



**WASHTENAW**  
AUDUBON SOCIETY

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**NEWSLETTER**

**January/February 2011**

**Annual Gull Trip to the Veolia Landfill in Salem Township** (December 4, 2010) *By Rob French*

No matter the temperature, I have yet to be comfortably warm standing on top of the landfill hill in Salem Township. Mind you, I know how to dress for extremes, and I'm very familiar with skiing and snowshoeing all day in sub-zero temperatures. But those are active endeavors, where one's body generates warmth continuously. Standing around clasping a cold metal tripod or hunk of binocular glass can quickly sap one's body heat. So even though the low temperature of the day was only in the mid-20's, I think many still felt the challenge of staying warm.

A full van of passengers left Huron High School as planned in the morning, and as usual, with one gull species already on the day's list (Ring-billed). Escorted up to the dumping area by landfill staff (almost uncomfortably close to one of the dozers), we quickly piled out of the van and started getting scopes set up and scanning the several thousand Herring and Ring-billed Gulls already picking through the mounting pile of garbage du jour. We quickly located a first winter Glaucous Gull, which was cooperative enough so that everyone was able to see it well. This was a life bird for some in the group, and added the species to the county lists of others. *(Article continued on pg. 13)*



***Glaucous Gull***  
*(Photo by Laurent Fournier)*

## Contact

### President

Sue Johnson

(734) 995-1821

President@washtenawaudubon.org

### Vice President & Programs

Mike Sefton

(734) 677-3275

Vp-programs@washtenawaudubon.org

### Treasurer

Ellie Shappirio

(734) 665-6613

Treasurer@washtenawaudubon.org

### Secretary

Dana Novak

(734) 424-9305

Danacnovak13@yahoo.com

### Field Trips

Monty Brown

Fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org

### Membership

Sherri Smith

(734) 994-6287

Membership@washtenawaudubon.org

### Newsletter

Bryn Martin

(734) 454-0439

Brynmartin@sbcglobal.net

### Education

Dea Armstrong

(734) 668-2513

Ddarm@umich.edu



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Bryn Martin

6241 Runnymede

Canton, MI 48187

## President's Letter, Sue Johnson

I went on my first "real" birding outing in May, 2004, when my son Andy, then in the sixth grade, begged me to take him to Point Pelee for spring migration. We had heard this was a must-go time of year, and were encouraged, among other things, to arrive early. When we returned home three days later, with 40 lifers, and at least one 14-hour day, the addiction had begun. Our annual trek to revel in the wonder and beauty of spring migration has become one of my favorite things to do.

It was not wise for me to take on this presidency for a few reasons. First, one should never follow in the footsteps of a legend. Ray Stocking, by all accounts, has been a phenomenal leader for Washtenaw Audubon over the last five years. The upside, of course, is the transition promises to be smooth. Thank you, Ray. Second, the majority of you are far more accomplished birders than I am. I made it very clear when I accepted this position, that if birding expertise were a prerequisite, they best look elsewhere. So while I won't be leading any field trips soon, I look forward to exploring and learning alongside experts and beginners alike.

That being said, I want to share why I said "yes" to the Board's request to serve in this role. First and foremost, many members of the Washtenaw Audubon Society have played an integral part in our lives as a family. The birding community at large is an unusually friendly and welcoming species! The number of experts who ushered us through our first migration trip at Point Pelee, sharing hints and leading Andy by the shoulders to the best possible view point, made an everlasting impression on me. We have found wherever we go that the birders are usually the same: friendly, patient, and willing to share their knowledge, their optics, their sightings, and their snacks. And Washtenaw Audubon is no exception.

After Andy's first day (of many) with Roger Wykes, participating in the *One Road Challenge*, Andy enthused, "It was like spending the day with Roger Tory Peterson!" Years later, collecting him at the Westgate parking lot after a Big Day with Mike Sefton, Dea Armstrong and Harold Eyster- it was hard to find words to describe the deep satisfaction of seeing four people, with decades between them, having had the time of their lives shattering a county record. And as Andy left us in June to spend the summer in Churchill, Manitoba, I realized we had officially lost our son to the out-of-doors and the world of ornithology. There are worse things. And his friends from Washtenaw Audubon are partially to blame.

So now as your president, I can take advantage of this forum to say thank you to so many of you who surprised us with your friendship, support and encouragement to Andy and me over the years. I am excited to help Washtenaw Audubon reach out to our community to both spread the joy of birding and to raise awareness of the needs of conservation. I look forward to meeting many of you, and learning more about the birds I have come to love.



*Incoming president Sue Johnson with outgoing president Ray Stocking*

Happy Birding!

## Rare Bird Alerts

### Michigan Bird Report

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

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

## **Birding by Bike and on Foot: My 2010 Washtenaw County BIGBY Year**

*By: Jacco Gelderloos*

After a bit of back-and-forthing between Europe and North America during the 1990s, I (well, we) settled into life in Ypsilanti, and now Ann Arbor. Although I had always been a (casual) birder, with some listing tendencies during my younger years (courtesy of a birding big brother), I was truly infected by the birding (and listing) bug after my inaugural WPBO spring fling trip up to the UP. While there, I roomed with trip leader and compulsive lister Don Chalfant, who got me truly interested in listing in all its facets: I started keeping detailed lists for Michigan, the ABA area, the world, various Michigan counties, and for each year I birded Washtenaw County. As many of you will know, the latter is a popular undertaking for many a Washtenaw birder, and the so-called “Wingnut Award” is handed out to the top lister for each calendar year.

Over the years, this Wingnut competition, though very much a good-natured undertaking, became a bit of a source of frustration to me. Sure, I did well enough, finding 200+ species in all years since 2000, but with a full-time job and a young family to raise, I could never hope to be in serious contention for the actual award (and eternal fame), what with a bunch of seriously involved (semi-)retirees in hot pursuit of the prize each year! Matt Hysell, formerly of Ann Arbor and now a very accomplished Berrien County birder, found a way to work around this monopoly of sorts by pursuing a Big Year record for birders employed full-time: he succeeded quite nicely by tallying a whopping 234 species in 2005. However, due to his odd hours as an ER doctor in residency, Matt had opportunities for birding that I, having a generic 8:30 to 5:00 job could hardly duplicate (my highest annual tally ever was 224, also in 2005). The fact that my family has only one car clearly did not help either. Further frustration ensued....

But then Matt pointed me in the direction of another idea that certainly looked promising to and for me: the pursuit of a big year without the use of fossil fuel, a so-called BIGBY. During 2008, he pursued this big year variety in his new home of Berrien County and tallied an amazing total of 227 species (check out his reports on his blog: <http://berrienbirder.blogspot.com/2008/03/bigbying-is-not-for-faint-hearted.html>).

This seemed like a pursuit I'd be able to replicate in Washtenaw County, albeit with a more modest target as to species count. Tallying 150 species certainly seemed doable and 175 would probably be within reach as well.

As I was mulling over how to tackle my BIGBY year during 2009, the intended approach started to come into focus. I would be making far-ranging forays to specific target areas at specific times of the year to pick up particular target species, and on workdays stop by the Arb on the way to work, and visit the Arb or Dolph Park during lunch breaks. Daily visits to these local hotspots should give me ample of opportunity to pick up migrants and some breeding birds.

2009 ended, 2010 arrived, and my BIGBY year kicked off. For the first few weeks of January, the weather was inclement to the point that going out on my bike was ill-advised, if not impossible. As a result, by the end of January I had been birding only in my neighborhood on Ann Arbor's east side, and had a BIGBY score of 21 species. With the start of February things started looking up, though, and I prepared for my first serious outing.

February 7: In good spirits I set out for Vreeland Road, particularly the area between Harris and Gotfredson, in hopes of locating Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, and Rough-legged Hawk. However, I was soon confronted by the fact that I was not used to biking any more/yet – several of the hills en route to Vreeland Rd darn near killed me and by the time I reached the intersection of Geddes and Gale, I was seriously considering the wisdom of this whole BIGBY thing. Fortunately, a rattling Winter Wren in the brush along the margins of the Radrick Farms golf course motivated me to push on. As a bonus, the steep hills ended and the ride down Vreeland was most enjoyable. The fact that there were literally hundreds of Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, and Horned Larks wheeling around the Vreeland and Gotfredson intersection clearly didn't hurt either; I hardly regretted missing Rough-legged Hawk. By the end of the ride I had added another 15 species to my tally.

*(Article is continued on the next page)*

*(BIGBY continued from previous page)*

February 21: There had been persistent reports of a pair of Long-Tailed Ducks in the Huron River, just upstream from the Delhi rapids, so I decided to go for it and head out on my first actual BIGBY chase. The route promised to be more or less flat and along the river, so I was looking forward to a casual ride with plenty of opportunities for new species. A bit of a thaw had cleared up much of the bike trails along the river, so without much trouble I reached my destination (though the route was by no means flat!). But: no Long-tailed Ducks.... This was disappointing, in that I had biked all this way (12 miles one way) without finding my target. On the other hand, I did pick up another 10 species along the way, so the trip wasn't for naught.

Having closed out February with a tally of 46, I spent March birding around the house, with rather limited success: a half dozen new species could not be considered very impressive by any stretch of the imagination. However, April promised much-awaited improvement. Not only would the weather be getting more conducive to biking, but migrants would also start arriving soon, and with that, more checkmarks on my BIBGY list. During the first week of April, I picked up 11 new arrivals, all of them on the way to work or during lunch in the Arb.

April 10: Early to mid-April seemed like a good time to venture out to Embury Road. Many of the specialty species there would be active and en route I'd have a good chance of picking up a few more birds, most notably the Great Horned Owls on nest at Miller and M-14. Leaving before dawn, I arrived at the nest site at first light and was able to pick out one of the owls on the nest: nice! From here, it was on to Embury, with a steady stream of new species to keep up my spirits: American Woodcock, Eastern Towhee, Sandhill Cranes, and a Ruddy Duck to name but a few. Along Embury, birds were singing everywhere, and it wasn't long before I felt/heard the first of several Ruffed Grouse drumming. Oddly, though, no turkeys were gobbling and I started back towards home having picked up only Swamp Sparrow and Virginia Rail. Nice birds, of course, but I had hoped for a little more here.... If I was feeling a tad down, this was quickly alleviated by an odd song in the trees along Island Lake Road: Purple Finch! Taking this for an omen, I decided to take the touristy route home. First stop: Four Mile Lake. And what a fortuitous decision this proved to be – not only was there a nice selection of waterfowl on the lake (among them 2 Common Loons), but I also noted a brown

bird hovering over the cattails on the west side of the lake: a female Northern Harrier! This was certainly making up for the so-so birding along Embury. Next stop: Trinkle Marsh. My main hoped-for species here was Rusty Blackbird, and the marsh did not disappoint. There were some 15-20 Rusties in the trees along Trinkle Road, with several of the males singing. As I was scanning the marsh I realized that in addition to a pair of American Wigeons, there was an amazing number of Northern Shovelers swimming around: I tallied a whopping 23 males and 18 females! Clearly, this must have been one of the highest congregations in Washtenaw County ever. Though I logged 59 miles on this trip, they resulted in 21 new species, so I was quite satisfied when I arrived home.

As hoped for while planning, my morning rides to work via the Arb proved to be great for picking up a broad selection of migrants. From mid-April to mid-May, 42 new species landed on my list, among them Peregrine Falcon (near the Burton Tower), Yellow-billed Cuckoo (the Arb), Northern Parula (near home), and Northern Waterthrush (Dolph). On May 5, I (finally!) managed to locate a Belted Kingfisher, after plenty of effort in appropriate habitat. Suffice to say that by mid-May I was feeling rather optimistic about reaching the higher of the targets I had set, especially since I would be headed out on a BIGBY Big Day with my near-neighbor and fellow ex-pat Laurent Fournier.

May 16: A very early start to the day (4:00 a.m.) had us on our way to a variety of sites in Superior, Ann Arbor, Scio, Lodi, and Pittsfield Townships, as well as Ann Arbor City. In the July/August WAS newsletter I reported on this exhausting but exhilarating day, so for the purposes of this article, let me summarize this day as follows: we pedaled about 55 miles, walked a few more, and tallied a grand total of 114 species for the day. For my big(by) picture, this marathon of birding worked out quite well, too: with Laurent's help, another 27 species found themselves added to the tally, thus getting my BIGBY list past the 150-mark, up to 153. Now, to add 22 more....

May 31: After a couple of weeks of uneventful and decidedly unproductive mornings in the Arb, it was time for a trip out the far west side of the county again. The woods of the Sharon Hollow Preserve and the fields of the Sharon Valley SGA were today's destination, in hopes of adding some of those areas' breeding birds. Another pre-dawn start,

*(Concluded on the next page)*

(BIGBY continued from previous page)

west on Ellsworth, Ann Arbor Saline, and Pleasant Lake Roads. The reward: two singing Dickcissels in a meadow along the way. However, I did not set off early enough to have a go for true night birds like Whip-poor-will, but I did arrive at Sharon Hollow Preserve just after first light. Battling mosquitos, I was greeted by an Acadian Flycatcher, followed by a hoped-for, but unexpected Louisiana Waterthrush. Farther in, a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers was quite vocal, but the preserve's Barred Owls refused to hoot. With more and more birds joining the chorus, I decided to move on, down Prospect Hill Road to the utility cut that leads east from the road. White-eyed Vireo had been reported from here, but in spite of spending quite some time here, there was no sign of this brush specialist, nor any other vireo for that matter. On the way back out, I slipped on a log and had a nasty spill, but apart from a few bruises (and a bashed-in screen on my cell phone) I was okay to continue on to the prairie at Sharon Valley. Several Henslow's Sparrows gave *act de presence* here, but I struck out on finding a Sedge Wren. As I was still missing Grasshopper Sparrow, I opted to bike down Sharon Valley Road and work my way back to Pleasant Lake Road via Meyers Road. A successful strategy as it turned out: as I turned onto Meyers, a medium-sized bird with large white wing panels caught my eye – a Red-headed Woodpecker! Moreover, I was able to connect with several Grasshopper Sparrows as well, so apart from missing Barred Owl I had managed to find every species I had set out for, with Red-headed Woodpecker as an excellent bonus. A quick stop by the Schneider Road ponds did not turn up any late shorebirds, but a half dozen Bank Swallows made for a nice consolation prize. In the end, this day's 55 miles produced 8 more species, so that by the end of May my BIGBY year stood at a very respectable 161, with quite a few possibilities left for getting me to my target of 175, or even beyond!

But alas, missed opportunities and life in general caught up with me. In spite of the occasional morning visit to the Arb, I failed to add any new species to the list throughout late spring and early summer. As July progressed, I resolved to focus on visiting various shorebirding sites, because up until then, I had recorded only 6 species in this

family, four of them during our May Big Day. The weather would have none of it, though, with most of the sites close to town largely flooded, and shorebirding season came and went, leaving me exactly 0 new species. Maybe fall migration would help me some, then? I had a decent shot at a pretty good selection of species that regularly turn up in the Arb during August and September (would it really be too much to ask for a few more warblers?), but found my plans thwarted by family trips to Texas (a good consolation, I'll admit) and the west side of the state. Having thus missed crucial chances during a critical time of the year, I started to lose interest, or, I should say, my motivation failed me. Despite a migrating Common Nighthawk (#162) on September 3, I could not see how I would be able to find more than a dozen additional species to get me to 175, and the will to continue had essentially left me by the end of September.

In the end, I finished my 2010 BIGBY year with 164 species (Green-winged Teal and Sharp-shinned Hawk were the final two), which is obviously a respectable total for a first try. Although I did not keep very good track of the distance I traveled in the pursuit of my BIGBY goals, the five major outings described above add up to some 212 miles. Add to that the 5 miles I biked each way from home to work for months running (not all of them specifically aimed at birding, but you can't help hearing what's out there!), and I conservatively ended up with some 600 miles traveled, mostly by bike. That boils down to a new species for every 3.65 miles traveled. Successful or not, clearly a BIGBY year is good for one's physical health, not to mention better for the environment, which was the stated goal of a much more auspicious effort by a family group back in 2007-2008 (see their blog at <http://birdyear.blogspot.com/>). I was also struck by the sensation of how rewarding birding by bike is *per se* – by its very nature bicycling got me much closer to the natural environment, which struck me as an end in itself, regardless of whether or not I saw any new birds along the way.

Looking over my final list for 2010, though, I am struck by how many species I ended up missing, several of whom I could have added with relatively little effort, it seems. Needless to say, another go in 2011 is warranted, so 175, here I come! (or 200, maybe???) I'll keep you posted. Good birding!

# Putting Up A Nesting Box Is The Best Way To Help Bluebirds

By Kurt Hagemeister

Today, we are lucky to commonly see Eastern Bluebirds in Washtenaw County, especially if we frequent open habitats outside of town. But, this has certainly not always been the case. The plight of declining bluebird numbers in the early and middle parts of the 1900's is well documented. Habitat loss, the use of farming pesticides, and the introduction of invasive bird species (House Sparrows and Starlings) are all reasons that bluebirds were disappearing from many areas.

The good news is that Eastern Bluebird populations in many parts of the eastern U.S. are back to healthy levels again – largely due to the intervention of environmentally far-sighted people. In particular, it was discovered years ago that bluebirds readily accept properly-sized & located nesting boxes in lieu of natural tree cavities or old woodpecker cavities – locations where they would naturally nest. A continent-wide movement organized in the 1970's has brought back the song, color, and charm of the Eastern Bluebird to our yards.

So, how can you bring these beautiful members of the thrush family to *your* property? First, you need to have the right habitat. Bluebirds prefer open, grassy areas to nest in. They require about 1 to 1 ½ acres of open grassy habitat for their territory. And grass lawns actually work perfectly well. This doesn't mean you require that much property to attract bluebirds. It just means between yours and neighboring land, there is enough open space. Not everyone has bluebirds in their neighborhood. But, if you have seen them around, you can probably get them to nest in your yard.

Second, putting up a bluebird nesting box is the next thing you want to do. A bluebird nesting box requires an entrance hole of exactly 1 ½" diameter, a depth from the hole to the floor of about 5 to 5 ½", and a floor area of about 3 ½" by 3 ½". You can either build the house yourself, or purchase one online or at a bird supply store.

Important features of a well-made bluebird nesting box are:

1. ¾" thick wood – either pine or cedar
2. a front or side panel that can be opened to do nest-checks and clean out the box after nesting is completed
3. Ventilation slots or holes near the top to keep the house cooler
4. adequate drainage in the house floor to let water out
5. wood screw construction
6. a wide roof with at least a 2" overhang in front to shelter the entrance hole

It is important to mount the box on a pole out in the open that is about 5 to 6 feet high. It is also important to put some sort of a predator guard on the pole to keep climbing animals like snakes and raccoons from raiding the nest. A cylinder made of PVC or metal, about 6" in diameter, and 24" long works very well. Also, locate the box away from dense cover, woods, and buildings.

Bluebirds may nest several times during a season. So, you can attract them to your nest box any time from March to well into July in Michigan.

If you put up a nesting box, it is critically important to monitor (or check) the box regularly. First, bluebirds are susceptible to predation by House Sparrows – a very highly aggressive, non-native cavity nesting bird. If sparrows claim a nest box, you should remove their nests until they move on. They are persistent, so this may take a while. Go to [www.michiganbluebirds.org/problem-solving](http://www.michiganbluebirds.org/problem-solving) for more information about sparrow control. Second, nest box parasites like blowflies can infest the nest and hurt the young. Checking the nest and removing the blowfly larva will really help the bluebirds' chances. Third, it's useful to know if the nest box is successful or not at attracting bluebirds. If not, you can consider trying a more favorable location next season.

Monitoring is simple and will not cause the birds to abandon the nest. Simply tap on the side of the box, open up the nest box, look inside to see what's going on, count the eggs, check for problems, etc, close up the box, and walk away. Don't spend a lot of time at the box. You should check the box several times a week. And it's a good idea to keep a written record of what happened and when.

Putting up a bluebird nesting box is a rewarding and educational way to learn more about these wonderful birds, and avian nesting cycles in general. Also, showing a nest full of cute nestlings to children is a great way to instill in them the wonder of nature. For more information about bluebird nesting boxes, including downloadable building plans, go to: [www.MichiganBluebirds.org](http://www.MichiganBluebirds.org). Also, for more detailed information about bluebirds, you can go to [www.sialis.org](http://www.sialis.org).

*Kurt Hagemeister is a WAS member who has spoken at past meetings on bluebirds and birdfeeding. Kurt is also a co-founding member and President of the Michigan Bluebird Society. He has been an active "bluebird landlord" for over 12 years in Lodi Township. He can be reached at: [khagemeister@michiganbluebirds.org](mailto:khagemeister@michiganbluebirds.org).*



*This Northern Saw-whet Owl, a species which normally remains hidden, was seen by many local birders as it spent the day in Harold and Artemis Eyster's yard near Dexter on 13 Nov 10. Photo: Harold Eyster*



*Yellow-throated Warbler is rare in the state and usually migrates south by the end of September. This bird arrived in the Eysters' yard on 29 Nov 10 and was present at least through 7 Dec, a new late date for this species in the county. Thanks to the Eysters for letting birders visit their yard to see this rarity. Photo: Harold Eyster*



Several weeks of freezing temperatures had preceded the 64<sup>th</sup> edition of the Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count, and birders were greeted by clear skies and single-digit lows during the pre-dawn hours. As daylight approached, winds from the west picked up, bringing clouds and a rather nasty wind chill. Nevertheless, an impressive total of 61 birders (5 of whom were under age 18) and 4 feeder watchers enjoyed a generally pleasant day in the field. This year's species count of 70 was almost exactly the same as the average for the period 2000-2009 (69.5); the total number of birds counted (32,861) was about 10% below the average for the same period (36,065) - this can to some extent be attributed to the fluctuations in the numbers of American Crows counted, which over these years has been as low as 4,800 to as high as 29,000. Note that this year's tally for American Crow falls almost smack-dab in the middle of that continuum.

Although several uncommon species were noted, none were too out of the ordinary. With the exception of 3 species of waterfowl (Tundra Swan, Northern Shoveler, and Redhead), all species observed were seen on at least one of the three immediately preceding counts. As always, a handful of species posted record high tallies, all of which are noted in the summary below, as well as in the listing of the count results. Interestingly, two of these new records involved species that have been part of reintroduction programs (Trumpeter Swan and Wild Turkey); perhaps with renewed human efforts the Northern Bobwhite can be restored to a more healthy population level. That said, environmental factors in our circle have likely changed to such a degree that this species is now almost certainly gone and will probably not be recorded any time soon (the last Ann Arbor CBC record for Northern Bobwhite was a count week bird in 2000; prior to that, the last record was in 1989).

As mentioned in the introduction, temperatures dipped below freezing in late November and did not climb above the 32-degree mark. As a result, close to 100% of still water was frozen over, with open water largely confined to the Huron River corridor. Oddly enough, though, our counters turned up an amazing 17 species of waterfowl! Swans were well-represented with all three species counted: 47 Mutes, 33 Trumpeter (a record!), and 1 Tundra Swan. The latter was present in Little Lake, which was also home to a Lesser Scaup and one of the two American Coots. A cooperative pair of Northern Shovelers kindly stuck around to be noted on count day – this species turns up about once every five years, more often than not as a pair!

Seven species of daytime raptors was about our average, with more or less average numbers observed for each. Although Red-tailed Hawk got within striking distance of the century mark, to me the half dozen American Kestrels that were recorded was the more notable tally. Although 6 is the 10-year average for this small falcon, results in recent

years have shown a rather dramatic trend towards the species' disappearance from our count (5-year average is 3, and only 1 was recorded on the past two counts). As such, finding a half dozen is a bit of a bright spot – perhaps limited snow cover played a role in some Kestrels staying around?

As mentioned above, the reintroduction effort for Wild Turkey is bearing fruits in our count circle. The 2010 tally of 77 was more than double the previous high count of 37! That said, the species was found in only 2 of 8 count areas, even though they have been observed in at least 4 or 5 of them. This, then, would indicate that the Wild Turkey will continue to be noted in good numbers on the Ann Arbor CBC. Unfortunately, the other galliform species in our area are not nearly doing as well. Northern Bobwhite was last counted in 2000 (a count week observation), Ruffed Grouse has not been observed since 1996, and this year was the first year EVER in the history of the Ann Arbor count that no Ring-necked Pheasants were found. Much like the American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant numbers has been showing a declining trend, so the fact that pheasant was missed should not be too surprising. Perhaps the conversion of vacant lands slated for development to more grassy fields will offer this species a bit of a respite, and we haven't lost this species for good.

I have commented about woodpeckers quite a bit in CBC summaries, and this year will be no exception. Woodpeckers serve as bellwethers for various trends, and as such can serve as indicator species for these trends. For one, the virtual disappearance (since the mid-80s) of Red-headed Woodpecker from our count is clearly an indicator of changes in the landscape; on the flipside, the appearance of our count's first Pileated Woodpecker in 2008 is an indication that woodlot maturation has progressed to the point that this species has started moving out of its traditional strongholds in the western portion of Washtenaw County. Moreover, the Red-bellied Woodpecker has been viewed as one of the lead indicator species for southern species extending their ranges to the north (for example, see the sidebar in Nat Geo's *Complete Birds of North America*). This year's record tally for this species is just another data point in our CBC's bolstering this trend. Finally, the numbers for woodpeckers as a group have been climbing over the years (partly because of increases in Red-bellied Woodpeckers). Perhaps these increases can be linked to the damage being done by the Emerald Ashborer, supplying woodpeckers with large numbers of dead or dying trees. (*See the charts on page 11 for a visual representation of the changes in Red-bellied and general woodpecker numbers.*)

In keeping with the record set by the Red-bellied Woodpecker, several other species associated with the "southerners coming north" phenomenon posted either record highs or very admirable numbers. Eastern Bluebirds were present in record numbers (217), exceeding the previous high of 151 by some 40%! (*Continued next page*)

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Both Tufted Titmouse and Carolina Wren posted decent numbers, some 20% above the 2000-2009 average. Most impressive, though, was the showing of Northern Cardinals – that species eked out a record high, surpassing the previous record from 2007, to set a new high mark to 579 (25% above the 2000-2009 average)!

Apart from this good showing put in by the species listed above, notable ‘performances’ were put in by White-crowned Sparrow (5, another record high) and Northern Shrike (2). On the other end of the spectrum, much like 2009, 2010 was not a year for irruptives, with Red-breasted Nuthatch solidly in the normal range, although Pine Siskins were counted in good numbers, mostly in and near Nichol’s Arboretum.

In the end, 2010 had something to offer for all: several record high counts, some more sobering tallies (or plain misses!), and a few notable species spread around the circle. For a detailed accounting of our results, please take a look at the summary spreadsheet I have included. To put our results in a regional or national perspective, check out the National Audubon CBC website at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/hr/index.html>.

As always, a heart-felt thank you to all volunteers that helped make this year’s count a smoothly run event once again – without you, counters, area leaders, and potluck/feeder watch coordinators, our count would not be as well-oiled a machine as it is. See you all next year!

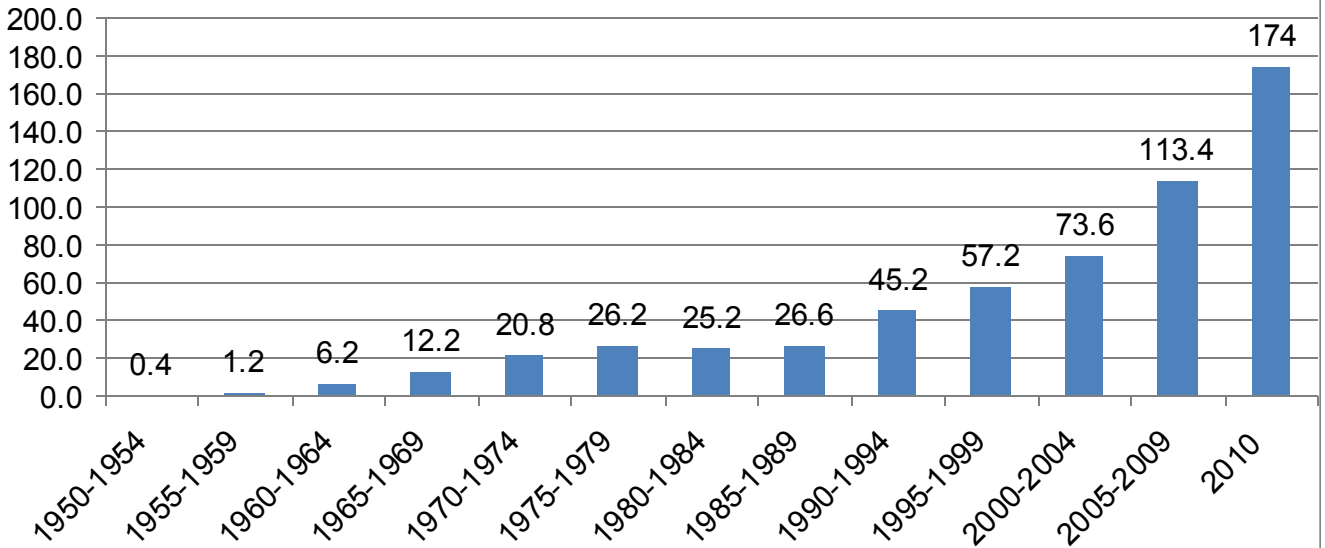
<b>Canada Goose</b>	<b>1817</b>	<b>American Kestrel</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Golden-crowned Kinglet</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Mute Swan</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>Peregrine Falcon</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Ruby-crowned Kinglet</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Trumpeter Swan</b>	<b>33 (HC)</b>	<b>American Coot</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Eastern Bluebird</b>	<b>217 (HC)</b>
<b>Tundra Swan</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Ring-billed Gull</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Hermit Thrush</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>swan sp.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Rock Pigeon</b>	<b>448</b>	<b>American Robin</b>	<b>1993</b>
<b>Wood Duck</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Mourning Dove</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>European Starling</b>	<b>4141</b>
<b>Gadwall</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Eastern Screech-Owl</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>Cedar Waxwing</b>	<b>403</b>
<b>American Black Duck</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Great Horned Owl</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Yellow-rumped Warbler</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Mallard</b>	<b>993</b>	<b>Belted Kingfisher</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>American Tree Sparrow</b>	<b>583</b>
<b>Northern Shoveler</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Red-bellied Woodpecker</b>	<b>174 (HC)</b>	<b>Fox Sparrow</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Redhead</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Yellow-bellied Sapsucker</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>Song Sparrow</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Lesser Scaup</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Downy Woodpecker</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>Swamp Sparrow</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Common Goldeneye</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>Hairy Woodpecker</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>White-throated Sparrow</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Hooded Merganser</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>Northern Flicker</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>White-crowned Sparrow</b>	<b>5 (HC)</b>
<b>Common Merganser</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Northern Shrike</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Dark-eyed Junco</b>	<b>740</b>
<b>Ruddy Duck</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Blue Jay</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>Snow Bunting</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Wild Turkey</b>	<b>77 (HC)</b>	<b>American Crow</b>	<b>15650</b>	<b>Northern Cardinal</b>	<b>579 (HC)</b>
<b>Pied-billed Grebe</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Horned Lark</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>Brown-headed Cowbird</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Great Blue Heron</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Black-capped Chickadee</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>Purple Finch</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Bald Eagle</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Tufted Titmouse</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>House Finch</b>	<b>427</b>
<b>Sharp-shinned Hawk</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Red-breasted Nuthatch</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Pine Siskin</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Cooper’s Hawk</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>White-breasted Nuthatch</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>American Goldfinch</b>	<b>718</b>
<b>Red-shouldered Hawk</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Brown Creeper</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>House Sparrow</b>	<b>721</b>
<b>Red-tailed Hawk</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>Carolina Wren</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>32861</b>

CW = count week only

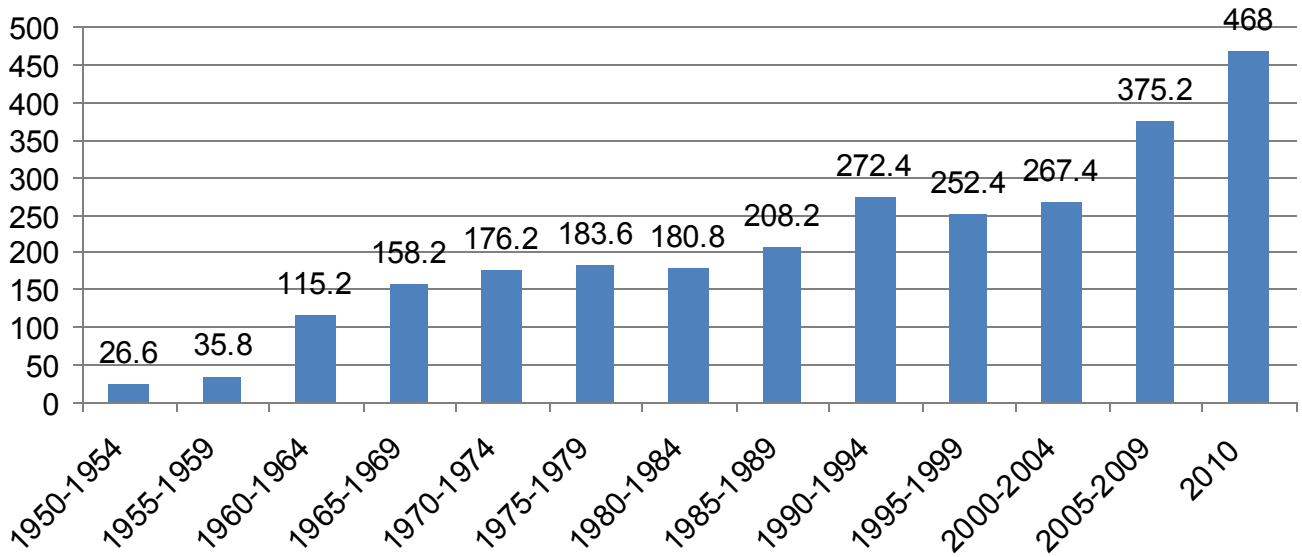
HC = high count

US = unusual species

## Red-Bellied Woodpecker - 5 year averages



## All woodpecker species - 5 year averages



# Upcoming WAS Field Trips (February--April, 2011)

By Monty Brown, Field Trip Coordinator ([fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org](mailto: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](mailto:birders@umich.edu) listserv and/or our web page at [www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php) with updates as needed. If you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send an e-mail.

**February 4–6**      **Winter Birding around Sault Ste. Marie** Leaders: Lathe Claflin and Gary Siegrist

REGISTRATION IS CLOSED

**February 19**      **UM Museum of Zoology, Bird Division** At this event, the manager of the collection of 200,000 preserved bird specimens, Janet Hinshaw, will discuss the activities and history of the bird division and will show participants a small sample of the collection. Space for this event is limited, and pre-registration is required. Washtenaw Audubon members will have priority. Send an e-mail to [fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org) and await confirmation. Please include the name, phone number, and an e-mail address for yourself and anyone else you wish to register. Directions and room information will be sent to registered participants. (10 AM--Noon)

**March 5**      **Owl Prowl** Leader: Ray Stocking The target will be the county's three breeding owl species. The trip will begin at approximately 5 PM and will go for about four hours. Final arrangements will be decided closer to the event date. This will be a driving trip with limited availability; pre-registration is mandatory. Preference will be given to Washtenaw Audubon members. Send an e-mail to [fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org). Include your name and a phone number for yourself and anyone else you wish to add to the list. You will receive a reply indicating your registration status. PLEASE NOTE: In case of bad weather, the backup date will be March 6.

**Thursdays in April and May**      **Weekly Spring Migration Walks in Nichols Arboretum** This is an annual series of Thursday morning walks at Nichols Arboretum to observe migrants as they pass through on the way north to their breeding grounds. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to join with other birders of all skill levels. This season's walks will start on April 7 and go through May 26. Park and meet at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off of Geddes Road at 8:00 AM. The walks go until roughly 11:00, but anyone can join or leave the group as his or her schedule requires.

**April 15**      **Woodcock Walk in Barton Nature Area** 7:45 PM--9:00 PM.

**April 16--23**      **Dominican Republic** Leader: Bryn Martin WAS will be embarking on its 3rd international field trip, this time to the beautiful Caribbean island-nation of Dominican Republic! The biggest draw to birding the Caribbean are the number of endemics on each island and the main focus of this trip will be to see as many of these specialties as possible. Plan on seeing 110-125 species. The trip is limited to only 10 participants and is currently over half-full. To register or for additional information, a detailed trip itinerary, a list of what is and is not included, or list of birds, please do not hesitate to email Bryn Martin at [brynmartin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:brynmartin@sbcglobal.net).

**April 17**      **Waterloo Bog Trail** 8:00-11:00 AM Leader: Dan Sparks-Jackson

*(Gull Trip article continued from pg. 1)*

I.D. Note: Large gulls typically take 4 years to achieve adult breeding plumage; the term “first winter” or perhaps more appropriately “Basic I” means that the gull has undergone a molt in the fall that has replaced the juvenal body feathers. Future fall molts will replace all feathers, but in this first year the gull retains the juvenal tail and wing feathers.

As we continued to search the gulls, another Glaucous Gull soon turned up, this one an adult. Once these had been found, they kept being re-found; their pale plumage and large size tended to make them quite visible.

Finally, as fingers were growing numb and thoughts were turning to a warm van and a hot shower, an adult Lesser Black-backed Gull emerged from the crowd. As the location of a Lesser Black-backed Gull was being described and some in the group were looking at one it initially became apparent through a somewhat comedic discussion that there were possibly two of them. “Okay, it’s just beyond the blue trash, preening.” “No, it’s walking to the right, over there.” “It’s not moving, and I can’t see its legs.” “I see the legs, and they are yellow.” Ultimately when this all got sorted out, the final conclusion was that there were at least three adult Lesser Black-backed Gulls!

Despite feeling as though we ultimately looked at every gull there, no amount of conjuring could bring out a Thayer’s Gull (or any of the other expected unusual gulls such as Great Black-backed or Iceland Gulls). But nevertheless, a four gull species day in Washtenaw County is nothing to sneeze at.

WAS membership renewals will henceforth be done twice yearly (on June 30 or Dec. 31). Your yearly membership will now be due on whichever of the two dates is closest to when your last membership expired. This is being done to simplify the renewal process. By changing dates, you will not lose months to your membership, but you may gain a few.

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  
(with printed newsletter \$25)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Student \$10  
(emailed newsletters only)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Senior \$10  
(with printed newsletter \$15)

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Patron \$50

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, and 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.

- February 16**      **Spring Migration in Veracruz:** Join Michael Kielb for a look at one of the greatest migration points in the world in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. Thousands of birds that winter in Latin America pass through a narrow migration corridor in Veracruz each spring on their way to breeding grounds in the north. Michael Kielb teaches biology at Eastern Michigan University and has made a number of trips to Veracruz during migration.
- March 16**      **Saving Raptors from Landfill Gas Burners:** Join Karen Young for a program on the dangers birds of prey face at many landfills. Landfills provide a wonderful source of prey for raptors, which perch on conveniently placed structures that vent methane gas from the landfill. The birds don't know that these structures are gas burners that will intermittently ignite, causing death or injury to raptors and other birds that use them for hunting or singing perches. Karen Young operates Bird Rescue of Huron Valley and specializes in raptor and other injured bird rehabilitation.
- April 20**      **eBIRD: Make Your Daily Observations Count:** eBird is an online program that pools the checklists of contributors and makes the data available to the global bird community such as ornithologists, various agencies, and conservation organizations. Darrin O'Brien will provide an overview of how to use eBird and will present examples of how he uses eBird to record his day-to-day birding activities and the potential of contributing one's records to this database. Join us and see how eBird can change the way you go birding. Darrin is a licensed bird bander and long-time volunteer for the Rouge River Bird Observatory, has served in various capacities for the Detroit River Hawkwatch, compiles the Clinton Christmas Bird Count and the North American Migration Count for Wayne County.

### Washtenaw Audubon Society

PO Box 130923

Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0923