



May / June 2020

## Environmental Verification at Searles Nature Preserve

Many know Washtenaw Audubon Society (WAS) as “the local bird organization”. We host field trips, offer educational programs, advocate for bird conservation, and hope to inspire a love of nature through birding. Another important part of our mission is land protection and stewardship. Washtenaw County is full of protected parks and recreational lands. Among the less well-known natural areas is Washtenaw Audubon’s Searles Nature Preserve (SNP), which hosts over 48 acres of wetlands and mixed deciduous forest with trails to explore.

*>continued on page 3<*



# President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon,

With the crush of passerine migration behind us, I am left to consider how being a birder has made coping with the pandemic more attainable. Consider what we do to relieve stress—we take a walk outside with our binoculars. About the only thing that has been legal to do outside of the home is take a walk, and I bring my bins. How does this help? Being outside in nature, I see how the birds continue their peregrinations no matter the human crisis. Whether Covid 19, justifiable anger and outrage over racism and murder of a person of color, a devastating flood, an insensitive or provocative tweet by our President, being outside on a warm day outside at Nichols Arboretum, our beloved Arb, or anywhere at all, helps us stay grounded and centered on the natural order of things and provides a needed escape from our ever more dire circumstances.

I miss all of you. We all miss each other--the Thursday morning Arb walks, the Tuesday Evening Birders, every Tuesday in May, Matt Spoor's field trips every weekend, Karen Markey's spring field trip series. We are trying to stay connected with birds, and without each other the picture remains incomplete. Where is that person to say, "Hey, isn't that Magnolia Warbler the most beautiful thing you've ever seen?" The days we spent together, birding, are like a distant dream. I long for the day we can all bird together again.

We will have a few upcoming events, which like the May Count, can be safely conducted without violating social distancing rules. Expect the full May Count wrap up in the next Newsletter, in July/August. August 14-16 will be Swift Nights Out, where we team up with the City of Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation (NAP), and dozens of volunteers like you, to get the true picture of what's happening in terms of numbers and usage, at our Washtenaw County Chimney Swift roosts. We'll be posting a Signup Genius on the WAS Website and Facebook, soon. The field trip committee will be thinking up some other ways we can share birding in a safe way, with each other. Ben and Matt Hack's Big Day presentation on Zoom last week, was a smashing success, both interesting, entertaining, record-breaking, astounding, and well-attended by over 65 members and guests. Our birding community really needed that. Look for a few safe events over the summer, on our FB Page and on the WAS website.

On a final note, I would like to extend a huge "thank you" to Taylor Myatt, who will be stepping down as our Stewardship Chair over the summer as he and his wife Laura leave for Papua New Guinea. We owe you a debt of gratitude for the amazing work you've done for WAS in general, and our Searles Preserve, specifically. We'll miss you, Taylor!

Until we meet again, at the next good bird, with a homemade mask on,

I remain for the birds,

Stay well, stay safe and good birding,

Juliet Berger, President

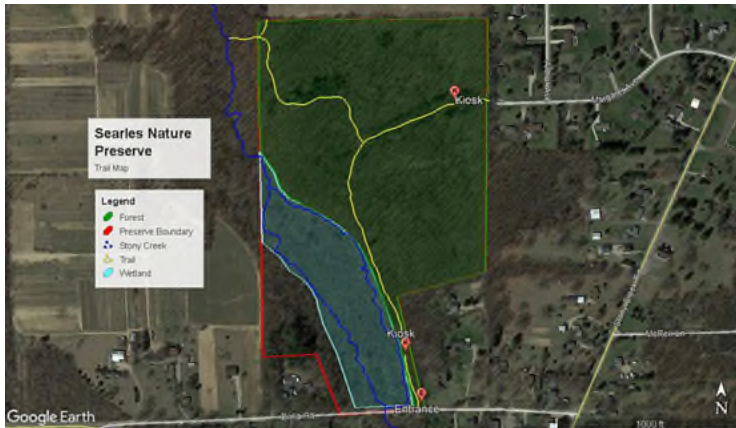
Washtenaw Audubon Society



*Summer Tanager, Jacco Gelderloos*

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Starting along Bolla Road in August Township, the main north-south trail follows an oak-lined ridge overlooking the low-lying wetlands. Well drained, sandy soils and changing elevation keep the upland forest habitats healthy with abundant wildlife, and the shrub-carr wetland habitat buffers the headwaters of Stony Creek with diverse flora at the start of its route toward Lake Erie.



We are thrilled to announce that Searles NP was recently “environmentally verified” in the *Forest, Wetlands, & Habitat* category through the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). MAEAP is a statewide program that recognizes farmers, landowners, and conservation organizations for voluntarily meeting a set of environmental standards. This designation gives WAS a third-party stamp of approval from the State of Michigan and affirms our management is in line with best practices.

Over the last few years, the WAS Stewardship Committee has been taking a deep dive into Searles NP to better understand its ecology and conservation value. With the help of many volunteers, partners, and habitat experts, we developed a comprehensive land management plan to document a foundation of knowledge and set the direction for SNP in future years. In short, the management plan answers two questions: what do we have and what are we going to do with it? This may seem simple, but it took over 2 years to answer these questions! We conducted ecological assessments, monitored changes with photos over time, delineated units based on soil types and natural features, inventoried plant populations, consulted with habitat experts, calculated restoration potential, and spent hours walking through dense vegetation to get to know the land inside and out. Maps, inventories, reports, analysis, and planning are certainly not as captivating as a Winter Wren in full song or a Hermit Thrush darting through the understory, but they are ultimately what will sustain important habitat for our feathered friends. In short, they are worth the effort.

Speaking of sustaining habitat, we need help! Land management is hard work, and never ending. Trails need cleared. Invasive species need to be kept under control. Changes on the land need to be monitored and documented. Degraded habitats need restoration. There are plenty of ways to participate, so if you are passionate to protect the birds we all love, please consider joining our efforts at SNP. We host volunteer stewardship events each year, so keep an eye out for upcoming events this fall or contact us sooner to get involved.

As part of our research at SNP, the Huron River Watershed Council (HRWC) conducted a bioserve site assessment, which combined GIS model rankings with field assessment scores to rank each habitat type (forest, wetland, and creek) in two categories: ecological integrity and level of disturbance. All habitats at SNP received above average scores, and the forest was one of the highest scoring ecosystems in the HRWC’s field assessment database! In other words, SNP is an amazing place! So if you’re looking for a secluded walk off the beaten path, we encourage you to visit Searles Nature Preserve. You may just fall in love with it, and we hope you do. SNP is a local hotspot on eBird, so don’t forget to post your sightings and please share with the “Washtenaw Audubon Society” username! We hope to see you out there.

*Taylor Myatt, Washtenaw Audubon Society Stewardship Chair*



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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 (June 2019 – July 2020)

**Friday - Sunday, August 14 - 16, 8:15 p.m.**

### Swift Nights Out

**Co-sponsored by City of Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation**

**Leaders: Juliet Berger & Johannes Postma**

We are looking for volunteers for our Fourth Annual Ann Arbor city-wide Chimney Swift count, August 14-16, 2020. Watching Chimney Swifts enter their roosts at dusk is a spectacular sight. Volunteers will choose a known Chimney Swift roosting location and stake it out before dusk, counting the Swifts as they enter the chimney, as darkness falls. You can sign up for one night/one location at a time, or count each night of the weekend. Chimney Swifts are in steep decline across North America, so let's help find out how they are doing in our city. Bring your friends along, to show them how these very cool aerial insectivores share our city with us.

We will post a link to sign up closer to the event; come back here to sign up!

Email leaders [Juliet Berger](#) and [Johannes Postma](#) with your results after the survey, and post it on eBird if you have an account.

NOTE: Occasionally the Swifts will not use a particular location on a given night due to a predator such as a Cooper's Hawk, or another issue. In that case, "no Swifts" will still be good information for us!

>**CANCELED**<

**Monday, August 03, 2020**

**New Zealand: Washtenaw Audubon Society International Field Trip**

**Contact: Bryn Martin**

**This trip has been canceled. We hope to bring this opportunity back in 2021.**

Please stay tuned as we are planning for more Socially Distanced Field Trips in the weeks and months to come – make sure to check the WAS website regularly for details and the most up-to-date information!

## March-April 2020: Early Spring Highlights

Jacco Gelderloos

### The Highlight

As the March-April period progressed, I started pondering which bird would lay claim to the title “best bird of the period”. Several worthy candidates presented themselves (see below), but the hands-down winner was clearly the first-ever Washtenaw County (and second State) record of a **HOODED ORIOLE**, coming to a hummingbird and grape jelly feeder in an apartment complex off Michigan Ave in Pittsfield Township. Much like what happened with last period’s Harris’s Sparrow, the homeowner posted a picture of this bird to a Facebook nature group on 4/25, expressing excitement about having “an” oriole coming to her feeder. Little did she know that her photos would set off a mad scramble to arrange for safe viewing etc. first thing on 4/26. During that day, the bird made regular appearances, delighting dozens of birders. Although it failed to show on the next day, folks waiting in vain near the feeder were handed a nice consolation prize (see below). With a Southwestern stunner like this now part of our local avifauna, we can only wonder what might be waiting in our future....



Hooded Oriole *Icterus cucullatus*, Pittsfield Twp, April 26 2020 (Michael Bowen)

### Waterfowl

Notable geese were limited to two blue morph **Snow Geese** that were (mostly) hanging out near the Schneider Rd Pond (3/9 – 3/29), where they were joined by a quartet of **Greater White-fronted Geese** for a day (3/17). There was also a report of a dozen **Greater White-fronted Geese** from North Bay Park (3/8), but these, too, were a one-day wonder. Mid-March featured a moderate push of **Tundra Swans**, with a maximum of 29 reported flying over Sharon Mills County Park during the One Road Challenge on 3/14.



Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*, Schneider Rd Pond, March 17 2020 (Karen Markey)



Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*, Hieber Rd, March 18 2020 (Norka Saldana)

The March-April time frame is when dabbling ducks are expected to move through in numbers, and unsurprisingly all eight regular species were reported from numerous locations. Certainly of note was the flock of 70 (!) **Northern Pintail** in the Waltrous Rd ponds (3/26 – 3/27); rarely does a flock of this size get found in our County.



A good variety of diving ducks mixed in with their dabbling cousins, and 13 species were reported. The long-staying female-type **White-winged Scoter** in Gallup Park stuck around until 3/31, and became decidedly more cooperative, showing very well near the large playground. Another scoter was found in North Bay Park on 4/27, and after some discussion among local birders was determined to be a **Surf Scoter** – unfortunately, this bird headed off after only two days and was not reported after 4/28.



Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Waltrous Rd, March 27 2020 (Bill Nolting)



Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*, North Bay Park, April 28 2020 (Jacco Gelderloos)

## Grouse through Terns

In what strikes me as a possible sign of a species in trouble, there were only two reports of **Ruffed Grouse**, one, of two birds, from Sharon Mills (3/26), and one of a single bird from Lindley Rd (4/19). Perhaps a more concerted canvass of this species's core range during May Count will turn up some more of these dapper grouse. Even fewer reports came in for **Eastern Whip-poor-will**; only a single observation from Lodi Twp on 4/29 – perhaps this is a sign of the delayed migration we seem to be having? Bolstering this assumption is the fact that several other generally early migrants were rather late in arriving and doing so in low numbers: a mere three reports of **Common Gallinules** during the last week of April may not be that unusual, given the secretive nature of these birds, but an equally low number of reports for feeder favorite **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** certainly is!

As is to be expected, shorebirds started trickling in during the last week of April, with a few reports for both **Dunlin** and **Least Sandpiper** being the most of note among the regulars. Clearly not a regular occurrence, though, was the invasion of sorts by **Long-billed Dowitchers**. Previously unreported in spring, this species is a rare fall migrant at best, so the fact that a total of five birds were reported from three sites is simply stunning. Singletons were reported from flooded fields at Lima Center & Willow (4/26) and Morgan Rd (4/27) However, the fluddles along Lehman Rd near M-52 were the epicenter of this dowitcher show: not only was a maximum of three birds present (an all-time high count), but they stayed for nearly a week (4/24 - 4/30)!



Common Gallinule *Gallinula galeata*, Trinkle Marsh, April 26 2020 (Russell Ryan)



Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Lehman Rd fluddle, April 25 2020 (Thomas Gass)

Generally, gulls are a feature of winter birding, so the presence of not one, but three, uncommon species into late March and even April is pretty unusual. North Bay Park was the place to be, with all but one of the reports coming from there. A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** was loafing around with the locals on both 3/9 and 3/22, as was its much bigger cousin **Great Black-backed Gull** on 3/14, clearly a leftover of the large congregations there in January. Two more **GBB Gulls** were reported from Barton Pond on 3/8. Unusual though these two species may be, the clear highlight among larids was an immature **Glaucous Gull**, photographed at North Bay on 4/10!

During the third week of April, terns started to trickle into Washtenaw County, with as many as two **Caspian Terns** reported from multiple locations, starting 4/19, and an immaculate **Forster's Tern** putting in a one-day appearance at North Bay Park on 4/21.



Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*, North Bay Park, April 10 2020 (Bill Nolting)



Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*, North Bay Park, April 21 2020 (Bill Nolting)

## Pelicans through Owls

In my "The Highlight" section, I mentioned that some of the birders waiting for the bird to appear got a consolation prize – it came in the form of a flock of some two dozen **American White Pelicans** flying over the **Hooded Oriole's** stake-out location on 4/28. That flock, in turn, was part of a major push of pelicans through Washtenaw County, with a whopping six reports from five different sites. Flocks of 29, 25, and 14 constitute the three highest single-site tallies ever for this species that is apparently on the increase.

Usually limited to rare heard-only observations, **American Bitterns** were actually seen on two occasions: one flew into the marsh at Scarlett Mitchell Woods (4/14), another was found in a small wetland along S Fletcher Rd on 4/25 and remained there the next day as well. Almost as secretive as the bitterns, **Black-crowned Night-Herons** turned up at Bell Rd (4/3) and at Thurston Pond (4/30), with the latter putting on quite the show for birders.

A close contender for bird of the period was a **Black Vulture** that was photographed at Pleasant Lake & Ann Arbor Saline Rd on 4/22 and 4/23 and was seen flying over a backyard on the east side of Ann Arbor on 4/24. This would constitute only the sixth or so record for Washtenaw County, although this southern vulture appears to be becoming more regular in recent years. The only other raptor of note that was reported was a **Golden Eagle** seen over Sharon Mills County Park on 3/29.

The arrival of March brought with it a distinct uptick in **Barred Owl** reports, ameliorating my fears that our local population might be in trouble. A single **Long-eared Owl** flew past a stunned observer in the middle of town in Ypsilanti on 3/5; at least one **Short-eared Owl** persisted in the fields at Vreeland & Gotfredson through 3/31.



American White Pelican *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*, Eberwhite Woods, April 28 2020 (Benjamin Hack)



American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*, S Fletcher Rd, April 25 2020 (Juliet Berger)

**Did you know you can save dozens of birds every year by fixing windows around your house or office? Visit [birdsmartglass.org](http://birdsmartglass.org) to see how!**





Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Thurston Pond, April 30 2020 (Karen Markey)



Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*, Pleasant Lake & Ann Arbor Saline, April 23 2020 (Kimberly Ellis)

## Passerines

Much like some of the other early migrants, flycatchers (other than Eastern Phoebe) started showing up only in the final few days of April, but only with very few reports between them. Single reports for **Least Flycatcher** and **Great Crested Flycatcher** came in on 4/30, and a handful of **Eastern Kingbirds** were spotted around Ann Arbor starting 4/28. Also on 4/30, a **White-eyed Vireo** was found in Dolph Park, a more or less reliable spot for this skulking species. The One Road Challenge turned up a **Northern Shrike** along Sharon Hollow Rd on 3/14.

Four of our five wren species can be expected this time of year, but a singing **House Wren** recorded off Barton Dr on 3/2 was clearly ridiculously early and may have been a bird that wintered nearby. **Marsh Wrens** arrived in a more expected time frame, with reports from Four Mile Lake (4/26) and LeFurge Woods (4/28). The Gallup Park **Northern Mockingbird** continued its long stay through the end of March; several reports of this generally more southern mimid came in from the area south of Saline (from 3/28 on) and around Manchester, where a good-sized year-round population is present. Two locations held **American Pipits**: four were present along S Fletcher Rd (4/28) and up to two were feeding among shorebirds along a flooded field along E Morgan Rd (4/27 – 4/30). Two notable finch species were reported: a female **Purple Finch** was photographed at a feeder near Munger & Textile (4/2) and a **Common Redpoll** was noted at the Pittsfield Preserve on 3/22.



American Pipit *Anthus rubescens*, E Morgan Rd, April 28 2020 (Alice Elliott)



Purple Finch *Haemorhous purpureus*, Munger & Textile, April 2 2020 (Ann Alvarez)

The highlight from the January-February period, the Chelsea **Harris's Sparrow** was last seen on 3/18. With the arrival of April, additional sparrow species started appearing, with **Vesper Sparrow** reports coming in from the Vreeland Rd corridor (as of 4/8), the Searles Preserve (4/22), and the Maple & Willow-Arkona area (as of 4/7). A lone **Grasshopper Sparrow** was at Burmeister & Lima Center on 4/27 and single **Lincoln's Sparrows** were turned up at Mary Beth Doyle Park (4/22) and at Park & Staebler (4/22). In addition to the amazing Hooded Oriole, only a few **Orchard Orioles** appeared by the end of April, with essentially all being seen around Ann Arbor.



Towards the end of April, more and more warblers can be expected to appear in Washtenaw County. Although they are generally among the earlier cohort of arrivals, an **Ovenbird** attending a northeast Ann Arbor feeder on 3/1 was clearly out of the ordinary! A rare early migrant and local nester, two late April reports of **Louisiana Waterthrush** were to be expected, although neither the Lodi Township, nor the Mary Beth Doyle Park locations were traditional spots along the lines of the Nan Weston Preserve at Sharon Hollow. Closing out this period's highlight report were two 4/30 observations of **Orange-crowned Warbler**, one at Eberwhite Woods, the other in the Bromley Park neighborhood on Ann Arbor's northeast side.



Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapilla*, Bromley Park, March 1 2020 (Warren Faust)



Orange-crowned Warbler *Leiothlypis celata*, Eberwhite Woods, April 30 2020 (Benjamin Hack)

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.

## WAS Monthly Programs

Washtenaw Audubon's in person programs at the Botanical Gardens are on hold until the University allows gatherings to take place. To view our online Zoom programs, you will need access to an internet-capable computer, phone, or similar device. An announcement of the web address to view the program will be on our web site, Facebook page, and on the Birders email list a few days before the program.

We may also add more online programs for July and August, which will be announced on the same internet platforms.

### **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.

Navigate to the Zoom session here: <https://umich.zoom.us/j/91517764133>

Or join by phone:

Dial -- +1 301-715-8592

Enter meeting ID: 915 1776 4133

**July & August No meeting**

**September 16 Program to be announced**

## Washtenaw Audubon Society

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