



WASHTENAW
AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER
November/December 2009

In Search of the Crested Ibis (*Nipponia Nippon*)

By John Swales

In September 2009, I went for a week as an adjunct professor to Jiao Tong University in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, in central China. This is the city closest to the famous Terracotta Warriors' archeological site. Because the person who had invited me, Professor Ruiying Yang, knew I was a birdwatcher, she had made special arrangements for the weekend—we were going to the Changqing area in the Qinling mountains, where there was a Panda Reserve and a good likelihood of finding Crested Ibis. These special arrangements were needed because this area is closed to foreigners unless special permission is obtained.

The Crested Ibis is one of the world's rarest birds. The tiny Japanese population on Sado island was about to go extinct and then in 1981 a small group of seven birds was rediscovered in the Qinling mountains. Captive breeding was established at Peking Zoo and later several birds were donated by the Chinese government to bolster the Sado Island population, which no longer had any females of breeding age. Estimates seem to vary as to the current global population, but the Chinese government's protection policies have probably saved this species from extinction. According to most accounts, there are about 200 birds in the wild at the moment, of which about 40 reside in the area to which I was going.

Early on the Saturday morning four of us set off in an official car. The professor and I, a driver accustomed to mountain roads, and the departmental videographer, who apparently had relatives in the Changqing area. The trip took five hours, the first two on a splendid new expressway that ploughed and tunneled through the mountains. Then it was a slow twisty mountain road to Changqing, in the latter part running along a very attractive river valley and rice paddies. As it was harvest time, the fields were full of local farmers cutting and threshing their rice.

We arrived at the small, simple eco-hotel in time for a late lunch, and then it was off up a local valley with the birding guide to see what we could find. Migration was largely over, but we did see Azure-winged Magpie, Plumbeous Redstart and Green-backed Tit among others.

(Continued on the next page)



Crested Ibis

Photo: Bjorn Anderson

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In late afternoon, we drove to another valley, where the Crested Ibis was supposed to forage. And there 40 yards away was one! Much larger than other ibises I have encountered, with a red face, red legs, and bushy neck plumes. After ten minutes, and as dusk was starting to encroach, it flew slowly off to a nearby wood, showing the astonishing salmon-pink of its underwings. In its known feeding areas, the local farmers are forbidden to use pesticides so that the Ibis can find enough food, such as frogs and grasshoppers. One strange thing about the small concrete roads in this area in fall is that the farmers spread their rice over the roads to dry it, so half the time we were driving on rice! The next morning we spent in the Panda Reserve, but it was dull and windy and the forest birds were as elusive as ever. (We didn't expect to come across a panda.) However, at the last stop at 6500 feet, I did finally find a bird that I didn't expect: a Eurasian Nutcracker--a species I had always dipped on in Scandinavia!

As we were descending down the track in the reserve, I asked the guide how many foreign visitors the area had each year. He said only about a hundred, mostly biologists associated with the Panda Reserve, plus a few Japanese birders coming to see *Nipponia Nippon* in its current stronghold (if you can call it that.) Given the nice eco-hotel and the excellent local food in the restaurant, the interesting village street-life, the fresh up-country air, and the not-yet-developed ambiance, it seems unfortunate that more eco-tourists are not being encouraged to visit.

WAS trip to Hawkfest

By Sarah Toner

The WAS field trip to the Hawkfest at Lake Erie Metropark was a great time. About fifteen minutes after we arrived, the count was moved to the alternate count site at Point Mouillee, where more hawks were passing by. After spending about an hour and forty-five minutes there, the hawk counters packed up again and went back to Lake Erie Metropark, where the Audubon society scattered as they checked out the hawkfest. Most members stayed until about 3:40. Birds seen during the first 15 minutes of the count: 15 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 1 Cooper's Hawk, and 362 Broad-winged Hawks. Other birds there were Caspian Terns and Double-crested Cormorants. Birds seen while counting at Point Mouillee: 9 Turkey Vultures, 1 Osprey, 2 Bald Eagles, 51 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 1 Cooper's Hawk, 575 Broad-winged Hawks, 9 Red-tailed Hawks, and 8 American Kestrels. Additional birds seen there: Pied-billed Grebe, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-heron, Caspian Tern. Birds seen while counting back at Lake Erie Metropark: 2 Osprey, 16 Turkey Vultures, 1 Northern Harrier, 36 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 3 Cooper's hawks, 1335 Broad-winged Hawks, 4 Red-tailed Hawks, 24 American Kestrels, 1 Merlin, and 1 Swainson's Hawk. Other birds seen there: Caspian Tern, Cedar Waxwing, and large flights of Double-crested Cormorants. It was a great trip.

Rare Bird Alerts

Michigan Bird Report

<http://birdingonthe.net/birdmail.html>

Scroll down to Michigan, Mich-listers, and SE Michigan

Thursday morning Arb walks

9/17 *By Sarah Toner*

16 birders had a good time with 43 species being seen/heard. Highlights: Wood Duck (flyover), Belted Kingfisher, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Swainson's Thrush, Magnolia Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow .

10/1 *By Ellie Shappirio and Sarah T.*

16 people looked for birds on this chilly morning. It was 35° at 8:00 but by 10:30 the temperature was a more comfortable 50°. The sun warmed us and there was no wind. One of the visitors was special, as he was visiting from Costa Rica. Carlos Vargas is a tour guide there and enjoys birding. His website is <http://www.latitudtropical10.com/> and we recommend him highly. Most birds were active along the railroad side of Dow Prairie so we spent most of our time there and near the picnic shelter where many species were found. A Cooper's Hawk appeared to be hunting along the railroad tracks. Lincoln's, Chipping, Song, White-throated, and White-crowned Sparrows were seen with Red-eyed Vireos, a Blue-headed Vireo and Gray Catbirds. A late Eastern Wood-pewee, a Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warblers, Northern Parula and a Black-throated Green Warbler were found. A Great Blue Heron was perched in a tree along the Huron River. American Robins and Cedar Waxwings were common. There were many American Goldfinches. Eastern Bluebirds were heard in the field. A Gray-cheeked Thrush and a Wood Thrush were seen in the boardwalk area. American Crows, Mallards, Ring-billed Gulls, 2 Trumpeter Swans and Turkey Vulture flew along the river valley. Brown-headed Cowbirds were perched on a power pole.

10/8 *By Sarah Toner*

The bird walk in the Arboretum had little success. Not many birds were awake at eight o'clock, and it was very cold. Highlights included a Trumpeter Swan, a spectacular view of a Red-tailed Hawk, Eastern Phoebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird (heard only), Eastern Towhee, Lincoln's Sparrow, Field Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Tennessee Warbler, and Nashville Warbler.

10/15 *By Roger Kuhlman*

Six intrepid birders led by Roger Wykes and myself braved very cool and cloudy conditions and found 40 species. Most of the bird activity was along the northern edge of Dow Prairie or along the Huron River north of there. Our best birds found were a basic plumaged Scarlet Tanager at the western end of Dow Prairie and one or two Orange-crowned Warblers in the brush of the Gallup wet prairie along the Huron River. Other good finds included a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, two Brown Creepers, a flyover Double-crested Cormorant, four Chipping Sparrows, five Winter Wrens, five White-crowned Sparrows, five Eastern Phoebes and a Gray Catbird. Probably at least 50 Rough-winged Swallows were hawking for insects over waters of the Huron River.

10/22 *By Sarah Toner*

10 people went around Dow Prairie next to the railroad tracks, up to the boardwalk to Heathdale, and then back to the railroad tracks. We failed to see the hoped-for Orange-crowned Warbler. Highlights included a Cooper's Hawk chasing a Red-tailed Hawk over Dow Prairie, 2 Eastern Bluebirds sitting on a telephone pole, White-crowned Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, a Field Sparrow, 3 Hermit Thrushes by Heathdale, and a red or brown phase Eastern Screech-owl in the screech-owl hole near the Rhododendron Glen.

10/29 *By Sarah Toner*

8 people attended the very foggy last bird walk of the season. For the first hour and a half we couldn't even see across Dow Prairie. After a while, the fog cleared somewhat, but it was still heavy. We went around Dow on the railroad side, then headed up to the screech-owl hole before turning around to cut through the prairie back to the cars. Highlights included 3 sightings of Merlins, a Field Sparrow, White-throated Sparrows, 1 Juvie White-crowned Sparrow, but no screech-owl. 26 species were seen. It has been a great Fall for birds. I can't wait for the start of the next season in April.

63rd Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 19, 2009

Here we are, in mid-November, wondering where summer went and how winter got here so quickly. Night-time temperatures have dropped to or even below the freezing point and a few days ago I would have sworn I saw some flurries floating by! Most of the summer bird species have (wisely) left for their winter haunts to the south, with sparrows and waterfowl now making up most of the migrants passing through our neck of the woods. Although this trend is the harbinger of colder, less diverse birding times to come, it also heralds the impending arrival of the annual CBC season!

As many of you will remember, last season's count was wildly successful: a new high for total species tallied (77 on count day, plus 4 more during count week) and two new species for our count circle (Pileated Woodpecker and Varied Thrush). For a summary of last year's CBC, please see the January/February 2009 issue of the WAS newsletter. Making no promises as to a repeat of a count like that, you are all invited to participate in the 63rd annual Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count (CBC) sponsored by the Washtenaw Audubon Society. This year the count is Saturday, December 19th. Experience in identifying birds is not absolutely necessary as you can always be grouped with more experienced candidates.

The Ann Arbor CBC is part of a hemisphere-wide effort coordinated by the National Audubon Society. The National Audubon Society publishes the data from each CBC and mails a copy of this compilation to participants (last year's data compilation just arrived in our mailboxes). To cover the cost of compiling and publishing the data, a mandatory \$5.00 fee is charged per participant age 19 and older (it's worth it!).

During a 3-week period each year, CBCs are conducted across the Americas (and increasingly elsewhere as well). Each count covers a circular area 15 miles in diameter; the Ann Arbor count circle is centered on the Foster Road bridge near the intersection of Maple Road and Huron River Dr. The object is to identify the bird species and count their numbers within the CBC circle. In addition to the daylight bird census, several groups of observers will conduct a predawn search for owls.

There are several ways to participate in this count. The Ann Arbor CBC area comprises eight regions, each of which is assigned to an area leader who will coordinate the census in that region. If you wish to be a field observer, select one of the eight regions (*see map, or check out the detailed maps on the WAS website*) and sign up with the area leader of that region. If you are not sure which region you want to help census, call me (CBC Compiler Jacco Gelderloos) at (734) 973-9422 and you'll be assigned to an area based on need. The National Audubon Society web site also has a system for signing up for counts across the nation. If you sign up through this service, please contact me by phone or email me at JJGelderloos@yahoo.com to let me know you have done so, as I will need to place you into an area within the count circle.

You can also be a feeder watcher. If you have a feeder within the count circle this is a fun and easy way to participate. (**Remember:** the feeder **MUST** be within the count circle, otherwise the data is invalid.) Like field observers, you may sign up to participate for any length of time – from one hour to all day. As a feeder watcher, you don't have to pay the \$5.00 fee unless you want to receive the National Audubon Society's annual CBC publication. Call feeder watch coordinator Kurt Hagemeister for more information, to sign up, or to get feeder watch forms.

The real fun and excitement happens at the end of the day at the potluck supper, when the final results are tallied and announced after dessert. This year, the potluck supper will be held at the Leslie Science Center - all participants are invited! If you plan to attend, please contact the potluck coordinator Nicole Sefton to let us know you're coming and to coordinate dishes. Area leaders will have maps and directions to the site; plan to gather there around 5:30-6:00 p.m.

Please remember that the CBC is run entirely by volunteers and can always use your help. Consider helping out with the potluck set-up and clean-up: we can always use people who arrive early at the potluck site to set up tables and chairs and help prepare for the arrival and arrangement of food. This may also entail getting supplies such as tablecloths, plates, etc. (costs will be reimbursed by WAS). After the supper, we will need to clean up as well. Remember: many hands make light work!

Information regarding the count will also be available on the Ann Arbor CBC web page (<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/aacbc>) where any updates will be posted as the count day approaches.

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Potluck Coordinator:

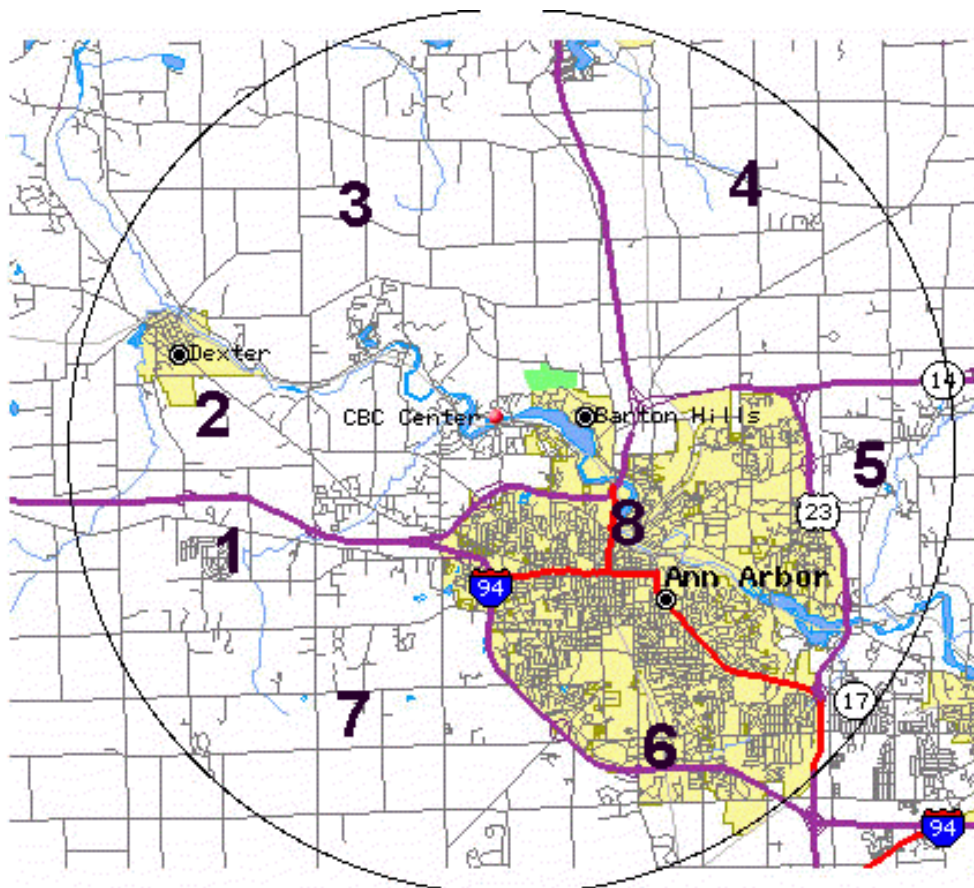
Nicole Sefton
(734) 677-3275 or seftonn1344@yahoo.com

Ann Arbor CBC Web Site:

<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/aacbc/>

National Audubon Society:

<http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>



Upcoming WAS Field Trips (Dec. 2009--Feb. 2010)

By Monty Brown, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For more information, go to our webpage. Changes and updates will be made via our Twitter service, the birders@umich.edu listserv and/or our webpage at www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php with updates as needed. If you have a suggestion for a field trip, please e-mail me.

Sat., Dec. 5 **Gull Trip to Salem Landfill** (Leader: Rob French) Because access to the landfill is highly restricted, we limit the number of participants. WAS members are given priority. This trip will take about 4 hours. Dress warmly! Those who wish to attend this trip need to send their names and a contact phone number to fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org.

Sat., Dec. 19 **Christmas Bird Count** (Organizer: Jacco Gelderloos) More info on the previous page.

Sun., Jan. 10 **Washtenaw Winter Birds** (Leader: Jacco Gelderloos) Come join us for an invigorating morning in search of birds that spend the winter in our county. Targets: Snow Buntings, Pine Siskins, and redpolls. 8:30 a.m. start with a return between 12:00 and 12:30. **Please note:** If bad weather necessitates postponement, the announcement will be posted on the Washtenaw Audubon field trip webpage (<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php>), and the backup date will be Jan. 17.

**Fri.-Sun,
Feb. 5-7** **Sault Ste. Marie Winter Birding Weekend** (Leaders: Lathe Claflin and Gary Siegrist) Jointly sponsored with Jackson Audubon society. Boreal Chickadee, Snowy and Great Gray Owls, grouse and crossbills are some of the target species. The weather can vary considerably, but the birding is reliably excellent. The number of participants is limited, and reserving a space is mandatory. There is a \$20 charge for the trip, and participants are also responsible for their own food and lodging costs. Call Lathe (517-522-3949) or Gary (517-522-5990) to check on availability and to get further information. The event begins on Friday evening and ends during the day on Sunday.

Sat., Feb. 13 **Birdhouse Basics** (Leader/Instructor: Dea Armstrong) The city of Ann Arbor's Natural Area Preservation (NAP) department and the Washtenaw Audubon Society are teaming up to cosponsor a seminar on birdhouse basics. 1pm at the Leslie Science Center. The session will run for about an hour.

Crosswinds Marsh Field Trip

By Monty Brown

On the morning of Saturday, October 3, Cathy Carroll led a bird hike to Crosswinds Marsh, a 1,000-acre wildlife preserve in southwest Wayne County. This area was reclaimed in 1993 by flooding farmland that had originally been wetlands, in an effort to balance the loss of wetlands involved in an expansion of Detroit Metro Airport. It is reportedly one of the largest restored marshes in the country. Cathy's trip was the first Washtenaw Audubon outing in several years to this impressive site.

On a rainy and cool morning, the group identified fifty bird species. Of note were Swainson's Thrush, many Hermit Thrushes, a singing Marsh Wren, a hunting Peregrine Falcon, seven species of sparrows (White-crowned, White-throated, Field, Song, Swamp, Lincoln's and Eastern Towhee), a Blue-headed Vireo, and a Nashville Warbler.

The Big Sit

By Monty Brown

This year marked the twelfth year in which Don Chalfant and Roger Wykes have led a Washtenaw Audubon group in The Big Sit. Glamorously billed as “Birding’s Most Sedentary Event,” this is a low-key, one-day international competition in which birders stay within one small area (a circle 17 feet in diameter, or around 220 square feet) and try to identify by sight or sound as many bird species as possible. Nine total WAS birders contributed to this year’s effort. None was more eager than Pioneer High School junior Paul Reece, who was the first to arrive at the Independence Lake site, shortly before 4:00 a.m. The early birders did not record much owl activity at first, but after an hour or so several Screech and Great Horned Owls began to respond to Don’s improvised and recorded calls. This helped those assembled before dawn to ignore the unusually chilly temperatures.

Over the course of nearly twelve hours, a total of 47 species were observed, which Don noted was very close to the twelve-year average of 49. Waterfowl were well represented, unlike warblers; we had only Yellow-rumped and Cape May in the latter category. Just after about half the group departed, the raptor activity doubled from three species (if one counts Turkey Vulture) to six, including a Bald Eagle, two Cooper’s hawks, and a harrier.

The complete species list: Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Mute Swan, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Great Blue Heron, Turkey Vulture, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper’s Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Bonaparte’s Gull, Rock Pigeon, Belted Kingfisher, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, American Goldfinch, House Finch, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird (alas!).

To become a member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, please complete the form below (or a copy) and mail it with a check or money order payable to **Washtenaw Audubon Society - WAS Membership**
PO Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113

_____ RENEWAL _____ NEW MEMBER

Membership Dues:

_____ ADDITIONAL DONATION \$ _____

___ Individual/Household \$20

Name: _____

___ Student \$10

Address: _____

___ Senior \$10

___ Patron \$50

___ Life (individual) \$200

Phone: _____ Email: _____

We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means.

Note: WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal, or possibly emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

WAS Monthly Programs

WAS monthly events usually are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Programs begin at 7:30pm at U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. Call 677-3275 if you have questions about the program.

No program in December. Please help with the Christmas Bird Count on December 19.

**Wed., Jan. 20,
2010**

Of Birds and Berries: Join Julie Craves for a program on the food sources used by migrating thrushes during their fall stopovers in our area. This presentation describes the fascinating methods used to determine food preferences, and will provide info you can use in making your yard more attractive to migrating thrushes and other birds. Julie is the Director of the Rouge River Bird Observatory at the University of Michigan – Dearborn, a contributing editor of *Birder's World Magazine*, and author of numerous books and articles.

Wed., Feb. 17

The Marvelous Biology of Birds: Join Bob Collins for an interesting program on the biology of birds, including the adaptations birds made in order to fly, such as feather structure and a hollow skeletal system, as well as other modifications to their biological systems. Bob "BioBob" Collins is a retired biology teacher at St. Clair Community College in Port Huron, and is past president of the Blue Water Audubon Society. Bob and his wife Carolyn are avid birders who have visited all 50 states and all seven continents.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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