



WASHTENAW AUDUBON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

May / June 2018

Heritage Trees

by Cathy Theisen, WAS Conservation Chair

In February 2018, MLive.com broke a story that the Washtenaw County Road Commission (WCRC) had received a grant of \$950,000 for some major culvert repairs. This money was earned by designating Mast Rd. in Dexter as a dangerous rural road, which necessitated removal of old growth trees within 10 feet of either side of the roadway. To put it more bluntly, we were getting a grant to fix some major road issues by sacrificing trees that had been growing longer than we had been a country! Heritage trees, indeed! (http://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/index.ssf/2018/02/trees_along_road_near_dexter_t.html)

Many of us who live in Dexter or Webster Township were stunned to hear that our ancient trees, some more than 300 years old, were to be removed because distracted drivers had run into them.

Additionally, a similar project, which includes the paving of Textile Road through the Pittsfield Preserve, was going to result in the loss of a hundred or more trees at that site. I felt blindsided, with little time to react, and wondered why the WCRC hadn't notified us they planned to drastically change and degrade our natural habitat. It turns out there was quite a rush to get the trees down by March 31, to ensure that the two species of endangered bats in our county would not have returned to their roosts from winter hibernation. The National Traffic Safety Board (NTSB) actually has data that suggest the narrower a roadway is, the slower people will drive. If you are going to remove fixed objects, like trees, you need to remove them in a 20- to 30-foot area next to the roadway, which will make people feel safer driving faster; which would seem counterproductive to safety on a rural road. In this case, our WCRC decided to remove trees up to 10 feet from the roadway, but doing nothing *(cont. on page 3)*

President's Letter

Hello Washtenaw Audubon!

Greetings from the other side of peak warbler migration. As of this writing, the May Count is a wrap. A day of severe thunderstorms, rain and sun, produced some rarities, and both record high and low numbers. We are working on compiling, with just a few townships left to finalize. David Amamoto (we know him as our official/unofficial photographer at most WAS events) has been a huge help to me in redesigning the May Count to an entirely eBird-based system, which makes compiling a snap. Stay tuned for a full report on the 2018 May Count in the summer issue of this newsletter.

Other news of note, this week, the third week of May, the Matthaei Botanical Gardens Ruby-throated Hummingbird, was finally freed. Most of us know she spent the whole winter and most of the spring in the conservatory, probably having accidentally slipped in there in the fall for a sip from a tempting blossom. Heidi Trudell and Selena Creed noticed her there this winter, though Matthaei staff apparently knew for weeks or months. We had a flurry of activity with photographers trying to get a diagnostic picture, and efforts to put up feeders. The Matthaei staff took great care of her, and this week they removed a couple of roof panels and she slipped out. There is a video posted on our Facebook page if you'd like to see the happy event. We wish her well on her journey!



Get out there and enjoy some more birds this summer. Spring migration may be winding down, but breeding birds are just beginning. I'll be out there, with many of you, doing breeding bird surveys for Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation (NAP), and for WAS too, at the annual Stinchfield Woods Survey, led by Karen Markey and Mary Wise. Please, volunteer for this event and learn more in the Field Trips section of the newsletter and on our Web site (www.washtenawaudubon.org). Also, we will have a Butterfly Walk on July 15, with leaders and location to be announced on our web site, soon!

I hope to see many of you there, by a trail intersection with a map in hand, listening to a Hooded Warbler's emphatic song.

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger

[Photo credit: Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Carol Poulos]

Heritage Trees

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to improve safety. A confusing mishmash of trees were marked for removal, some farther than 10 feet, while some closer trees were left. And, of course, all the power poles in the ten-foot safety zone were left, functionally presenting the same fixed object hazard as a tree might.

<https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2018/2/2/forgiving-design-vs-the-forgiveness-of-slow-speeds>

Because these were old growth trees, citizens recognized that they were literally irreplaceable, not that the WCRC had any plans to even plant saplings in their stead. Below is an excerpt from a letter WAS sent to all the commissioners and presented at the Webster Township meeting:

“WAS is very concerned as to whether the Road Commission has done any environmental impact studies on the plan to take down mature trees along Mast Road? Aside from the aesthetic and historical value of our rural roadways, WAS is concerned about the native wildlife species that use these mature and increasingly rare trees as homes. I presume most interested citizens are aware of the overall declining number of bees, and their multi-billion-dollar role in U.S. Agriculture. One of the problems in many parts of the country is deforestation and loss of old growth trees, such as those along Mast Rd. A number of bees once found in Michigan are now absent. One example is the rusty-patched bumblebee, which has not been seen here since 2000. It is now listed as an endangered species. I am personally aware of a hollowed-out tree on private property at Mast/Gregory that periodically holds an active beehive; I’m sure it’s not the only one of these old growth trees with cavities that house bee hives.

<http://msutoday.msu.edu/news/2017/new-discovery-more-bees-mark-michigans-first-full-bee-census/>

Our next species of concern has to be bats, which are currently suffering worldwide population declines due to White Nose Syndrome. Eight species of bats occur in Washtenaw County, and all of them are known to periodically use old growth and mature tree hollows for roosting and reproduction. Three of them—the eastern red bat, the hoary bat, and the silver-haired bat—are known to roost in trees exclusively, often preferring edge habitats. When cold weather arrives, they migrate to warmer climates, and will be returning to Michigan in March or April. Of our Washtenaw County bats, the evening bat is a threatened species, with the northern long-eared and Indiana bats being Washtenaw’s only endangered mammals. We now know, per the Road Commission’s literature, that this plan is specifically being pushed through to get these trees out before the endangered bats return and thus halt tree removal. Have we done any studies on what the destruction of these bat roosts will be to our county’s only endangered mammals?

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-10370_12145_12205-70016--,00.html

Lastly, we are concerned with our county’s many federally protected birds of prey that often nest in mature trees of some height, or in the cavities that are found in such trees. Bald Eagles (SC=species of special concern), Osprey (SC), Red Shouldered Hawks (T=Threatened), Red Tailed Hawks, Broad Winged Hawks, Barred Owls, Great Horned Owls, Screech Owls, and Saw Whet owls are all known to breed in Washtenaw County. Barred and Great Horned Owls, specifically, would already be on their nests and brooding eggs by February. Additionally, Red-Headed Woodpeckers (SC) and Cerulean Warblers (T) are known to breed in large, old growth trees.

We respectfully request time for an environmental impact statement, and ask for real consideration for other safety measures that might preserve these old growth trees. We support the lowering of the speed limit, placement of guardrails, speed bumps, traffic lights at more frequent intervals, and the use of reflectors on trees close to the road. Surely we can reach a compromise between human safety needs and the preservation of our natural heritage?”

Over 2,000 residents signed petitions to save the old growth trees, realizing it meant we’d have to look for other ways to fund the real target of the grant money, the replacement of aging culverts. In a somewhat lukewarm victory, the WCRC did return funds from a second grant for 2019 that would have taken down

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DEAD BIRDS

If the birds at your feeder,
So nice to peruse,
Into a window
Unwittingly cruise,
Or you happen upon
Some avian prize
Who met with some other
Untimely demise
Such as a car
Which flattened its skull,
Or the jaws of a cat
In which it was mauled.
Then pack the remains
Into a bag
And place in the freezer
Along with the Hag.
This keeps it from smelling
And turning quite rank
(My mother would have killed me
Had I pulled such a prank).
But don't fricassee it
Or place in a stew,
The feathers are messy
In all of that goo.
And it's rather unnerving
To look in the pot
And see floating eyeballs
Where you wish they were not.
So take my advice
And save much ado,
Just call the museum
They'll know what to do.
They'll skin it and stuff it
And tag it and more,
For when they're all done
It goes in a drawer
Where scientists, children,
And, yes, even you
Can examine and fondle it
All the day through.

If you have such a corpse and wish to get rid of it before either the law or the smell catches up with you, contact the bird division of the Natural History Museum and ask for Janet Hinshaw (764-0457).

-SHH

Board Members

President

Juliet Berger
president@washtenawaudubon.org

Vice President & Programs

Mike Sefton
vp-programs@washtenawaudubon.org

Treasurer

Ellie Shappirio
treasurer@washtenawaudubon.org

Secretary

Dana Novak
secretary@washtenawaudubon.org

Membership

Jessica Adamczyk
membership@washtenawaudubon.org

Field Trips

Bryn Martin
fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org

Conservation

Cathy Theisen
cathythetvet@comcast.net

Education

Open

Stewardship

Taylor Myatt
myattts@miamioh.edu

Webmaster/Technology and Social Media

Rob French
rwfrenchjr@comcast.net

Past President

Sue Johnson
Suejohn62@gmail.com

Board Member/Bird Rescue

Sherri Smith
grackle@umich.edu

Newsletter

Nancy Davis
newsletter@washtenawaudubon.org

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.

More about Dead Birds

The poem on the opposite page is from 42 years ago. It appeared in the May/June 1976 edition of the Washtenaw Audubon Society newsletter. It's as relevant today as it was then.

WAS members Heidi Trudell and Alice Elliott have an updated message for members: "If you find such a corpse and wish to get rid of it before either the law or the smell catches up with you, please collect it in a Ziploc bag including the date, location, cause of death, and your contact info. Then contact Janet Hinshaw at the Bird Division of the Natural History Museum at [734-764-0457](tel:734-764-0457).

Did you know that windows kill up to 998 million birds per year? You can make your windows safer for birds by placing decals spaced every 2 inches in rows or 4 inches in columns (see below). See more solutions at <http://bit.ly/1Y1Qngr>. If you wish to be a part of a coordinated effort to collect bird specimens, particularly those who have hit windows, please contact Alice Elliott (aliceell@umich.edu) or Heidi Trudell (heidi@bigbendnature.com).

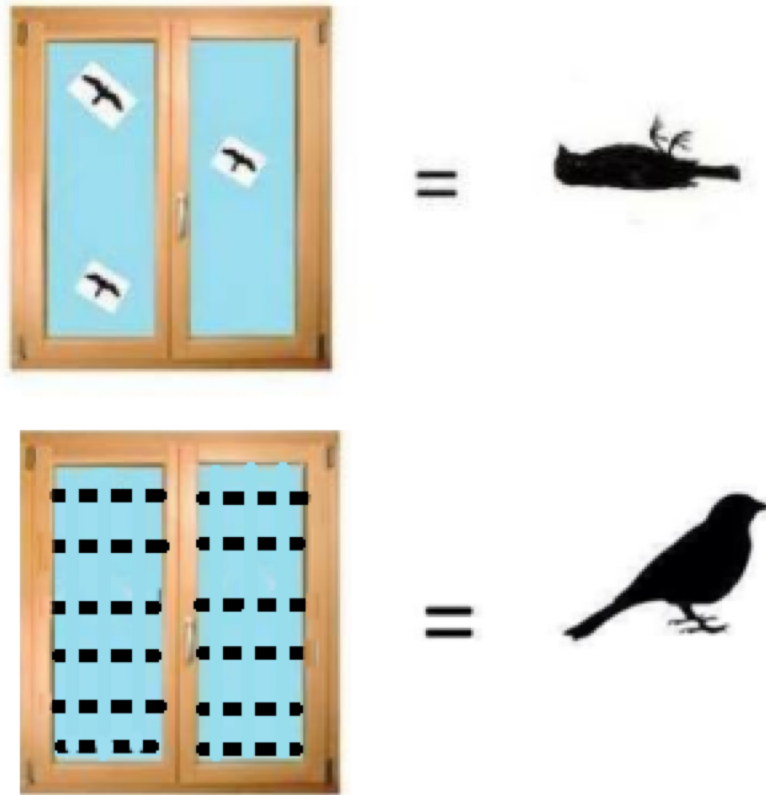


Image credit: Rose Marie Menacho

SAVE THE DATE

Saturday, August 18, 8:00 a.m.

Driving Tour, Shorebirds, and Waders at Pointe Mouillee State Game Area
Leader: Jim Fowler

Registration will begin on August 1. The registration email address will be posted at that time. Priority will be given to WAS members and those who did not attend last year. Please see the WAS Web site for more details.

Heritage Trees

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hundreds more trees along Territorial Rd. from Spencer Rd. to Huron River Dr. In the below letter to citizens, the WCRC makes clear that they intend to continue to pursue funding opportunities like this, so the battle is just beginning.

“This winter we embarked on two safety projects that included tree removals on Mast Road in Webster Township and N. Territorial Road in Northfield and Salem Townships. As you may know there has been a lot of attention on these projects. We have heard from some residents in favor of the work but many others who are opposed to the removal of trees. We have heard these concerns and take them seriously. But we also take safety very seriously. We believe these are good projects that will make our roadway safer. But we understand that Washtenaw County residents have some real concerns about the way these projects were carried out. Yesterday afternoon, the Road Commission Board decided to take a step back. They decided to turn-back a 2019 safety grant for a similar project on a section of N. Territorial Road; we were awarded this grant earlier this year. This action does not mean we are giving up on this type of project forever, trees that are too close to the road continue to be a great hazard to the traveling public. This action does mean that we are reviewing our community engagement strategies and will be making some adjustments to be better partners with our citizens.”

Looking forward, WAS is cooperating with other concerned partners in attempts to levy some oversight on our now autonomous road commission, which seems out of step with the values of the residents of these semi-rural areas. As of this writing, 450 trees have been lost forever, and it seems unlikely we’ve done anything to improve safety on these roads. As your Conservation Chair, I welcome any thoughts /constructive solutions you might have as we gear up for further discussion with the WCRC. Email at cathythevet@comcast.net

And for more about the controversy, listen to The Green Room episode: Washtenaw County’s Big Trees Controversy hosted by Barbara Lucas: <http://wemu.org/post/green-room-washtenaw-county-s-big-trees-controversy>



Upcoming WAS Field Trips (June 2018 – August 2018)

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.

Friday, June 1, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., NAP Bird Walk, Argo Nature Area

Saturday, June 9, 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., NAP Grassland Bird Walk, A2 Landfill/Wheeler Service Center

Join leader Juliet Berger on these NAP-sponsored walks. For more information, please go to <https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/NAP/birds/Pages/default.aspx>.

Saturday, June 2, 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Stinchfield Woods Annual Breeding Bird Census

The Stinchfield Woods breeding bird census is an annual survey of elusive species breeding within the 777-acre Stinchfield Woods, located at 9401 Stinchfield Woods Rd., Pinckney, MI. Typical birds found at Stinchfield include Pine and Black-throated Green Warblers, Blue-headed Vireos, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Hooded Warblers, Ovenbirds, and Acadian Flycatchers. This survey is mostly a hearing event so birders with a keen ear are especially needed, although all birders are welcome to participate. Please email Karen Markey (ylime@umich.edu) and Mary Wise (auntyem@umich.edu) to RSVP for this event or for more details.

Saturday, June 16, 9:00 a.m.

Prothonotary Paddle

We have up to nine singing males of the beautiful Prothonotary Warbler along a stretch of the Huron River in Hudson Mills and Delhi Metroparks. They are best viewed from the water, and there are always a large variety of other birds to see on this float trip. The trip is 8 miles long, and usually takes about 3 ½ hours to complete. We will have a picnic spot picked out that is approximately halfway. Bring your own picnic and beverages. Book your own boat(s) for the “Hudson Mills to Delhi Metropark Long Trip” directly from Skip’s Canoe Livery <http://paddlethehuron.com/services-rates/> and review the details on their site, being sure to select the 9:00 a.m. option on June 16th. You will need a park pass (\$10) for any car that is delivering boats to Hudson Mills. Please let Bryn Martin know ASAP if you are bringing your own boat, so we can work out shuttling logistics. See the WAS web site for many more details.

August 17, 18, 19: Swift Nights Out

Please see more details on the WAS web site as the date approaches.

Tuesday, August 28: Tuesday Evening Shorebirders

A special Tuesday Evening Birders event! Please see more details on the WAS web site as the date approaches.

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.*

June 20 Dolph Park, Ann Arbor's Other Birding Hotspot

Join the inimitable Don Chalfant for a program on one of Ann Arbor's best birding spots. A west side park with some of the same attributes as the University of Michigan Arboretum, but with the advantage that it can be birded in less than an hour, Dolph Park has lakes, rolling hills, a marsh, and varied tree and plant life, which draws a good variety of spring migrants. Don has birded Dolph for many years, and found the first Washtenaw County record of the rare Kirtland's Warbler there a few years ago. Don is a retired Ann Arbor Public Schools teacher who lives and birds in Ann Arbor, and annually migrates to his winter home in Florida.

There are no scheduled programs in July and August. Please join us on our field trips this summer, and please check the WAS web site for more about field trips and programs.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

P.O. Box 130923
Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0923