



WASHTENAW
AUDUBON SOCIETY
NEWSLETTER

March/April 2012

Chile Expedition By Andy Johnson

This past January, Washtenaw Audubon member, Andy Johnson traveled to Chile representing the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Following are excerpts from Andy's blog, Birding Etcetera, primarily from the second leg of his trip in the Yeso Valley. To read the full account and see more photography from his adventures, go to his blog (<http://www.birdingetcetera.blogspot.com>) and photography website (andyjohnsonphoto.com).

I've tried and failed to understand how extremely fortunate I've been to be one of many undergraduates involved in the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's vast array of research and outreach. Most recently, this past January, I had the amazing opportunity to carry out a video and audio expedition to Chile that another sophomore, Hope Batcheller, and I proposed this Fall. We would join Nathan Senner, a Ph.D. student studying the migrations of Hudsonian Godwits, to resight some of our banded birds on their wintering grounds in south-central Chile. But noticing a dearth of recordings and videos from Chile in the Lab's Macaulay Library collection, we figured it would be worthwhile to extend our stay and visit an array of Chile's unique habitats to remedy the situation.

After their first stop working with the Godwits on Isla Chiloé, along with a team of Alaskan shorebird biologists, Andy, Nathan, and Hope headed to the Yeso Valley east of Santiago to film the Diademed Sandpiper-plover.

The Yeso Valley has to be the most incredible place I've ever seen. On this late January evening, the sun drew its last sharp rays across the peaks encircling us, and Andean Condors made their last rounds before going to roost. At over 8,000 feet of elevation, our campsite was on a flat, alpine meadow, nestled among several snow-covered peaks, some of them reaching another 8,000 feet higher still. We were just a few hours' drive east of Santiago, a dense, smoggy metropolis of over 7 million people – but it felt a world away. Because here we were in the company of one of the world's most enigmatic and captivating shorebirds, the Diademed Sandpiper-plover (*Phegornis mitchelli*). Restricted to peat bogs and alluvium in the high Andes, the Sandpiper-plover is

considered near-threatened, due to its small, declining global population and restricted range.



But our lack of knowledge about the basic ecology of this species compounds their vulnerability – and that's what had brought us here. We met up again with Jim Johnson and a crew of Chilean biologists, this time to help out with and shadow their research on this amazing bird. Jim, an Alaskan shorebird biologist who's been studying migratory Whimbrel and Godwits on their Chilean wintering grounds, and Chilean master's student, Andrea Contreras, are working to better understand this species' life history and develop a proactive conservation plan.

(Continued on pg. 4)

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Dear Friends,

It's finally March! Even though it has felt like March for the last three months, we can begin to get excited about the coming of Spring in earnest.

By the time this letter reaches you, we will have already had our first "early spring" outing with a trip to see waterfowl in Washtenaw County, lead by Dea Armstrong. But if you missed that opportunity, there are many more outings to look forward to. On March 31st we will join up with members of the Oakland Audubon Society, under the guidance of Cathy Carroll and Ed Lewandowski, and look for gulls and other species in eastern Washtenaw and Western Wayne Counties. And then there's April, which by any birder's standard is Spring, even if the snow is falling. Beginning on Thursday, April 5th, we launch our annual series of spring migration walks in the Arb. Every Thursday in April and May you will find fellow birders parked and gathered at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off Geddes Road at 8:00am. Even though these are promoted as leaderless walks, truth be told, there is always a leader or two to guide whoever gathers in casual meanderings through the Arb. It's a wonderful way to get to know the birds that pay us a visit in the spring as well as your fellow WAS birders. To learn more about our spring offerings, see the listing in this newsletter or check our website for updates and directions.

Last spring, Don Chalfant found our "Bird of the Year" at Dolph Park on May 10th. Many of you were fortunate enough to catch a glimpse, or maybe even a wonderful view of Ann Arbor's first Kirtland's Warbler in almost 30 years. I was one of the unlucky ones who arrived about 15 minutes too late. If you missed it, as I did, Don's photo graces the home page of our Washtenaw Audubon website (www.washtenawaudubon.org). Better still, dust off those binoculars and get outside! Maybe you'll be the one to find the 2012 "Bird of the Year."

Happy Birding,

Sue Johnson

Dolph Nature Area Help

March 24, Saturday 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Did you know that Dolph Nature Area is home to the only natural lakes in Ann Arbor? The trails running through the park are situated to offer fantastic views for bird-watching and wildlife sighting. Get outside and lend a hand helping cut back invasive shrubs for increased bird watching. Meet at the parking lot on the east side of Wagner Road, between Liberty and Jackson. Please wear long pants and closed-toe shoes. Minors must either be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form if you would like older children to participate on their own. Tools, snacks, and know-how provided. Free. Thanks for your continued efforts and support!

Rare Bird Alerts

Michigan Bird Report

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

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

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, and 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 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. Also, for more detailed information about Bluebirds, you can go to 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.

Good Afternoon potential Crane Counters!

The Annual Crane Count is soon (April 14th, from 6:30 a.m. - 8:30 a.m.). Please let me know if you are interested in counting this year. The system will be paperless and very simple as the International Crane Foundation has partnered with ebird.org to allow for submitting data online. <http://www.savingcranes.org/annual-midwest-crane-count.html> Just let me know if you want to participate this year, and whether you'd like the same or a different location. I can email or snail mail you a map. Thanks!

Anya Dale (anyaaudubon@gmail.com)



(Chile Expedition continued from Pg. 1)

This study began last January during the austral summer, when the upper reaches of the Yeso Valley are spared from constant snow and wind. In this second field season, Jim, Andrea and crew would continue work to find nests, band birds, and evaluate breeding success, all the while hoping to glean something of the refined taste *Phegornis* has for Andean bogs – and exercising their own for Chilean wines.

The particular habitat requirements of the Sandpiper-plover are poorly understood, and the birds inexplicably shun many bogs that appear suitable to the human observer; even their seasonal movements and winter havens remain uncharted. There is however, the suspicion that these birds overwinter in the Valley, contrary to earlier hypotheses that they migrate north and join other populations. This would be a crucial discovery for the species' conservation, as it would indicate very small, isolated populations at even greater risk of local extinction.

Earlier that day, we awoke before dawn to traipse the valley, recording and filming the bird life here: Ground-tyrants, Earthcreepers, Hillstars, Cinclodes and Condors, a menagerie of high elevation specialists. These former figments of my imagination were now flitting before my lens, alive and breathing. And all this, contained within a most stunning and humbling fishbowl between mountains: the Yeso Valley, a product of many millions of years of geology, was towering over me in its apparent permanence, reminding me that all I've ever known is contained within a mere snapshot of time. But of course, this snapshot I was living had another 12 hours of daylight, and we were here to make the most of it.

The crew had split into a few groups and dispersed throughout the valley, revisiting productive sites from the 2011 season in hopes of resighting banded birds and finding new nests. Luckily, one of the first pairs we encountered was kind enough to lead us to the goal – two splotchy, olive eggs nestled atop a small, grassy mound. Spending some time with this pair, I was able to film an adult returning to the nest to incubate, a sequence I had been visualizing over and over since we began planning the expedition months prior.

(Continued on the next page)

White-sided Hillstar



(Chile continued)

Throughout the remainder of our all too brief three days in the Valley, we had many amazing opportunities to shadow this project, filming and participating in the capture and banding of chicks and adults, and searching for nests. We were able to capture some of the first high-definition video of this species, a diverse portrayal of their life histories: adults vocalizing and foraging, incubating nests, brooding chicks, and accompanying fledglings. In the week following our departure for the Altiplano of northern Chile, the team went on to find a staggering 18 nests. The Sandpiper-plover crew's research is just beginning, but already yielding invaluable information that will help direct the conservation of this fascinating denizen of the high Andes.

The early days of Sandpiper-ploverhood



JAS / WAS Soo Trip (February 2nd-5th). *By Gary Siegrist and Lathe Claflin*

The highlights of the combined Jackson and Washtenaw Audubon Society's field trip to Sault Ste. Marie were: Snowy Owls, Sharp-tailed Grouse dancing on leks, Hoary Redpolls (3), Red Crossbills (20 to 30), White-winged Crossbills (there were small flocks around the Soo area), Bohemian Waxwings (150+) in two groupings, Gray Jays (5), Evening Grosbeaks (small flocks scattered around area), Northern Shrike and Rough-legged Hawk were widely scattered south and west of the Soo. We did have 2 dark-morph Rough-leggeds. Pine Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls, Purple Finches and Pine Siskins, were found in good numbers at many/most feeders in the Soo area. Bald Eagles were at numerous locations around the Soo. Red-tail Hawks, American Robins, American Tree Sparrows were found. These birds would be considered unusual for winter in the Soo area by local birders.

What Wonderful Washtenaw Waterfowl! *By Dea Armstrong*

A wonderful morning to be out and while ducks were not as numerous as in previous mid-March outings, they were as diverse. More puddle ducks than usual. Thank you to all who spotted, scoped and drove, and to Sara Toner who ebirded the totals for us. Nice job by all!

Highlights: Trinkle Marsh provided some Rusty Blackbirds and (eventually!) some nice looks at Green-winged Teal. The Northern Shovelers were outstanding and plentiful! Ponds at Tuttle Hill and Textile continue to provide good looks at most of the same species seen far away at Ford Lake. Nice numbers of ducks at Independence Lake. Scouting yesterday also turned up good numbers of similar species on Barton Pond but boaters move the ducks around quite a bit.

Waterfowl List: Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Green-winged Teal, Redhead, Canvasback, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Hooded Merganser, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, American Coot

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (March--May, 2012)

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 web page at www.washtenawaudubon.org/fieldtrips.php with updates as needed. If you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send an e-mail.

March 31 Transition of Seasons in Van Buren (Wayne County) and Superior Townships

Leaders: Cathy Carroll and Ed Lewandowski. At this outing we will join forces with the Oakland Audubon Society to look for gulls and other species found in eastern Washtenaw and western Wayne counties in the late winter-early spring. Meet at the Tulip Tree Picnic Area of Lower Huron Metropark, just down the road in the park from Edison Lake at 8 AM. Bring a lunch or snack and be prepared for weather of any sort. Please note that a \$5 daily fee or a Metropark pass is required for all cars.

Every Thursday in April and May

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. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to join with other birders of all skill levels. This season's walks will start on April 5 and go through May 24. Park and meet at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off Geddes Road at 8:00 AM.

April 14

Weekend Walk in Nichols Arboretum: Leader: Harold Eyster Harold will lead participants in search of warblers and other spring migrants. This will be a great opportunity, especially those unable to attend Thursday morning walks at the Arb. Park and meet at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off Geddes Road at 8:00 AM.

April 28

In Search of Salamanders: Leader: Edwin Sanchez Please join us at Hudson Mills Metropark. Eddie is an expert on these amphibians, and this will be a fun morning turning over rocks and logs to locate some of them. Meet at the Oak Meadows picnic area parking lot located within the park (turn right after the entry kiosk, then your next left into the lot). Expect muddy grounds. In case we end up handling any salamanders, **please do not use any soaps, creams, or detergents on your hands for this morning.** (10AM to 1PM)

Every Tuesday in May

Tuesday Evening Birders: Leaders: Dea Armstrong, Lathe Claflin, Mike Sefton The leaders scout locations and scan bird reports during the day, and then in the evening take the group to where the action is. This is a carpool event, typically with multiple stops. Meet at 6:00 p.m. at the Miller Road/M-14 park-and-ride lot, where everyone will consolidate vehicles for a 6:15 sharp departure. These outings end at dusk.

May 13

Hudson Mills Metropark: Leader: Karen Markey

May 20

Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, NW Ohio: Leader: Karen Markey

The New Michigan Recreation Passport is Great! CHECK YES!

When you renew your license plate this time around, be sure to check YES to get a \$10 recreation passport. The passport is good for the same amount of time as your license plate and the \$10 fee gets you into all 98 state parks and recreation areas (no more need to buy those annual or day passes!).

NABA (North American Butterfly Association) 2012 Counts

In 2012, we plan to run five counts in Washtenaw County and one (mostly) in Monroe. These counts record good numbers of species and individuals seen, but we could do better with more participants and more extensive coverage. (At present, we only include parts of the count circles, largely on selected tracts of public land.) With members' help we could extend coverage and thus provide improved scientific data on butterfly populations—a key environmental indicator. Beginners are always welcome. (However, it should be noted that a few sites require some fairly arduous 'trekking' and 'bushwhacking', but young-at-heart Roger Wykes always manages to do it!)

Spring Seasonal

SW Washtenaw Count, Sunday May 27th; Compiler, Martin Bialecki (kilnfired@gmail.com)

July 4th

SW Washtenaw Count, Sunday July 1st; Compiler, John Swales (jmswales@umich.edu)

Chelsea Count, Wednesday July 4th; Compiler, Roger Wykes ((734)-769-6482)

Ann Arbor Count, Saturday, July 7th; Compiler, Roger Kuhlman (rkuhlman@hotmail.com) or John Swales.

Fall Seasonal

Petersburg-Dundee Count, Saturday August 4th; Compiler, Roger Kuhlman.

SW Washtenaw Count, Sunday, August 19th; Compiler, John Swales.

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

_____ ADDITIONAL DONATION \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Membership Dues:

___ Individual/Household \$25
(on-line only \$20)

___ Student \$10
(emailed newsletters only)

___ Senior \$15
(on-line only \$10)

___ 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.

Please note: *The Matthaei Botanical Gardens now charges for parking at the rate of \$1.20 an hour, enforced 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm. Members of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum will continue to park for free. This fee will bring the Garden's policies into alignment with other University of Michigan venues, and provide revenue to maintain the Gardens. If you arrive at 7:15pm for a 7:30pm Washtenaw Audubon program, you will only have to pay 90 cents to park for the 45 minutes before enforcement ends at 8pm. The parking kiosks accept coins, bills and credit cards.*

- Mar. 21** **Grassland Bird Conservation and Recovery:** Join Shelby Bollwahn for a program highlighting recovery and conservation efforts to protect grassland birds. Grassland bird species such as Henslow's Sparrow, Dickcissel, Bobolink, and Northern Harrier, among many others, are on the decline due to changes in agricultural practices and human encroachment. Shelby Bollwahn is a Conservation Innovation Grant Technician with the Hillsdale Conservation District, promoting grassland bird habitats in southern Michigan.
- Apr. 18** **New Guinea Adventure:** Join Don Burlett for an exciting program on Birds-of-Paradise, jungles, and cannibals as he leads us on a tour of Papua New Guinea. Don will present a portrait of the birds and people of a country that few of us have the opportunity to visit. Don Burlett is the president of the Oakland Audubon Society and an avid world birder and photographer.
- May 16** **Superbirders of Southeast Michigan** (rescheduled from March 21) Ride with Andy Dettling and Jacco Gelderloos as they set the standard for Green Big Years. Using only their feet and bicycles, these Iron Birders have sighted a remarkable number of bird species over the course of the calendar year, in most cases outperforming those birding wimps who have used automobiles in previous big year attempts. Hear their tales of death-defying rides in pre-dawn hours, in rain, snow, and heavy traffic as they work their Big Green Big Years, known as BGBYs!* (*Pronounced "Bigbee.")

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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