



NEWSLETTER

September / October 2019

Birding Ghana with Washtenaw Audubon

Bryn Martin, WAS Co-Chair, Field Trips

Birders do many crazy things just for the chance to see a bird. Drive for hours and hours, brave the hottest heat and the most freezing cold, wake in the middle of the night to listen to chirping birds flying overhead... But on Washtenaw Audubon Society's most recent international field trip, I was struck by this fact once again. For WAS's 8th international trip, we visited the western African country of Ghana (August 12-21, 2019). One of the top targets for most birders here is a very unusual and unique bird called either the White-necked Rockfowl or Picathartes. For many international birders, this is the number one reason to go birding in Ghana. There are only a handful of countries in Africa where one could find Picathartes and Ghana is by far the country of choice, based on a variety of factors including safety and infrastructure.

Seeing the Picathartes is not easy. It is not only rare and habitat-specific, but during the day it skulks silently on the rainforest floor. One must go to their evening roosting spots if one has any sort of chance of seeing the bird. But the birds are very regular. Get to the roosting spot near evening, you will most likely see the bird. If one was to go directly to the Picathartes roosting site from the capital city of Accra, it would be a multiple-hour car ride on mostly unpaved and bumpy roads. You then park the vehicle and head out on a trail into the rainforest. (The local birding company we used was Ashanti Tours and a portion of all of the money they make goes to this village as thanks for protecting this area and these birds and allowing travelers access.) We hiked into the rainforest for over an hour, much of it uphill, enjoying the humidity and occasional bugs. Happily, when we got to the roost-site (a hollowed-out cave in the side of the hill), there were benches for us to sit on as we waited for the guests of honor to return. But I haven't even gotten to the crazy part...

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President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon,

Lately, I've been thinking about empty nests. Autumn is here. Birds wing their way across the sky by day and by night, leaving their nesting grounds for a warmer climate in which to winter. Lots of empty nests become visible this time of year as leaves fall, revealing their hiding places. The last Arb walk of September showed me a few new nests, including one muddy, straw-bound Robin's nest, and one tiny Goldfinch cup nest. This evidence of breeding birds left behind, shows another side, a more sentimental side, the past of the birds that raise young in our area. Their abandoned homes show us the ghosts of the birds we know, though they are gone.

At home, empty nests fill my thoughts as I confront my own nest, the nonpreferred, empty one. Both of my children have left the nest, residing at colleges near and far, and I'm still getting used to it. Our daughter came home for a visit last weekend, filling our nest again with her bright presence. Our son flits in occasionally. I'm striving to acclimate myself to this taking in and letting go. So it is with the seasons of migratory birds and children.

Join us Thursday mornings through the end of October for our weekly Fall Migration Walks through the Arb. The Big Sit is coming up on October 12, and Don Chalfant will be there waiting for us to arrive, to find more birds and bring more cookies. Look for additional fall field trips coming soon on our website as we welcome our new Field Trip Co-Chair, Matthew Spoor (<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/events/eventlists/fieldtrips>). Matt comes to Ann Arbor from Grand Forks, North Dakota, and brings a wealth of bird knowledge and enthusiasm for getting out and exploring new places. We are fortunate to have his help with our field trips. Bryn Martin, our longstanding Field Trip Co-Chair will continue to work on our International adventures, assisting with local trips, as well. Catch the program Bryn will present on the latest WAS International Trip, to Ghana, Wednesday, October 16, at 7:30 p.m. at Matthaei Botanical Gardens.

I hope to see you by the woods, near the river, and wherever warblers decorate our world.

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger



Olive-sided Flycatcher, Juliet Berger

Birding Ghana

(continued from page 1)

We had to sit silently and still because if the birds got spooked as they were coming in, apparently, they would fly off and potentially not return until after dark. So, we sat and daydreamed. An hour passed. Okay, that was long... We got to two hours. This is when I started laughing in my head at this hobby. Who else chooses to just sit for two hours straight, not talking and not moving? We then approached three hours! How long could a birder sit still to see one bird? On the level of crazy, where does this rank? It was starting to get dusky out and I genuinely began to wonder what we would do if we missed this bird. Nature is never 100% guaranteed...

Finally, at about the three-hour mark, one *Picathartes* made an appearance. It's very hard to describe this bird if you have never seen one. (You are better off googling a photo or attending my talk in mid-October to see a picture.) Picture a long, thin bird the size of a crow or chicken. White belly, black back. Its head is bald-black in the back and yellow in the middle. Bizarre. *Picathartes* are a bird-family unto themselves, with no close relatives. The bird bounded in from the rainforest, hopping like a kangaroo. Happily, we ended up with great looks. It was within yards of us. The photographers in our group snapped a few shots. Once we were all satisfied with our looks, we began the trek back through the rainforest (now in the fading light). Was the looong wait worth the sighting of this one bird? I'll let you be the judge of that.

Of course, *Picathartes* were not the only birds we saw on this trip. We ended with over 300 species. We saw 4 species of beautiful Bee-eaters (including the stunning Black Bee-eater), 8 species of Hornbills (including the monstrous Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill), 10 species of colorful Barbets, 3 species of incredible Turacos, the Rufous-sided Broadbill, 16 species of the plain-looking but very diverse Greenbuls, the unique Oriole Warbler, 7 species of glossy Starlings, 17 species of colorful Sunbirds (Africa's version of the hummingbird), 15 species of finch and many, many more.



As far as mammals go, Ghana is not known for the animals typically seen on savannah safaris. We saw a few species of antelope and a few species of monkey, including baboons who were always lurking around one of our accommodations looking for an opportunity to steal something from us. The big mammalian highlight of the trip was the African Elephant. Most people on this tour had seen wild elephants, but not like this. Ghana is known for having elephants who are conditioned to having humans near them on foot. I could not believe how close we were to a gigantic bull elephant while on foot, nothing between us except one of the national park's rangers. Cool experience.



One of the best parts of birding, for me, is where it takes you: the places you have to visit in order to see new and unique birds. We visited a wetland strewn with garbage along a busy road that was chock-full of birds. We braved Africa's only canopy walkway to see the birds at the top of the trees. We visited African villages that would be off most tourist's routes because there happened to be special birds in their area. We fought sweat bees, tsetse flies, and biting ants. We took the opportunity to visit the Cape Coast Castle, the final stop in Africa for many slaves before they were shipped off to the Americas.

One of the other best parts of birding are the people you get to spend your time and your hobby with. We had a great group who had a lot of fun together. Hopefully, you will be able to join us on another upcoming international birding trip. Please attend the WAS program in October to hear more about this trip and to see pictures of many of the species we saw.

Many thanks to Mike Sefton for sharing his extraordinary photos from the trip. Page 3: Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill; Ghana Crew and Guide. Page 4: Red-throated Bee-eater; African Elephant; Warthogs; Dark Chanting-Goshawk; Ghanaian woman.



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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.

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (October 2019 – November 2019)

Matthew Spoor, Co-Chair, Field Trips (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)

Thursdays, through October 31, 8:00 a.m.

Fall Migration Walks in Nichols Arboretum

Every Thursday morning through October 31, participants will gather at 8:00 a.m. at the end of the Riverview Drive cul-de-sac (off Geddes Road) near the eastern edge of the Arboretum to observe fall migration at the Arb. The assembled birders will choose a route or routes and head out in search of migrants, many of which will be in their first-year plumage. 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. **NOTE:** There will be a Saturday morning Arb walk on October 19. See below for details.

Saturday, October 12, 2019

The Big Sit (Independence Lake County Park)

This is a low-key international competition that Don Chalfant has organized and participated in for the past two decades. The task is to try to identify by sight or sound as many bird species as possible while remaining in a circle of 17 feet in diameter. The timing can be completely flexible. You can arrive before dawn to join in the owling or you can come after breakfast, in the afternoon—whatever works for you. It is also a great outing for those with restricted mobility since everything takes place in a fixed spot. For those staying for any significant amount of time, we recommend bringing food and a chair, in addition to your binoculars. (Rain date TBA. If bad weather is projected, be sure to check the WAS Facebook page. This decision will be made by 4:00 a.m.) Location is a grassy knoll approximately 300 yards from the main entrance to the park. There is a \$6.00 entrance fee for Washtenaw County residents, and \$10.00 for non-residents unless you have a Washtenaw County Parks Pass.

Saturday, October 19, 2019, 8:00 a.m. to whenever

October Big Day beginning at Nichols Arboretum

Global Big Day has become a May tradition for tens of thousands of eBirders: 24 hours to put your favorite spot on the global birding stage. Last year eBird couldn't wait a full year between Global Big Days, and October Big Day was born. On 19 October, October Big Day is back! Can we beat last year's total species count of 6,331 globally, 634 USA, 187 Michigan, and 76 in Washtenaw County on a single October day? We will kick things off with a nice walk at Nichols Arboretum at 8:00 a.m. until around 11:00 a.m. Afterwards, for those that would like to continue the Big Day, we will decide where to go from there. Navigate to the cul-de-sac at the end of Riverview Drive (off Geddes Ave. near the east end of Dow Field).

Saturday, October 26, 2019, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Hawk Watch at Lake Erie Metropark Boat Launch

During the autumn months, the lower Detroit River becomes a corridor for the passage of migratory birds and has gained international recognition for the annual volume of birds of prey. Hundreds of thousands of migrating hawks, eagles, falcons, and vultures are concentrated at this location where it is possible to systematically count them each year. Join us and witness kettles of Red-tailed Hawks and Turkey Vultures, Rough-legged Hawks, Northern Goshawks, Sharp-shinned Hawks, Bald Eagles, and Golden Eagles. We will carpool from the Park & Ride at exit 175 on I-94 and Ann Arbor-Saline Road where we will depart at 9:00 a.m. sharp. Or you can navigate directly to the boat launch at Lake Erie Metropark where we will meet at 10:00 a.m. There is an entrance fee of \$10.00 if you do not have a yearly pass.

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Summary Report for 2018-2019	
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES	
<i>Year ended June 30, 2019</i>	
REVENUES, GAINS AND OTHER SUPPORT	
Member dues	\$ 3,255
Gifts, unrestricted	932
Gifts, restricted (Chimney Swift Fund)	2,000
Contributions in kind - Loates "After Audubon" Prints	2,900
Interest earned	279
Sales of merchandise	40
TOTAL REVENUES, GAINS AND OTHER SUPPORT	\$ 9,406
EXPENSES	
Newsletter and brochure costs	\$ 2,088
Stipends	1,200
Grants made	1,000
Insurance	688
Program expenses	422
Searle property expenses	126
Other operating expenses	284
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 5,808
RESULTS FROM OPERATIONS	\$ 3,598
NET ASSETS AT BEGINNING OF YEAR	\$ 155,707
NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR	\$ 159,305
STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL POSITION	
<i>As of June 30, 2019</i>	
ASSETS	
Cash in checking account	\$ 7,860
Savings in money market account	13,105
Savings in certificates of deposit	30,000
TOTAL CASH AND INVESTMENTS	\$ 50,965
Bernard Loates "After Audubon" prints	\$ 2,900
Searles property	86,940
Wing property	18,500
TOTAL PROPERTY	\$ 108,340
TOTAL ASSETS	\$ 159,305
LIABILITIES	\$ -
NET ASSETS	\$ 159,305

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (Oct 2019 – Nov 2019)

Matthew Spoor, Co-Chair, Field Trips (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 (as indicated). We enthusiastically encourage and welcome people with no experience. We will always have extra binoculars for those that need them. Please check the WAS website or Facebook page for updates, additions, and directions. All trips are rain or shine unless otherwise noted.

Saturday, November 2, 2019, 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Volunteer Stewardship Day at Searles Nature Preserve

Come join Washtenaw Audubon’s volunteer stewardship crew as we care for our Searles Nature Preserve. This natural gem in Augusta Township gives nature lovers a quiet place to visit and enjoy a secluded hike. We’ll be focusing on maintaining trails and clearing invasive shrubs at this event, so please bring saws, loppers, pruning shears, and any other tools that may be helpful for clearing brush. If you don’t have any of these tools, don’t worry, we’ll have extra. Dress for the weather. Park along Bolla Rd., approximately 1/4 mile west of Stony Creek Rd. in Augusta Twp. Hope to see you there!

Saturday, November 9, 2019, 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Weekend Walk for Birds at Matthaei Botanical Gardens

Join us as we explore one of Washtenaw County’s top birding hotspots with nearly 150 species reported this year. We will enjoy the autumn scenery and fall birds with the beautiful backdrop of the gardens at Matthaei. The gardens are located at 1800 N. Dixboro Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105. We will meet in the parking lot in front of the gift shop. There is no fee to enter the gardens, but parking is \$1.80 per hour with \$5.00 maximum.

Sunday, November 17, 2019, 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.

Weekend Walk for Birds at Barton Nature Area

Please join us for a wonderful weekend walk around Barton Pond and surrounding woods. Expect a nice variety of birds including waterfowl, passerines, and raptors, if conditions are right. We will meet in the Barton Nature Area parking lot off of West Huron River Drive, just north of Bird Road.

Saturday, November 23, 2019, 8:00 a.m. to noon

Belle Isle State Park (with Oakland Audubon Society)

We will once again join forces with Oakland Audubon for this annual trip to Belle Isle. Waterfowl abounds and other species lurk in the woods and along the shore. Meet in the parking lot at the Nature Center on the east end of the island at 8:00 a.m. It can be very cold there, so please dress for the weather. We will scope for birds in the water and end with a hike through the woods. If there is interest, we may go somewhere for lunch afterwards. A state park recreation passport is required.

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.***

October 16 Birding in Ghana

Join Bryn Martin for a tour of the West African nation of Ghana, the destination of Washtenaw Audubon's most recent foreign field trip. With more than 750 bird species and interesting mammals and other fauna, Ghana is one of the top destinations in Africa. Bryn Martin teaches high school in Livonia and is an avid international birder.

November 20 Birding Belize

Join Keith Dickey for a program on birding in the Central American country of Belize. With over 600 species on its bird list, Belize boasts some sought-after birds such as Keel-billed Toucan, Jabiru, Agami Heron, and Black-headed Trogon, mammals such as Jaguar, and Mayan ruins.

December No formal Wednesday program in December

Join us for the annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 21! Beginning birders are welcome to participate in the count. Visit the Washtenaw Audubon Society web site for more information.

January 15 Birding Ecuador

Join April Campbell for a program on Ecuador, which boasts 1600 bird species.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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