while learning about birds of these exotic Caribbean islands. Wildlife photographer and former manager at MAS's Baker Sanctuary **Mike Boyce** will be our guide for the evening.

Date: **Thursday, February 4**. Social time begins at 7:00 p.m., brief meeting and program begin at 7:30. Hot drinks and snacks provided. Why not bring a friend?



Violaceous euphonia, a small passerine in the true finch family, is one of the many exotic birds featured in Mike Boyce's presentation on Trinidad & Tobago at the February 4 meeting (©Mike Boyce)

Thank you

A big thank you to **Liz Febba** and **Martha Caterino** for delicious snacks at the January meeting.

2015 East Lansing CBC report

by Tom Wecker

On December 19, 2015 the Capital Area Audubon Society conducted its **70th Christmas Bird Count**. Conditions were generally pleasant for December, with temperatures in the upper 20s and no precipitation. The ground was snow free. Much still water was open, as was all moving water.

Forty-nine (49) birders were in the field, the same as last year. Sixty-four (64) species were discovered, which is above our ten-year average of 57 species. The total number of birds counted was 12,987, a tally that was well below our ten-year average of 17,203. The relatively low count was due primarily to lower than average counts of three species: Canada goose, American crow and European starling. The large amount of open water and the endless availability of open farm fields no doubt led to a greater than average dispersal of Canada geese on count day. The lower than average count of American crows was due solely to the fact that no large winter roost was discovered (in spite of much effort). Perhaps the roost had not yet formed because of the mild December. Finding the large European starling flocks is always a hit-or-miss proposition.

One species was seen which was new for the East Lansing count. **Ed Merz** found a northern shoveler along the Looking Glass River in Dewitt.

Two new record high counts were recorded: bald eagle and white-throated sparrow. The increasing presence of bald eagles in Michigan is reflected in our count numbers. The species was first seen in 1998 and has since been recorded seven more times. The attempted nesting at Potter Park in 2015 was an apparent first, and nests were observed in virtually all of the area counties. I would expect the frequency of CBC sightings of this species to increase and the number of birds to also increase.

There were several other interesting sightings. Two red-headed woodpeckers were seen, marking the first occurrence of that species on this count since 1989. Bonaparte's gulls were seen for only the second time and fox sparrows for only the third time. A horned grebe was seen for the first time since 2001.

On the flip side, the number of mourning doves seen on the count continues to decline. This year's total was the lowest since at least 1981.

Thanks to all of the participants. And special thanks to **Lee and Roger Laylin** for once again hosting the compilation dinner.

The next East Lansing CBC will be held on December 17, 2016.

2015 East Lansing species list

2316d	Canada goose (3523/3117)
4u	Mute swan (4/3)
1u	Wood duck (irreg/irreg)
4u	American black duck (4/7)
1396d	Mallard (1343/1254)
1uR	Northern shoveler (----/----)
1u	Ring-necked duck (irreg/irreg)
8u	Bufflehead (irreg/irreg)
50u	Hooded merganser (21/17)
3u	Common merganser (irreg/5)
76u	Wild turkey (89/76)
1u	Horned grebe (----/----)
1s	Great blue heron (2/4)
4uR	Bald eagle (1/irreg)
1s	Sharp-shinned hawk (2/1)
6u	Cooper's hawk (10/12)
1u	Accipiter species
28d	Red-tailed hawk (26/28)
300u	American coot (37/20)
35u	Sandhill crane (irreg/----)
17u	Bonaparte's gull (irreg/----)
1000u	Ring-billed gull (166/122)
33u	Herring gull (irreg/irreg)
675d	Rock pigeon (902/907)
126d	Mourning dove (222/331)
3d	Eastern screech owl (4/4)
1d	Belted kingfisher (3/3)
2uT	Red-headed woodpecker (----/----)
78d	Red-bellied woodpecker (68/70)
1s	Yellow-bellied sapsucker (2/irreg)
105d	Downy woodpecker (151/142)
12d	Hairy woodpecker (22/21)
7d	Northern flicker (17/15)
6d	Pileated woodpecker (4/3)
3u	American kestrel (4/4)
1s	Merlin (irreg/irreg)
2s	Peregrine falcon (1/1)
244d	Blue jay (222/246)
1299d	American crow (5309/4069)
11u	Horned lark (44/30)
488d	Black-capped chickadee (482/554)
58d	Tufted titmouse (78/87)
5u	Red-breasted nuthatch (11/13)
134d	White-breasted nuthatch (137/137)
18u	Brown creeper (13/17)
4d	Carolina wren (10/8)
2d	Golden-crowned kinglet (11/6)
43d	Eastern bluebird (58/56)
1s	Hermit thrush (1/irreg)
165u	American robin (43/51)
1408u	European starling (2077/2496)
320u	Cedar waxwing (242/395)
25u	Snow bunting (irreg/146)
194d	American tree sparrow (141/172)
2u	Fox sparrow (irreg/irreg)
279d	Dark-eyed junco (404/402)
49u R	White-throated sparrow (7/8)
9d	Song sparrow (6/9)
1u	Eastern towhee (irreg/irreg)
359u	Northern cardinal (349/403)
270u	House finch (203/251)
4u	Purple finch (3/6)
2d	Pine siskin (15/11)
267d	American goldfinch (419/485)
917u	House sparrow (798/1030)

KEY: The number in front of the species name is the 2015 total. **R**=record total. **T**=tied old record. **u**=up from 2014. **d**=down from 2014. **s**=same as 2014. **Irreg**=not seen in at least 3 of the last 5 years or 6 of the last 10 years. **----** = not seen in the five or ten year period. Following the species name is the average number of this species seen for the preceding 5 and 10 years.
(cont. on page 3)

East Lansing CBC species count

(cont. from page 2)

SEEN IN 2015 BUT NOT IN 2014: wood duck, American black duck, northern shoveler, ring-necked duck, bufflehead, hooded merganser, common merganser, horned grebe, American coot, sandhill crane, Bonaparte's gull, herring gull, red-headed woodpecker, snow bunting, fox sparrow, Eastern towhee.

SEEN IN 2014 BUT NOT IN 2015: trumpeter swan, pied-billed grebe, rough-legged hawk, great horned owl, barred owl, winter wren, swamp sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, common redpoll.

2015 Eaton Rapids Christmas Bird Count report

by Tom Wecker

The 2015 Eaton Rapids Christmas Count was actually held in 2016. Sixteen (16) birders participated in the count, which was held on January 2, within the time frame allowed by the National Audubon Society. This was the eighth year that this count has been conducted as a nationally reported count.

Forty-one (41) species were seen, which tied the previous highest total for this count. The average number of species for the previous seven counts was 36.6. The total number of birds counted was 6,562, which was the second highest total for this count. The average number of birds seen for the previous seven counts was 4,957.

Three species were seen this year which were new to the count: sandhill crane, white-throated sparrow and red-winged blackbird. In addition, there were new high counts for many species: red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, golden-crowned kinglet, cedar waxwing, northern cardinal, house finch and house sparrow.

Thank you to all who participated.

The CBC bonus factor

And speaking of birds seen on Christmas Bird Counts, we sometimes have this added bonus when considering surprise birds on CBCs.

Invariably, CBCs cover some areas not regularly birded during much of the year. A little park, a small pond, a remote field, a backyard feeding station, or a nearly forgotten woodlot may all be neglected for much of the year. But these very locations may command inspection during the CBC period, if only to secure full coverage in the 15-mile diameter CBC circle.

2015 Eaton Rapids Christmas Bird Count species list

(Count Day: January 2, 2016)

Canada goose	1824
Mute swan	3
Mallard	356
Wild turkey	5
Cooper's hawk	5
Bald eagle	3
Red-tailed hawk	21
Sandhill crane	2
Ring-billed gull	42
Rock pigeon	318
Mourning dove	229
Eastern screech owl	3
Belted kingfisher	1
Red-bellied woodpecker	38
Downy woodpecker	53
Hairy woodpecker	8
Northern flicker	11
Pileated woodpecker	2
American kestrel	6
Blue jay	103
American crow	1273
Horned lark	13
Black-capped chickadee	195
Tufted titmouse	58
Red-breasted nuthatch	2
White-breasted nuthatch	53
Brown creeper	7
Carolina wren	1
Golden-crowned kinglet	3
Eastern bluebird	27
European starling	783
Cedar waxwing	6
American tree sparrow	61
Dark-eyed junco	148
White-throated sparrow	1
Song sparrow	1
Northern cardinal	166
Red-winged blackbird	1
House finch	97
American goldfinch	194
House sparrow	439

This is when, say, a spotted towhee could be discovered on a CBC in Pennsylvania, a brown thrasher in Arizona, a varied thrush in Wisconsin, or a snowy owl almost anywhere.

It's the CBC bonus factor, and it happens every year.

A couple of surprise bonuses this year specifically deserve mention. Both of these bonus birds were Eurasian thrushes far, far out of their expected winter ranges, and both discovered on Christmas Bird Counts. The first was a redwing, found in Victoria, British Columbia. This is a (cont. on page 4) ►

CBC bonus factor (cont. from page 3)

species found very rarely in Atlantic Canada and only a few times in the west: in Alaska, Washington, and British Columbia. The bird stayed in the Victoria neighborhood through December. The fascinating story about its discovery can be read here:

<https://volantbc.wordpress.com/2015/12/19/seeing-redwing/>

The second bonus bird was also a Eurasian thrush – a fieldfare discovered on the 19 December Missoula, Montana CBC. It was found in a suburban yard near some crabapple trees. Somewhat like the redwing, this species has been found rarely in the Northeast, with only a couple of records elsewhere: in Alaska, British Columbia, and an odd occurrence in Minnesota. It stayed in the area through 22 December. Who could have imagined a fieldfare in Montana?

These are stellar examples of the wonder and surprise of the CBC bonus factor. ■

Adapted from The Birding Community E-Bulletin, January 2016, Wayne R Petersen & Paul J Baicich editors. Archives at <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

Kestrels may help protect orchards

Michigan State University will use a nearly half-million-dollar grant from the National Science Foundation to attract more American kestrels to orchards.

Catherine Lindell, MSU integrative biologist, and two other colleagues are investigating whether crop damage decreases when the population of these small falcons increases.

American kestrels are the most common predatory bird in the United States. However, their numbers have been declining nationwide for reasons that are not clear to researchers. The birds prey on many species that cause damage to fruit crops, including grasshoppers, rodents, and European starlings.

The researchers are studying whether they can increase kestrel populations in fruit-growing regions of Michigan and take advantage of their dietary habits to reduce the activity and numbers of species that eat the leaves, stems, and fruit of cherry trees and blueberry bushes. They are also investigating whether they can attract the cavity-nesting kestrels to fruit orchards and fields by installing nest boxes.

As part of this study, cherry and blueberry growers will be interviewed to determine which factors influence fruit-grower decision-making about pest management techniques, such as the use of native predatory birds.

From MSUToday Weekly Update, published Nov. 16, 2015, online.

California condor returns to the wild

A 35-year-old condor named AC-4 was released from a captive breeding program that helped save North America's largest species of land bird. He soared out of his open pen in late December at a canyon rim inside the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge in central California's Kern County. He had been one of just 23 condors left in the world in the 1980s.



It was the bird's first free flight since 1985, when a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service team captured him near the same spot. It was part of a last-ditch attempt to stop the extinction of the California condor, which has a wing span of more than 9 feet.

AC-4 needed only a few minutes to get his bearings before flying out of the pen and over the canyon, said Joseph Brandt, a lead condor biologist with the wildlife service. Brandt was

sitting on a hilltop nearby to watch the release.

Lead poisoning is believed one of the main factors that drove California condors toward extinction. The birds ingest fragments of lead bullets when they feed on carcasses of animals shot by hunters.

California lawmakers voted in 2013 to phase out lead bullets for hunting by 2019.

Biologists believe AC-4 was 5 to 7 years old when they captured him for the captive breeding program. He fathered the first chick born in the program, giving its founders greater hope they could save the species.

In all, AC-4 sired 30 condor chicks that have been successfully released into the wild.

"Many people have poured their heart and soul" into saving the condors, Jesse Grantham, a former condor program coordinator and part of the original team that captured AC-4, said in a statement from the wildlife service.

This year, biologists recorded 19 wild condor nests in central and Southern California, more nests than at any point this century, Brandt said.

Condors can live up to 60 years in the wild and mate for life, Brandt said. Biologists hope AC-4, which they have tagged for tracking, will pick a mate before the courting season ends this winter, he said. ■

Source: The Associated Press, Dec. 31, 2015. Photo: Adult California condor in flight, Wikipedia photo taken in Zion N.P., Utah 2007

Impressive backyard visitors

by Debbie Wolf

Every birder dreams of seeing a pileated woodpecker in their yard.

CAAS member **Eileen Houston** not only sees pileateds in her Delta Township yard, she nearly had a pair nesting there.

Early last year she noticed a male and a female pileated working on a nesting hole in one of the dead beech trees toward the front of the woods in her backyard. She was hopeful.



Pileated male and female working dead beech tree. Photo ©Eileen Houston (2015)

Then last March, Eileen observed both the male and the female near the completed hole, scrutinizing it. A house inspection was under way! But apparently this potential dwelling was not up to code in the eyes of the female: she pushed the male away from the hole, stuck her head in it, and then flew off. Eileen witnessed this scene twice, and observed no nest activity thereafter.



Close-up of hole being drilled by pileated pair. Photo ©Eileen Houston (2015)

The pileateds remained in the area though, and in early January of this year she observed a male feeding at one of her four suet feeders!



Male pileated woodpecker on suet. Photo ©Eileen Houston (2016)

She keeps her camera at the ready and remains optimistic that the pair will ultimately decide in favor of the beech tree cavity. She has no doubt that they would make lovely neighbors.■

Great Backyard Bird Count is Feb. 12-15

The 2016 Great Backyard Bird Count takes place February 12-15 in *your* backyard. Register at gbbc.birdcount.org

Since it started 18 years ago, more than 100,000 people of all ages and walks of life have joined the 4-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the winter distribution and abundance of birds.

GBBC was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds online and to display results in near real-time.

Last year, participants from more than 100 countries counted 5,090 species of birds on more than 147,000 checklists.■

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Bounty created in 1907 for English sparrows – then considered a pest – killed in Michigan during the months of December, January, and February.

Source: *Michigan History*, Jan/Feb 2016, Vol. 100, No. 1

Journal Review Corner

by Jennifer Olson

Editor's note: This column is dedicated to environmental issues that may be of interest to CAAS members. If you have a journal article you would like to share with our readers please contact Jennifer Olson at hawthorn071@hotmail.com.

Article title: Sharp-tailed Grouse Lek Attendance and Fidelity in Upper Michigan

Authors: Thomas D. Drummer, Michigan Technological University; Gregory Corace III, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Seney N.W.R.; Stephen Sjogren, U.S. Forest Service, Hiawatha National Forest.

Journal: Journal of Wildlife Management, Volume 75, Issue 2, February 2011, pp. 311-318

Introduction: According to Merriam-Webster, the definition of lek is: an assembly area where animals carry on display and courtship behavior. The eastern Upper Peninsula (UP) is the eastern periphery for sharp-tailed grouse in the United States. Populations of sharp-tailed grouse have fluctuated greatly over the past century. The first official documentation occurred on Isle Royale in 1904. In the 1930s the sharp-tailed grouse was a popular game species and lek surveys were conducted to estimate populations. Lek surveys continue today. Past efforts to monitor sharp-tailed grouse in the UP consisted of identifying occupied habitat and leks, then determining the mean number of birds flushed at known leks. For each count, observers recorded the number of males (dancing birds) and females (non-dancing birds) and general weather conditions. The challenge is that the mean number of birds per lek does not reflect possible fluctuations in the number of leks within or between years. Research in northeastern Colorado indicates that about 23% of greater prairie chicken leks disappeared between years. To assess and improve monitoring protocols for sharp-tailed grouse in the eastern UP, two aspects of lek count data were studied: (1) lek attendance (probability a bird is on a lek when lek counts are conducted), and (2) lek fidelity (the likelihood a bird attends only one lek).

Study Area: Sharp-tailed grouse in the eastern UP occupy xeric (dry), conifer-dominated openings, large clear-cuts, low-intensity managed agricultural lands, or open wetlands. The 3 study sites were in: (1) a xeric, conifer-dominated ecosystem, (2) an open wetland, and (3) a low-intensity managed hayfield.

Methods: Sharp-tailed grouse were captured using a combination of mist nets and baited rectangular-shaped walk-in traps. Trapping started between February 14 and April 13 and continued until May 7.

Grouse were fitted with avian necklace radio collars that had an expected lifetime of >500 days. Radio-collared birds were located 3-4 times per week during the lekking season (April-May) of 2005-2007. Observers determined if the birds being monitored were or were not on a known lek. Lek counts were conducted in each of the 3 study sites. The number of dancing birds (assumed to be males) was recorded over a 15-minute period, then the total number of birds flushed (males and females) was counted. Lek counts were conducted at 28 spatially explicit leks among the 3 study sites. Attempts were made to conduct multiple counts at each lek each year but that was not always possible. Observers conducted 124 lek counts in 2005, 78 in 2006, and 75 in 2007. To estimate lek fidelity, data from both lek counts and telemetry locations were used. For each collared bird within each year, it was determined which leks each bird was located on and the primary lek was defined as the lek on which the bird was found most often. (Photo below from U.S. Fish & Wildlife)

Results: Ninety-nine (99) sharp-tailed grouse (76 males, 23 females) were captured over 3 years and 737 telemetry observations of radio-collared birds were collected, but once data collection errors



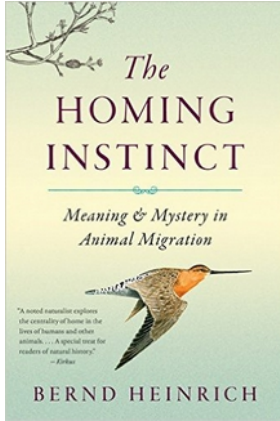
were considered the effective sample size was $n=424$ from 58 birds. Of the 424 total sample size, 186 were in the xeric, conifer-dominated ecosystem; 51 were in the open wetland; and 187 were in the low-intensity managed hayfield. Collared birds were located on a lek 69% of the time. The probability of lek attendance for males exceeded 80% starting around April 10 and remained high into early May, whereas female lek attendance peaked mid-April but declined quickly thereafter. In addition, the probability of lek attendance was best within 3 hours of sunrise but declined with increased wind speed for both males and females. Strong fidelity was observed to a primary lek at all sites and in all years (males = 0.95, females = 0.81). Observers did not document any birds on more than 2 leks. On two occasions, a male bird was observed visiting 2 leks on the same day.

Discussion: Strong lek fidelity to a primary lek was observed, so the potential effect of multiple counting of birds does not seem large, although lek fidelity could change if lek density changes. One bird visited 2 leks 7.5 miles apart, so considerable movement is possible. The effect of inter-lek movement can be mitigated by surveying nearby leks within a short time interval. The high lek fidelity and high lek attendance rates of male sharp-tailed grouse in the study indicates accurate counts of lekking males may yield a useful index of male abundance if possible change in the number of leks is also considered. In the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, it is recommended that lek counts be conducted within 3 hours of sunrise, between April 8-30, and when wind speeds are <15 mph. ■

Book Review

The Homing Instinct
by Bernd Heinrich

Reviewed by Debbie Wolf



Seeing the bar-tailed godwit photo on the cover of *The Homing Instinct* I expected the book would focus primarily on birds, but I was wrong. Delightfully, it is about much more than that.

The book's subtitle, *Meaning & Mystery in Animal Migration* actually comes closer to the mark. Through his collection of themed chapters centering on various aspects of

“home,” the author brings to bear his considerable knowledge and expertise of the natural world – accumulated over a lifetime of study – in ways that are imaginatively wide-ranging and highly informative.

We learn about how and why certain insects, birds, amphibians, and even people choose a site for, construct, maintain, and then frequently abandon a home. Heinrich reveals many of these homing secrets through personal observations, which are always meticulous, thoughtful, and integrative. Everything has a place in nature. Everything fits together.

Acclaimed naturalist/scientist Bernd Heinrich has authored 20 books on a variety of topics, as well as numerous professional papers, book reviews, and articles in the popular press. As one of the world's most insightful and original biologists, his gift is his ability to translate vast stores of knowledge into prose that is both creative and engaging.

In other words, he's a scientist who's a great storyteller. And with every story he tells in *The Homing Instinct*, he guides us toward a better understanding of and appreciation for the homes of all kinds of creatures, great and small.

After all, who doesn't like a good story?

At 316 pages, the book is a comfortable length and a very satisfying read.

One thing is sure, though: we have almost no innate homing navigation mechanisms. Compared to an albatross, a loggerhead turtle, or a monarch butterfly, we can hardly walk in a straight line except between landmarks.

– Bernd Heinrich

Sitting with Cardinals

by Carolyn White

The red lights in the arborvitae turn out to be cardinals, fluffed over needles, well-spaced, three, their necks sunk into feathers, sheltered on this bitterly cold day. Ah, there's a female. Once you know what you're looking at, binoculars aren't needed. No one moves, except the northwest wind tossing snow.

I sit in the kitchen. The town shut down. Too cold to be out. How do they stand it? Whoever owned this house before had the foresight to plant arborvitae, interlacing evergreen leaves stopping the worst of the wind. The cardinals face me. Maybe today I'll learn patience. Or maybe one day is not enough for a species like mine surrounded by house.

Beautiful ornaments, one high, two low, the female in the middle. No chat. Only feathers. A quick turn of a head. Alert as buddhas. It must be more than survival keeps them so still, but what eludes me.

I stand up and head for the bedroom. I'm sure I won't distract them if I come back to the kitchen wearing my red pullover and sit.

Note: “Sitting with Cardinals” was written during the Dec. 2014 ice storm in mid-Michigan. ©Carolyn White

Call Note

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