



# WASHTENAW AUDUBON SOCIETY

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## NEWSLETTER

March / April 2020

### The 2020 Spring Migration Issue

It's spring, and though we are all staying close to home to stay safe in this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, our favorite time of year is happening all around us-- Spring Migration.

If you have a yard, there will be birds in it. Some will just be passing through. If you have to walk your dog, you will hear and see birds. If you get up before dawn, you'll hear a morning chorus. And, you can still safely walk some trails, especially in less traveled parks, without encountering crowds of other people. Stay safe and enjoy spring migration with your household or on your own. Here are some of the field trips and events we would be holding in April and May, if it is deemed safe. Brought to you by the Washtenaw Audubon Board, the Field Trip Committee, Matthew Spoor our Field Trip Chair, and WAS volunteers everywhere: Note: The WAS Big Backyard Bird Day takes place at your home on April 16th! See inside the newsletter for details.



*Left: Yellow-bellied  
Sapsucker*

*Right: Great Horned  
Owl*

*Photos: Juliet Berger*

# President's Letter

Dear Birders and Friends,

It is with a heavy heart that I share the following thoughts about our community's programs and field trips. The new normal is difficult to grasp, and we fear losing loved ones in this pandemic. Spring migration is upon us, and we'll be tempted to go out together, but we must be very careful.

The health and safety of our community is our highest priority always, and this is especially true while the spread of Covid-19 is happening in our community. As of now, all our field trips are canceled through the end of April, and the April 15<sup>th</sup> program at Matthaei Botanical Gardens is cancelled. This is subject to change, and we are likely to cancel many more spring events, so please don't come out for any field trips or programs, unless you've seen confirmation that they have resumed and it is safe to bird and be together again. Please observe Governor Whitmer's Stay Home, Stay Safe rules, and do not go birding in groups or share vehicles with other than household members. Please see our website, [www.washtenawaudubon.org](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org) for all updates.

We are hoping to implement webinars to continue to bring our programs to those interested, without risking the health of any of our vulnerable members. Information about any upcoming webinars will be posted on FB and our website, [www.washtenawaudubon.org](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org). We hope to also be able to go forward with the May Count, this year May 9<sup>th</sup>, following some important safety guidelines. Details will be forthcoming.

In the meantime, I hope a flock of Warblers visits each of our yards. I am holding all of you in my thoughts and prayers.

Be well everyone.

As always, I am for the birds, and for the birders too,

Juliet Berger

President, Washtenaw Audubon Society



*Blackburnian Warbler, David Amamoto*

## WAS Library Update – Lots of Additions!

With a big Thank You to library curator Sherrie Smith, a brand new listing of recent additions to the WAS will soon be available through the WAS website – dozens of birding books have been added and are ready to be checked out by WAS members!



*Left: Fox Sparrow,  
Jacco Gelderloos*

*Right: Wood Duck  
hen at nest, Juliet  
Berger*

## Upcoming WAS Field Trips (April 2020 – June 2020)

*Matthew Spoor, Field Trip Chair (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 Matt at the email address above.

**\*\*\*\* PLEASE NOTE THAT SOME, OR EVEN ALL, OF THE OUTINGS BELOW MAY BE CANCELLED DUE TO GOV. WHITMER'S "STAY HOME, STAY SAFE" ORDER \*\*\*\***

### Thursdays, April 16

#### WAS Big Backyard Bird Day

Since we're all socially distancing, staying home and staying safe, why not count our backyard birds together. Begin any time after midnight in Thursday, April 16, and bird just your yard, for as long as you can or want to. Many of us are working from home so we can set up outside if we have a yard or patio, or set up next to a window or feeder and see what flies by. If you are going in to a workplace (as an essential worker), you can bird your yard when you get home or bird your workplace. Use eBird to record your sightings or just post them on the WAS Facebook page. If you're a WAS member who lives in another county, you can bird your yard too! Let's see how many species we can find in our yards!

### Thursdays in May, 8:00 a.m.

#### Spring Migration Walks at the Arb

Join us on Thursday mornings during the month of May (May 7, 14, 21, and 28) 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.

### Saturday, May 2, 8:00 a.m.

#### Shorebirds and Migrants at Mary Beth Doyle Park

##### Leaders: TBA

Formerly known as Brown Park, Mary Beth Doyle Park includes an oxbow in Mallett's Creek, created to slow down run-off flow and help mitigate erosion in the creek's watershed. As the high water levels from early spring recede, mud flats are often left behind and shorebirds can be found here in surprising variety. Of course, if shorebirds do not materialize, we can always bird the park's woods to look for migrants and local breeding birds. We will meet at the parking lot off Birch Hollow Drive (which is off Stone School Rd, just north of the I-94 bridge), at 8:00 a.m.



## Upcoming WAS Field Trips (April 2020 – June 2020)

**Tuesdays in May (May 5, 12, 19, 26), 6:00 p.m.**

**Tuesday Evening Birders**

**Leaders: To be announced**

**Miller Road Park & Ride Lot**

Each Tuesday in May, leaders will 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 with multiple stops. We will meet at 6:00 PM, *usually* at the Miller Road Park & Ride (at Miller and M-14), but the meeting location is subject to change if dictated by the destination of the week. We will confirm the specific meeting spot on the Monday before the trip by posting it on our Facebook page and on the Birders email listserv, and in most cases we expect to be able to update this entry on the website as well. For example, if the primary destinations are to the east, we might choose to meet at the Plymouth Road Park & Ride. Group departure from the meeting site is at 6:15 so do plan to arrive in plenty of time to form up carpools! Please bring binoculars and scopes if you have them. Dress for weather that will get cooler as sunset approaches. We almost never cancel so it is best to show up at the departure site to see what the plans are. We will bird until sunset. Usually we are well away from our departure site, so it is after sunset when we return to the parking site.

**Saturday, May 9, 2020**

**Washtenaw County May Count**

**Compiler: Juliet Berger; Area leaders to be announced**

As you think about the ways you will bird in the county this spring, please consider participating in the Washtenaw County May Count, on International Migratory Bird Day. Juliet Berger is the Compiler for this informal count. The Compiler divides the county into townships, each of which has an Area Leader. Leaders recruit additional volunteers to count birds throughout their area. For names and contact information for the Compiler and the Area Leaders, visit the WAS website, and please consider volunteering. *Note:* Please contact Juliet Berger if you are interested in helping out as an Area Leader—it is not too difficult or time consuming! This year, the May Count will continue to be a Washtenaw County only event, as our state-wide compilers have retired. All Washtenaw County birders are welcome to bird all or part of the day. We will post detailed instructions on the WAS website on count day logistics. Please check back here for more information about how to participate as the date gets closer. *Note:* Please also see the WAS web site for new documents describing the count procedures. Area leaders will be posted closer to the event date.

**Thursday, May 21, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**

**Breeding Bird Survey Kickoff Meeting**

**NAP Headquarters, 3875 East Huron River Drive**

Learn how to survey for breeding birds in Ann Arbor's parks! Experience in bird identification is necessary. Sign up for your favorite park, pick up survey materials, and learn about the 2019 survey results. Register by May 19, please. For more information, or to register, call NAP at 734.794.6627, or send an email to NAP@a2gov.org.

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/NAP/birds/Pages/BreedingBirdSurvey.aspx>.

**Friday, May 29, 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.**

**NAP Bird Walk, Gallup Park**

**Leader: Juliet Berger**

Join Juliet Berger on this NAP-sponsored walk. For more information, please go to

<https://www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/NAP/birds/Pages/default.aspx>.

## Board Members

### President

Juliet Berger  
president@washtenawaudubon.org

### Vice President & Programs

Mike Sefton  
vp-programs@washtenawaudubon.org

### Treasurer

Keith Dickey  
treasurer@washtenawaudubon.org

### Secretary

Dana Novak  
secretary@washtenawaudubon.org

### Membership

Jessica Adamczyk  
membership@washtenawaudubon.org

### Field Trips

Matthew Spoor (local)  
Bryn Martin (international)  
fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org

### Conservation

Cathy Theisen  
cathythetvet@comcast.net

### Stewardship

Taylor Myatt  
stewardship@washtenawaudubon.org

### Education

Astrid Monique Fortier Muller-Karger  
education@washtenawaudubon.org

### 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

Jacco Gelderloos  
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.

## Saturday, June 6 (tentative)

### 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 see the WAS web site for more details or email Mary Wise (auntyem@umich.edu) to RSVP for this event.

## Saturday, June 13

### Prothonotary Paddle

Please see the WAS website for more information about this unique way to see the Prothonotary Warblers along the Huron River in Hudson Mills and Delhi Metroparks.



*Prothonotary Warbler, Benjamin Hack*

## Sunday, June 14, 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.

### NAP Grassland Bird Walk, A2 Landfill/Wheeler Service Center

#### Leader: Juliet Berger

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

**Did you know that you can help save birds by drinking Smithsonian "Bird Friendly" certified shade-grown coffee? Visit [3billionbirds.org](http://3billionbirds.org) to learn more about this and other practical conservation tips!**

# Guess who's back, back again?

Jacco Gelderloos

It's back! After an absence of "I'm-not-quite-sure-how-long" (too long, though), the periodic rarities report is back as a regular feature of the WAS newsletter. I always greatly enjoyed reading its past iterations, and having just come on board as WAS's incoming newsletter editor, I figured this might be a good time for me to resurrect the segment. Since loads of birding information is now readily accessible through online resources like eBird and Facebook, and with the option to quite easily include pictures of the actual birds in question, there really was nothing standing in the way of launching an illustrated version of the old highlights report!

What really pushed me into fully pursuing the idea was reading the wonderfully narrated and illustrated 2019 annual highlights report compiled by the Dutch Birding Association ([www.dutchbirding.nl](http://www.dutchbirding.nl)). Although creating a major report like that is, as of yet, a little too much, the DBA's biweekly highlight report is essentially what I envisioned creating for the WAS newsletter. So, credit given where credit is due: what follows is in large part based on the work of my compatriots at the other side of The Pond.

The January-February 2020 highlights report is entirely based on eBird reports and associated photos. However, since not all of you use that medium, please do not hesitate to send me reports of seasonal rarities (code 6-7 or higher from Birds of Washtenaw County by Kielb, Swales, & Wolinski) for inclusion in this segment, at [JJGelderloos@yahoo.com](mailto:JJGelderloos@yahoo.com). Of course, I'm open to changes or modifications as well, so feel free to give me feedback. Good birding!

## January-February 2020: Winter Highlights

### The Highlight

Although several good birds were reported during the first two months of the year, the award for "best bird of the period" would have to go to Washtenaw County's fourth record of a **HARRIS'S SPARROW**, coming to a feeder near Chelsea. With prior records as far back as 1957, 1965, and 1974, it's easy to understand this handsome sparrow caused quite the stir! Interestingly, the homeowner had been hosting the bird for some time (two months or so), but it was identified only after she posted a video to a birdwatching Facebook group, where it was identified definitively on February 27. Birders have been allowed to visit ever since, and it's not been disappointing for sure!



Harris's Sparrow *Zonotrichia querula*, Chelsea, Feb. 29 (Lyle Hamilton)

### Waterfowl

All three swan species were reported, as well as all five regular geese. A **Snow Goose** was hanging out on Ford Lake and in nearby Waterworks Park (2/14-2/17). **Ross's Geese** put on quite the show, with two birds observed by many in the Carpenter Rd corridor (1/14-1/20), 1 bird present along Gotfredson Rd on 2/25, and another found in the Barton Pond area (2/26-2/29). Gallup Park featured a report of a lone **Greater White-fronted Goose** (2/23). **Cackling Geese** were found associating with their larger cousins in several locations throughout January and February.

Winter birding highlights (cont.)



Ross's Goose *Chen rossii*, Bemis Rd, Jan. 15 (Spencer Vanderhoof)



Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*, Carpenter Rd, Jan. 18 (Thomas Gass)

Dabbling ducks put in quite a good showing, too, with eight species reported, mostly from the Huron River valley. Although most of these can be expected to start appearing towards the end of February, like the **Northern Shovelers** on Ford Lake on 2/23, reports of two **Green-winged Teal** in Gallup Park (1/3-1/7) are quite unusual, as was a male **American Wigeon** on the Huron River near Maple Rd on 2/9. A fly-over flock of 24 **Northern Pintail** at Crooked Lake (2/24) may not be surprising timing-wise, but a flock of that size is certainly noteworthy. Several other individuals of this handsome duck were found, as was a smaller flock of six on Ford Lake (2/24).

Diving ducks generally arrive ahead of their dabbling cousins, which was reflected in the 11 species found. The clear highlight in this group was a long-staying female-type **White-winged Scoter** that played hide-and-seek with birders in Gallup Park from 1/27 through 2/28. Other notable observations were a group of up to 70 (!) **Canvasbacks** on Ford Lake (2/24) and a **Ruddy Duck** west of the Foster Rd bridge (2/15-2/17).



Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Gallup Park, Feb. 20 (Todd Palgut)



White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca*, Gallup Park, Jan. 27 (Dominick Fenech)

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**.

\_\_\_\_ Renewal      \_\_\_\_ New Member

**Membership Dues**

Additional Donation \$\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_ Individual Household      \$25 (online only \$20)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_ Student      \$15 (online only \$10)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_ Senior      \$15 (online only \$10)

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.



## Winter birding highlights (cont.)

**Pied-billed Grebes** are now regularly wintering along the Huron River, judging by their becoming nearly annual on the Ann Arbor CBC, as well as by their being reported in several spots from late January through the end of February. A **Horned Grebe** on Ford Lake (as of 2/24) was early, although not ridiculously so. More unusual was a singleton **American Coot** at North Bay Park (1/1-1/8). This site was also graced by the presence of several **Great Black-backed Gulls**, with as many as 10 reported on 1/16 – an amazing count for a location away from the Great Lakes!



Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*, Ford Lake, Feb. 29 2020 (Russell Ryan)    Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*, Ford Lake, Jan. 17 2020 (Thomas Gass)

## Other Non-Passerines

Diurnal raptors (falcons included) were well-represented and several goodies were found among them. The fields east of the Vreeland & Gotfredson Rd intersection contained as many as 7 **Northern Harriers** on 1/14, although numbers have been dropping of late. Only a single **Rough-legged Hawk** was reported, along Vreeland Rd on 2/2, but **Red-shouldered Hawks** were observed from numerous locations all over the County throughout the period. **Bald Eagles** have become almost common, outnumbered only by Red-tailed and Cooper's Hawk – although seen primarily along the Huron River, reports came in from many other spots as well. **American Kestrels** had a good showing (in spite of recent woes on the Ann Arbor CBC) and were present in open areas throughout Washtenaw County. Both **Merlins** and **Peregrine Falcons** were essentially limited to the greater Ann Arbor area, and the Burton Tower-North Quad nesting area.

Joining the Northern Harriers at Vreeland & Gotfredson were as many as four Short-eared Owls – the small rodent population in that field must have been beyond substantial to support such a large predator presence! **Barred Owl** reports were limited to a few from the Sharon Valley area and from the damp woods along Glazier Way on Ann Arbor's east side. Hopefully the lack of observations from other more or less reliable spots is not a sign of a population in trouble...

Exceedingly early was a 1/17 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at the DeVine Preserve; more normal, and likely indicative of wintering birds, were reports of **Red-headed Woodpeckers** from numerous locations. A young bird at Thurston Pond was particularly obliging and was seen by many from 1/30-2/25. **Pileated Woodpeckers** can now be expected pretty much anywhere, at any time, judging by the multitude of observations from all over the County. Gone are the days we had to go the western tier of townships and hope for a glimpse of this magnificent bird!



Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* & Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, Vreeland & Gotfredson, Jan. 8 (Bill Nolting)



Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*, Thurston Pond, Feb. 3 (Cathy Theisen)



## Passerines

After the second ever CBC record this past December, **Eastern Phoebes** continued with a strong showing at three or four locations (including the bird found on the CBC). **Northern Shrikes** were present at several more or less traditional spots; the long-staying **Northern Mockingbird** continued at its reliable hang-out in Gallup Park. Always of note in winter, two separate **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** thrilled observers at North Bay Park (1/26) and Island Park (2/18). **Red-breasted Nuthatches** and **Brown Creepers** were found at a number of scattered sites, predominantly around Ann Arbor. Similarly, **Winter Wrens** were turned up only in the Greater Ann Arbor area, at the Botanical Gardens and the Barton Nature Area, but oddly not at the Arb. And, to continue the trend, **Hermit Thrushes** started trickling in at various parks around Ann Arbor as well, with two reported from the Bot Gardens on 1/23.



Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*, Gallup Park, Jan. 12 (Russell Ryan)



Northern Shrike *Lanius borealis*, Sharon Hollow Rd, Jan. 8 (Cathy Theisen)



Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*, Gallup Park, Feb. 16 (Dan Fox)



Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*, Island Park, Feb. 18 (Karen Markey)

Winter finches were essentially absent this winter, with a single report of **Purple Finch** (2 on 2/3) and a handful for up to four **Pine Siskins** in a handful of locations. The intersection of Vreeland and Gotfredson roads proved to be the most reliable location for both **Snow Bunting** and **Lapland Longspur** – reports came in throughout January and February, topping out at 100 (on 2/7) and 150 (on 2/23), respectively. In addition to the amazing Harris's Sparrow mentioned above, several other notable sparrow species were present in Washtenaw County during the first two months of the year. **Fox Sparrows** attended feeders in both Dexter and Ann Arbor, and **White-crowned Sparrows** were found in at least three locations, with as many as four at a site in Lodi Twp. Although not unheard of in winter (there have been recent CBC records), three separate cases of four individual **Field Sparrows** are certainly quite unusual. More expected were a few **Swamp Sparrows**, as was the return of the first **Eastern Towhee** near Chelsea in mid-February. Blackbirds are becoming ever more expected during winter, especially after February 1, but a duo of **Rusty Blackbirds** at Trinkle Marsh (1/5) and one coming to a feeder near Dexter (2/26) were still rather amazing finds. **Yellow-rumped Warblers** have been hard to come by in recent winters, so the flock of up to 8 that hung out in Waterworks Park throughout January and February was definitely quite rare.

Winter birding highlights (cont.)



Lapland Longspur *Calcarius lapponicus*, Vreeland Rd, Jan. 1  
(Deborah Edwards-Onoro)



Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla*, Nichols Arboretum, Feb. 11  
(Cathy Theisen)



Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*, Dexter, Feb. 26  
(Cathy Theisen)



Yellow-rumped Warbler *Setophaga coronata*, Waterworks Park, Feb. 25  
(Oliver Kew)

## 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.*

**April 15      Raptors and Climate Change: Can Evolutionary History Predict Future Response?**

Due to Covid-19 related restrictions, we have been forced to cancel this program.

**May 20      Light Pollution, Climate Change, and Birds' Survival (tentative)**

Join Gerald Hasspacher for a talk on the Dark Sky Movement, a world-wide movement to reduce artificial light pollution and its negative effects on wildlife, especially birds, and on people, and the threat of climate change to birds. Gerald Hasspacher is a co-chair of the Sierra Club of Southeast Michigan, an RN, retired teacher, and a dedicated environmentalist.

**June 17      Florida Lifers: Checkmarks on Your Life List**

Join popular Washtenaw Audubon speaker and noted humorist Don Chalfant in an illustrated talk on the birding delights of his second home, Florida. Don has spent his winters in Florida pursuing and photographing some of the more unlikely species to show up there, as well as more common species such as Painted Bunting, Limpkin, Crested Caracara, and Swallow-tailed Kite. Besides his spectacular photos, Don will doubtless have a number of droll anecdotes to relate. Don Chalfant is a resident of Ann Arbor and New Smyrna Beach, a retired teacher, an avid photographer, and an ace birder.

**September 16    Program to be Announced**

## Washtenaw Audubon Society

P.O. Box 130923

Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0923