



NEWSLETTER

January/February 2016

Results from the 69th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count by Jacco Gelderloos

In my announcement article from early November I speculated about the possible impact the weather in general, and *el Niño* in particular, might have on our count. Well, as I'm looking over the results from our efforts on December 19, 2015, I can only imagine that the mild conditions that dominated southern Michigan during the fall months and into December resulted in a decidedly interesting outcome. With daytime temperatures staying mostly (well) above the freezing mark in the weeks leading up to the count, the scene appeared set for plenty of open water and no snow cover to speak of. What that would mean for the count remained to be seen....

Count day came with temperatures in the 20s, which is where they stayed for the remainder of the day. Overcast skies with little wind turned into overcast skies with ever increasing winds (gusts above 25 mph). Those clouds eventually produced some flurries and even some sleet. I can only imagine these increasingly unpleasant conditions caused birds to hunker down as the day progressed, and prompted observer teams to call it a day.

Speaking of observers, we had an unusually large contingent of nine counters watching their feeders, with several good birds as a result. Turnout of field observers was in our count's usual range of around 60, which continues to rank it in the higher ranges of the state. Looking over the tally broken down by count area, it seems each area turned up several good birds, details of which you can find in what follows. As a whole, the total tally ended up at 71 species (slightly below the recent 10-year average of 72 species), along with an *accipiter* sp., and a count week Merlin. The total number of individuals, 21,699, is about two-thirds of the 10-year average, but in large part that count is heavily dependent on the number of crows that are tallied at the roost located in Ann Arbor. The location of that roost largely determines how many crows are counted, and the *(continued on page 4)*

President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon Society,

As I write these words, it is 9 a.m., January 18, 2016, and it is 9 degrees Fahrenheit outside. Birds are chowing down at my feeders in a furious fashion. They are in need of fuel to make it through another cold, Michigan winter day. As always, in January, like many of you, I try out a few New Year's resolutions.

Here are my Top 10 Birder's New Year's Resolutions for 2016:

1. Bird every day, even for 5 minutes at the window, looking at my feeders.
2. Keep the feeders full!
3. Try to make the birding involve a walk or some form of exercise. I downloaded the Fitbit app to my iPhone, and it is keeping me motivated. Best of all, it didn't cost me anything.
4. Try to bird with friends at least several times a week. Winter months can be lonely, but many birders will go outside anyway despite the cold. Find a friend or more than one to bird with, and you'll fight the winter blues.
5. Bring young people birding. I teach a kids' birding class at Bach Elementary School called Feathered Friends. These kids love the field trips and I love leading them. I need to remember to include these young birders in Washtenaw Audubon events, as well. Even though my own teens want nothing to do with birds right now, other kids love birds. Sigh.
6. Add birding to my normal routine. My husband, Scott, and I walk to a coffee shop almost every weekend, from our home in Westside Ann Arbor. We now wear our bins on every walk (my husband just started wearing his, hurray!). We walk through West Park, listen for Carolina Wrens, and try to find the resident Cooper's Hawk. We occasionally check the Bell Tower area on campus for the Peregrines before heading home.
7. Read about Noah Strycker's record smashing World Big Year 2015. Then read some of his books.
8. Show my thanks for my supportive family, good bins, good friends, and a scope.
9. Support the Audubon Society and other nature oriented organizations, in all possible ways, every day. Protect birds, nature, and natural spaces.
10. Learn as much as I can about birds and nature, and share with others. Bring new birders into our community and help non-birders appreciate our love of birds and birding.

I'd love to hear your top New Year's resolutions, too. You can share yours with me at president@washtenawaudubon.org. Join us on an upcoming field trip or program. There are several listed in this newsletter and it would be great to see you!

As I said last January, it gives me hope that the next time I write this letter, spring will be upon us. I'll continue to hold that beautiful thought in mind.

In the meanwhile, as always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger

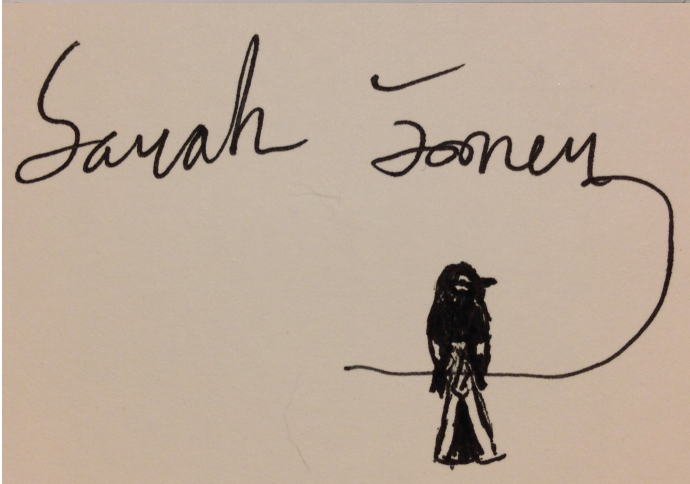


*Northern Shrike, 1/16/16, Sharon Township,
Washtenaw County, Benjamin Hack*

When They Fledge

At the May 2015 program, we celebrated Sarah Toner, graduating high school senior, before she headed off to her summer job at Seney National Wildlife Refuge and then to start her freshman year at Cornell. Sarah herself had something for WAS, and we share it with you here.

Dear Washtenaw Audubon and the Ann Arbor birding community,
 Ten years pass in the blink of an eye. I have old notebooks, written in sloppy handwriting and confusing abbreviations, with lists of the birds seen on the Thursday Morning Arb Walks. At the time, as I recall, I didn't really pay attention to what the birds looked like; I was more focused on writing down the names. Gradually, I began to match images to those names-- the gray bird that Harold Egster led us to was a Golden-winged Warbler, for example. The members of the Washtenaw Audubon Society were always there to help me with tricky IDs and give me advice about birding. I have never met a nicer, more open, or educational group of people anywhere. I cannot express my thanks enough to the people who showed me how to pursue my passion and turned my spark into a flame. All of your influence has changed my life forever. Thank you so much!



Ann Arbor Park Closures

A note to our members: The city of Ann Arbor is closing 14 city parks from 4 p.m. to 7 a.m. on weekdays until March 1, 2016, for deer cull activities. These parks include: Barton Nature Area; Bird Hills Nature Area; Black Pond Woods Nature Area; Bluffs Nature Area; Cedar Bend Nature Area; Furstenberg Nature Area; Huron Parkway Nature Area; Kuebler Langford Nature Area; Leslie Park Golf Course; Leslie Woods Nature Area; Olson Park (the dog park will remain open during regular hours); Ruthven Nature Area; South Pond Nature Area; Stapp Nature Area. All parks will remain open during regular hours on Saturdays and Sundays. Please be sure to check to see if your favorite birding spot is on this list of closures.

Ornithology: An In-Depth Study of Birds Offered Again in 2016!

Dea Armstrong and Francie Krawcke will offer their in-depth bird class again in 2016 starting on Tuesday, March 1, 2016. The class will be held at the updated and technologically advanced Morris Lawrence building, Washtenaw Community College (<http://www.wccnet.edu/about-us/visiting/>), where there is always plenty of easy parking.

Dea Armstrong, retired City of Ann Arbor Ornithologist, will take the lead on the Saturday morning field trips (8:00 a.m. until noon). In past years Dea put all class members on fields of 100+ Lapland Longspurs, Rough-legged Hawks, and Long-tailed Ducks less than 10 feet away. Francie Krawcke, now the Director of Michigan Avian Experience, will co-teach the lectures and support in the field. Francie and Michigan Avian Experience will provide access to a wonderful selection of live raptor species that will allow students close-up observations of live birds.

Ornithology: An In-Depth Study of Birds is a great course for novice and intermediate birders alike. It is also a wonderful place for photographers to learn more about their subjects. The class consists of 8 weeks of Tuesday evening lectures and Saturday morning field trips, beginning on March 1. We understand that you might not make it to all classes and field trips, but we will provide ways for you to cover the information you missed. As in previous years, the class size will be limited to 20 individuals. If you are interested or have any questions, please get in touch with Michigan Avian Experience (734) 347-2637 or fkrawcke@gmail.com. Prospective students can also get more information or register at www.michiganavianexperience.org. Tuition of \$300 is due time of registration.



Snow Goose, 1/3/16, Portage Lake, Benjamin Hack

Results of the 69th Annual Christmas Bird Count

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wild fluctuations in crow numbers closely correspond to the up- and-down swings in our CBC overall bird counts. Per crow counter Dea Armstrong, it was hard to get a handle on the incoming crows this year, which caused the number to come out lower than in (some) years past.

Just like last year, the mild weather leading up to the count was a mixed blessing; to quote my 2014 assessment: “Essentially all bodies of water were open, meaning that waterfowl and other water-dependent birds had many options for feeding and roosting (both inside and outside the count circle).” Indeed, what was true then, held true now. Every last body of water was open, which resulted in some unusual finds in the waterfowl category, but also depressed overall numbers, possibly because ducks simply were able to remain farther north or in places outside of our circle. Fifteen species of waterfowl is pretty much in line with recent results, but among those fifteen were several unusual species: nine Tundra Swans, a Northern Pintail, and two Northern Shovelers were certainly exciting. More worryingly, we found only four American Black Ducks, which is the lowest in quite a few years—let’s hope they were still in areas to our north. We missed Wood Duck altogether, a species that ought to at least be present in the Huron River with the favorable conditions our area experienced. Basically, all goose, swan, and ducks species were present in numbers (significantly) below the recent 10-year average. Bucking this trend was Pied-billed Grebe, which set a new all-time high with seven (previous high was three), and has become virtually annual on our count over the past decade. American Coot set a new high-count as well and came close to hitting the triple-digit mark, which has not happened since the late 1990s.

Somewhat surprisingly, only two Great Blue Herons were found in scattered locations (about a ¼ of the recent 10-year average), but a close to average total of eight Belted Kingfishers were found. Given that both species rely on open water these contradictory results are quite puzzling. If you were present at the potluck/tally, or peeked at the result summary list, you will have noticed that an absolutely staggering total of **320** Sandhill Cranes were found—this number absolutely obliterated our previous high count of 4 (yes, *four*). If that does not suffice to put this year’s amazing number in perspective, perhaps this will: in our 68-year CBC history prior to 2015, Sandhill Crane was turned up exactly *six* times—1987 (1), 1998 (2), 2001 (4), 2004 (CW), 2008 (CW), and 2012 (4). So although they appear to be getting more common, the 2015 total is completely out of the ordinary for our count. Jerry Jourdan, the compiler for the Monroe CBC, also noted the large number of cranes (63) on that count, and per Gary Siegrist, some 2,000 cranes were found during the Waterloo CBC, many of them coming in to the marshes of the Haehnle Preserve. Extraordinary stuff!

Both large raptors, Turkey Vulture and Bald Eagle, posted record counts, with ten vultures and as many as nine eagles (at writing, I’m working on eliminating possible duplicates). The other hawks and falcons were present in near-average or slightly below-average numbers, with the two Peregrines coming close to tying the three American Kestrels for most numerous falcon. Nighttime observers found only two owl species, and in numbers well below the recent average at that: 23 Screech-Owls is only about two-thirds of the to-be-expected number, whereas 5 Great Horned Owls is less than half. It’s not quite clear if these low counts are due to the fact that the owls just weren’t calling, if there was a reduced observer effort on our part, or if the weather adversely affected owling (or all of the above). Only time will tell, and owls have proven to be subject to rather wild swings in recent years. So unless this trend continues, I don’t believe we need to worry about our circle’s owls just yet.

Just like on the 2014 count, a measly two Ring-necked Pheasants were found, and I for one do not think we will ever get back into double-digit tallies for this species, in spite of the continued presence of seemingly suitable habitat. Conversely, Wild Turkeys posted another record tally, with a whopping 168 birds counted in six out of eight count areas in our circle. How long before all eight report them, and how much longer before 200+ tallies become the norm? For some historical context please see the chart on the next page for the progression of Wild Turkey reports in our count circle, from 1989 (first reported) through 2015.

Although its increase is not quite as impressive as that of Wild Turkey, Pileated Woodpecker is clearly on the increase in our circle as well. This year’s trio tied the high count set in 2012, and the fact that these three birds were seen in different count areas indicates that this species is colonizing different areas, and that these birds are not part of a small concentrated population. Other than that, it was a lower than average year for woodpeckers, but given the steady increases we saw in recent years, this was more or less to be expected.

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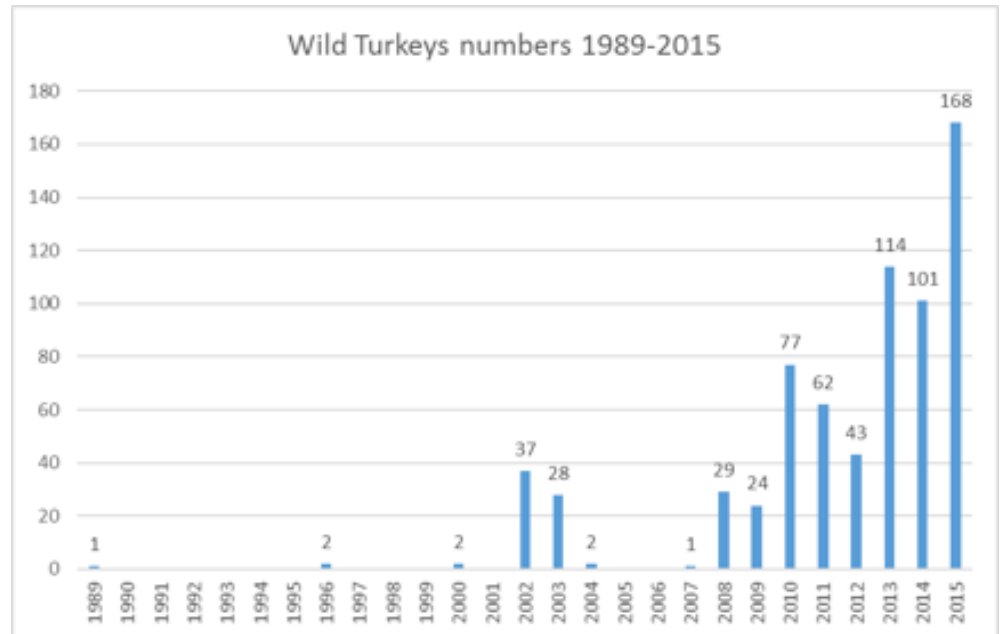
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Newsletter

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The Washtenaw Audubon Society is an active chapter of Michigan Audubon formed in the early 1950s. Monthly programs feature guest speakers on a wide variety of natural history and birding topics. We conduct field trips to places in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and beyond.

Results of the 69th Annual CBC



Kicking off passerine reporting is what I can only describe as the highlight of the 2015 count: Rachelle Roake located our count's first ever record of EASTERN PHOEBE along the B2B trail from Dexter to Hudson Mills Metropark. Per area leader Rob French, this bird was present for some two weeks after the count, providing for a highly unusual record for Michigan CBCs. Without a doubt, the mild weather leading up to the count allowed this flycatcher to survive in our area for as long as it did.

With a small number of minor exceptions (see below), every single songbird species was reported in numbers below the recent 10-year average. It seems that the mild weather meant that quite a few migrants (like White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco) were able to survive farther north and simply were not present in "normal" levels of abundance. Moreover, many birds were not as concentrated in productive areas as they would regularly be due to the lack of snow cover and milder conditions in general. Good news for the birds, not so good for us observers! In many ways, it seems that this year's count was very similar to the one in 2014, when I noted that "[m]any observers commented on the scatter-shot nature of the day's birding: small pockets of lots of activity, followed by large areas devoid of birds."

Our resident passerine species must have been spread out quite thinly, what with all being reported in lower numbers than the mild conditions would lead one to assume. Still, I found it odd that so few of some of the semi-hardy winter birds were found—only one Brown Creeper? Fewer than half of our normal number of Carolina Wrens? Only four Golden-crowned Kinglets, when 21 is the recent average? Pretty odd, all in all, but there may be perfectly good explanations for these low tallies out there. Species that rely largely on berries during the winter months were still down compared to the 10-year average, but nowhere near to last year's depressed numbers.

Sparrow-like birds are always of interest to me, in that the category includes several common species, as well as a number of potential rarities. To start off with the latter: two Fox Sparrows and two Swamp Sparrows were certainly of note. However, the four common/usual sparrows (continued on page 6)

Results of the 69th Annual CBC

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(American Tree, Song, White-throated, and Junco) were, once again, found in numbers from 15 to 50+% below the average. As I speculated above, many of these birds were probably still to the north or more widely scattered in surrounding areas.

Although a blackbird on our count is always of note, for the first time since 1994 three species in the icterid family were turned up, even if only in small numbers. Somewhat oddly, these birds were found in widely scattered locations, not in a single mixed flock as one might expect—each of the four observations was in a different count area!

Finches followed the overall passerine trends. No “winter” finches were found, and the other three species were down by 25 to some 60% over the recent average. Although House Sparrow numbers were pretty much average, it is worth noting that one of our count areas completely missed this species, which most of us would consider a common and hard to miss bird—that just goes to show, you can never tell what you will or will not see when you go out birding!

So where does all this leave us? I dare say that the 2015 Ann Arbor CBC was quite similar to the 2014 edition. Mild weather leading up to the count, loads of open water, and no snow cover in 2015 pretty well mirrored the 2014 conditions. Add to that an average species count and average to below-average numbers for each species, and voilà—there you have it, an average result. If this strikes you as a somewhat negative assessment, that is not what I’m trying to convey. As always, my words about the 2013 edition still ring true and help put my use of “average” in perspective: “That is not to imply that [it] was a bad count—I think it is safe to say that, yes, average means just that, average, but that average can still have some goodies on offer.” Just like we do every time we run our CBC, amazing birds are turned up (Eastern Phoebe certainly fits that bill!), unusual or uncommon birds were spread out nicely throughout our circle, and high counts stirred our imagination, with the Sandhill Crane invasion filling that role this year. And, no matter what, we can all agree that a day spent in the field birding beats pretty much any other day!

I have summarized our finds in the spreadsheet on the WAS website, so take a look at the results of everyone’s hard work. If you would like to read about the outcome of the 2014 CBC on a grand scale, please take a look at the summary article on the National Audubon website: https://www.audubon.org/news/the-115th-christmas-bird-count-0?utm_source=science&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2015-11-17_americanbirds.

This site serves as the interactive version of the “American Birds” magazine of years past, and as such, it provides not only all of the interesting articles and information, but can also link you to much more detailed custom data. It’s very easy to get sucked into for a few hours, and most definitely worth it.

As I’m finishing up, a few words are in order about two long-serving area leaders who have decided to give up that role. After exactly one decade at the helm in area 4, Cathy Carroll will be passing the baton to a new area leader. Her leadership was characterized by solid coverage and excellent reporting. During her tenure, area 4 counters found, to name but one, our CBC’s first record of Bonaparte’s Gull, during the 2012 edition. Thanks, Cathy, for a job well done! To find the first time our second retiree participated in an Ann Arbor CBC I had to go back to the “Fifty Years & Counting” booklet (a history of the first 50 years of our CBC)—on 12/17/1978 Roger Wykes joined the ranks of our CBC volunteers, and after a whopping 37 years as an integral part of our count, Roger has decided to bow out. During those nearly four decades as a CBC volunteer, Roger, along with his late wife Barbara, ran area 3 for more than 20 years, and mentored many of the Ann Arbor area’s young birders. With Roger at the helm, area 3 counters turned up several notable birds, among them the only record for Bohemian Waxwing (per Barb Wykes) and the only record for a hummingbird sp. Thank you, Roger, your contributions will be missed!

Of course, I would be remiss if I didn’t profoundly thank the rest of you, the many, many volunteers that help our count run so well, and guarantee the excellent coverage that we take for granted. Without you there would be no birds to report, no potluck to enjoy, nor would there be yet another important data set for me to enter on the NAS website. The data we collect and report helps determine trends among our winter birds and may just provide the information that helps protect them and their wintertime habitat. So thank you all for that! Hope to see you again in December of 2016!

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (Feb 2016 - April 2016)

Bryn Martin, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free of charge and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For trips with constraints on the number of participants, WAS members are sometimes given priority in registering (again, as indicated). *For trips that require carpooling, minors attending without a parent must bring a written permission statement signed by a parent.* To receive a standard form for this, contact me at the email address above. Also, if you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send it to Bryn at the email address above.

Saturday, February 20 **TBD**

Winter Birding

Check the WAS website or via social media to see the finalized details. Depending upon what is being seen where, the field trip will be structured accordingly. Last year, we visited owls and raptors at Shiawassee in January and then waterfowl, especially the huge numbers of Long-tailed Ducks, at Port Huron in February.

Saturday, March 5 **TBD**

One-Road Challenge

This fun, annual challenge will be held in March this year. Details will be forthcoming, but be sure to check the WAS website or via social media to see the finalized details.

Saturday, March 12 **10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.**

Kensington Metropark Birding

Leader: Bryn Martin

Meet at the Nature Center parking lot for a walk along the trails. Bring a pocket full of sunflower seeds to feed the local chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers. View migrating waterfowl and the Great Blue Heron rookery. We hope to see the resident Sandhill Cranes, newly arriving Red-winged Blackbirds, and Wild Turkeys. Last year we had Bald Eagles! Suitable for all ages and levels, but this is geared toward novice adults and young birders. Minors should be accompanied by an adult. The field trip is free of charge, but there is an admission fee to the Metropark.

Thursdays in April and May (and one at the end of March)

Spring Migration Walks

Join us on Thursday morning, March 31, and Thursday mornings in April and May (April 7, 14, 21, 28; May 5, 12, 19, 26) at Nichols Arboretum to observe migrants making their way north. These leaderless walks are a great opportunity to join with other birders of all skill levels. In addition to the birds, the Arb's trees and other plants offer delights of their own. Park and meet at the Riverview Court cul-de-sac off Geddes Road at 8:00 a.m.; the walks will end around 11:00 a.m., but participants can leave whenever they prefer.

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, P.O. Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	Membership Dues	
Additional Donation \$_____		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> 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 7:30 p.m. at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. **Please note:** *The Matthaei Botanical Gardens 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 park for free.*

February 17 Top Ten Favorite World Birding Destinations

Will Weber, life-long birder, long-time Ann Arbor resident, and founder of Journeys International, offers a personal perspective on his favorite birding destinations in Asia, Africa, The Pacific, and the Americas. Since 1978 Dr. Weber has led more than 100 nature, culture, and adventure group trips around the world, always with binoculars close at hand.

March 16 Birding and Conservation at Hog Island Audubon

Washtenaw Audubon Society members Norka Saldaña and Matty and Benjamin Hack share their adventures at the Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. See www.washtenawaudubon.org for more details.

April 20 Jerry Jourdan on shorebird ID.

May 18 Bill Rapai on invasive species.

June 15 Don Chalfant on his Bird a Day Big Year.

Please go to www.washtenawaudubon.org for more details about forthcoming programs.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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