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Flyway

Summer 2012

Volume 2012, Issue 3

Detroit Audubon Society Presents the 2012 Conservation Symposium

MIGRATION SECRETS—NOT JUST FOR BIRDS

Saturday, September 29, 2012

You may be a new birder still learning your yard birds, a well-traveled veteran birder with an expansive life list, or, like many of us, somewhere in between. Regardless of your expertise, you will find this year's event to be entertaining, educational, fun, and delicious. We are bringing experts from across the country, across the state, and across the street to the beautiful Edsel and Eleanor Ford House in Grosse Pointe Shores.

The day will start with a light breakfast and talk by Rosann Kovalcik, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, followed by a 1 ½ hour bird walk led by the highly experienced team of Rosann K. and Bill Rapai, President of Grosse Pointe Audubon. They regularly lead walks on these grounds almost year-round; no one knows more about the property's bird secrets than these two.

The second part of the day features three very talented and knowledgeable speakers on not only birds, but insects and butterflies as well. Lunch will be a lovely buffet with dining on the terrace, and we will continue our tradition of a silent auction featuring items in all price ranges. Vendors and other nonprofits will be in attendance to enhance the day.

Please arrive by 7:15 a.m. for the bird walk, or 9:15 a.m. for the symposium to allow time to drive up the winding driveway and to park.

Register Today!

Join with other bird lovers to enjoy a day of great presentations and camaraderie in a magnificent setting. Download the registration form available at **www.detroitaudubon.org**, or call **(248) 354-5804** to request that a form be mailed to you.

Kirtland's Warbler Migration: The Last Mystery

Biologists have been able to answer the major questions about the Kirtland's nesting needs and its diet and habitat on both the summer and winter grounds. But little is known about the bird in migration—its path, how quickly it travels, where it stops, and what it eats on its trip between the jack pine and the coppice. Join Bill Rapai, the author of *The Kirtland's Warbler: The Story of a Bird's Fight Against Extinction and the People Who Saved It*, to learn what is known about the Kirtland's warbler in migration and what is being done to answer the remaining questions about the bird's biology and needs. Bill Rapai was an award-winning reporter and editor for the *Grand Forks Herald*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and the *Boston Globe*. His book on the Kirtland's Warbler is his first book.

eBird—Global Tools for Birders, Critical Data for Science

Chris Wood is the project leader for eBird and Neotropical Birds at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. eBird gathers millions of observations made by bird-watchers around the world to provide real-time information on bird abundance and distribution. Neotropical Birds provides comprehensive life history accounts of all birds in the neotropics. Chris is also the captain of the Cornell Lab's "Team Sapsucker," which holds the record for most species of birds seen in a single day in North America and has raised several million dollars for bird conservation. He is widely recognized as a leading authority on bird identification and has written and consulted on scientific and popular literature on birds. In his free time and for fun, Chris leads trips for the bird-watching tour company WINGS.

Insect Migration

Most people know about the incredible travels of the Monarch Butterfly; fewer people know of the dozen or so species of migrating dragonflies. Professor Jim Leslie will share his expansive knowledge of migrating insects, particularly Milkweed Beetles, the Green Darner, and several others. Come hear the amazing stories of these insects and the research being done to better understand them. Jim Leslie received a Ph.D. in Zoology in 1979 from Rutgers University. His work on insect population biology began during his postdoctoral studies at the University of Iowa. In 1985, he moved to Adrian College, where he is currently a professor of biology, teaching genetics, animal biology, and conservation biology.

Flyway

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The opinions expressed by the authors and editors do not necessarily reflect the policy of the DAS.

Articles that appear in the Flyway may be reproduced freely as long as credit is given to Detroit Audubon Society.

Submission of original articles and artwork is welcomed. Send articles via email to flyway_submissions@detroitaudubon.org. Deadline for the Winter 2012 Issue is August 1st, 2012.

Advertising rates are available by contacting the DAS office.

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Detroit Audubon

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE FIELD TRIPS AND SPEAKERS

by Leonard Weber

Last winter Detroit Audubon got a request from Chris Tallman, a teacher at Macomb Mathematics Science Technology Center, a program for academically talented high school students. She was looking to schedule a speaker for a large class of students, followed by a birding field trip. She herself had participated in and enjoyed Detroit Audubon field trips, she explained, and was looking to expose the students to an experience that most of them have probably never even considered.

We were able to schedule a late-March classroom presentation, followed by an April field trip. Fortunately, we had good weather and located some birds immediately, and the students got into the spirit of the occasion.

Ms. Tallman agreed to let me quote part of the thank you email she sent to the field trip leaders:

Thank you for your knowledge, your obvious enthusiasm, and your helpfulness. This was a first experience for many of us, and it was great!

Everything you helped us with, from the presentation last month to the bird checklist, great location, spare binoculars, and great bird sightings today was wonderful! Thank you for sharing your time, expertise, and passion for birding with us and with our students. It was absolutely delightful. We think you sparked some interest and inspired some future birders.

Detroit Audubon takes great pride in contributing to these experiences. As expressed in our mission statement, "We feel that the environment is best served by a knowledgeable citizenry and that bird-watching is the vehicle for developing an inclusive understanding of natural history."

We provide opportunities for people, both beginners and nonbeginners, to deepen their awareness of and appreciation for birds and nature. In addition to the full schedule of public field trips that we present each year, we accept group-specific requests. With a little lead time, we can usually provide a speaker or lead a field trip that fits the requestor's interests and schedule. We work with all kinds of groups, large or small, adults or students.

CAMP WATHANA NEEDS YOUR HELP

North Oakland Headwaters Land Conservancy and Camp Fire USA, Southeast Michigan Council, are partnering to preserve Camp Wathana, a 250-acre camp in a spectacular setting (two glacial lakes, two bogs, acres of unbroken forest canopy), in northwest Oakland County. Help us purchase a conservation easement by donating time or money to the \$250,000 campaign. The Carls Foundation has generously agreed to match the first \$100,000. For more information, go to www.nohlc.org or send donations to NOHLC, PO Box 285, Clarkston, MI 48347. Tours of the camp are available. Call 248-846-6547.

Member of
EarthShare
Michigan

ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD JULY 24

Join us for the 2012 Members Open House and picnic, which will be held on Tuesday, July 24, 2012, from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., at the Detroit Audubon Society office, 24433 W. Nine Mile Road Southfield, Michigan. Come hear about current bird habitat preservation projects, new education partnerships, and the state of Detroit Audubon Society.

DAS will provide the food and beverage, so the courtesy of a reply regarding your attendance will be appreciated. Please RSVP by July 20 by telephone to our office, (248) 354-5804, or send an email to us at detas@bignet.net.

Please note that this is a member-only event; we welcome you to join at the meeting.

The Annual Conservation Symposium (held in March in previous years) is happening this year on September 29, 2012 (see page 1).

DETROIT AUDUBON HELPS ACQUIRE 100 ACRES IN SUPERIOR TOWNSHIP

Detroit Audubon Society recently helped the Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy (SMLC) purchase a key 100-acre property in Superior Township in Washtenaw County. This was a very important property to protect since it completes the core of the Superior Greenway—protecting two miles along the east side of Prospect Road, from Geddes Road to Cherry Hill Road.

The property consolidates a contiguous block of 1,280 acres of protected land, of which 720 acres are open to the public for hiking, bird watching, and nature study. A high-quality tributary of the Rouge River flows through the property, and SMLC plans to restore wetlands and grassland habitat. The property connects to the Conservancy Farm, LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve, and the county's Meyer Preserve. This is one of the prime birding spots in the region, and nesting species include Sandhill Cranes, Marsh Wrens, Sora, and Virginia Rail.

Title to the \$700,000 property was acquired by the SMLC, with the City of Ann Arbor Greenbelt Program and Washtenaw County's Natural Areas Preservation Program contributing 75 percent of the purchase price. DAS contributed \$5,000 towards SMLC's purchase cost and also made a \$20,000 low-interest loan to help finance the acquisition.

If you would like to help DAS pay for this and other land acquisitions, please make a donation to the DAS Sanctuary Fund. Together, we can provide more safe havens for birds and other wildlife. Make your check payable to Detroit Audubon Society, 24433 W. Nine Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48033, with a notation that it is for the Sanctuary Fund. We will sincerely thank you . . . and the birds will love you!

The Flyway Is Going Green!

Well, perhaps not entirely, but we're taking a big step in the right direction! Many organizations are going paperless for many good reasons, including the positive impact on the environment.

Detroit Audubon Society has considered whether to continue to print and mail hard copy quarterly issues of the *Flyway* to our 6000+ members. DAS Board Members have concluded that a transition to electronic delivery of all but one issue per year is in the best interests of DAS and its members.

Accordingly, DAS will continue to print and mail quarterly *Flyway* issues for the remainder of the 2012 calendar year. **Beginning next year, only one issue of the *Flyway* will be printed and mailed to members. This will occur annually in March (the Spring issue).** The Spring 2013 issue and each subsequent Spring issue of the *Flyway* will contain important information about field trips throughout the year, the Annual Meeting, the Annual Conservation Conference, DAS contact information, election results, and more articles and photographs—all in a new, more appealing format.

Other quarterly issues of the *Flyway* (Summer, Fall, and Winter) will be prepared in electronic format and will be available on the DAS website: <http://www.detroitaudubon.org>. It is our intention that future quarterly issues will include significantly more content and, especially, more photographs and more color, than has been possible with the cost constraints imposed by printing and mailing the *Flyway* to thousands of members. The savings realized will go, instead, toward the many programs and conservation projects that deserve our support.

DAS would like to send to all members an electronic notice of the availability of each quarterly "e-Flyway" as soon as it is published on the website (containing a "one-click" link to the issue). To that end, **we ask each member to provide us with an email address where we can send you the link to access new quarterly issues of the *Flyway*, beginning with the Summer 2013 issue.**

Please send an email to the DAS office at detas@bignet.net, or call the office at **(248) 354-5804**, to provide us with your email address. We also plan to send members who receive the *Flyway* electronically timely reminders of upcoming meetings and any updates to field trip schedules.

Please be assured that DAS will not share or sell your email address to any person or organization. And you can unsubscribe to the newsletter and notices at any time by notifying the DAS office with your request via phone or email.

We are aware that some members may not have ready access to an email account or the Internet. We urge anyone who would be disadvantaged, or otherwise has an opinion on this matter, to contact DAS at the email address or telephone number listed above. Please let us know what you think. Your thoughts on how we can best serve you are always appreciated.

JOIN THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Detroit Audubon Society is looking for members to join its Education Committee, which will oversee new initiatives on behalf of the organization. For more information, please email Scott Roberts at scott@detroitaudubon.org.

ELLIE COX: TEACHER, BIRDER, MENTOR

by Allen T. Chartier



Allen Chartier presenting Conservationist of the Year award to Ellie Cox at Detroit Audubon Society's 1997 annual meeting. Photo by Doug Cox.

On March 29, 2012, Ellie T. Cox passed away peacefully at her Ann Arbor home at the age of 92, after suffering a stroke a month before. She was a mentor to many birders throughout her long and productive life.

Ellie's interest in birds was developed early in her life using Arm & Hammer "bird cards" to identify birds in her native Virginia. Although her love of birds was somewhat sidetracked by work on a master's degree at the University of Michigan, her work in journalism, and her marriage and family, Ellie renewed her love affair with birding once her youngest son was in high school.

Ellie taught students at Oakland County Community College, at Cranbrook, and at the Ferndale Public Schools. It was in her Birds of Michigan class on the Highland Lakes campus of OCC that I first met Ellie. She soon introduced me to Oakland and Detroit Audubon Societies and

shared with me the importance of the American Birding Association and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

One of Ellie's great talents was inspiring people to work as hard as she did. She mobilized volunteers such as myself into projects such as the study of the Great Blue Heron rookery near Oxford. She also gathered volunteers for annual bird counts at Bald Mountain Recreation Area and Independence Oaks County Park, which both resulted in published bird checklists. Another project in which I followed Ellie's lead was the Holiday Beach Hawk Watch. Especially meaningful to me, Ellie allowed me the opportunity to learn songbird banding at Lake St. Clair Metropark. Ellie initiated that banding operation in 1989, and though illness slowed her pace, I have continued that work under my own banding permit to this day.

Ellie also served as president of the Michigan Bird Banders Association. At her Detroit home, Ellie was one of the first to band House Finches as they expanded their range from their origins as escapees in the eastern U.S. Alongside her husband Howard, who died in 1996, Ellie studied Black Terns and Least Bitterns at Lake St. Clair Metropark. Their work revealed a relationship between the increasing number of Mute Swans and the local extirpation of Black Terns as a nesting species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reviewed their results in 1997 as it formulated a management plan for Black Terns nationwide.

One of the many awards Ellie received was Conservationist of the Year at the 1997 Detroit Audubon Annual Meeting. This award was just a modest recognition of the young imaginations she touched with her mentoring skills, her passion for stewardship, and her affection for the beauty we look up to the skies to witness so often. Ellie will be sorely missed.

UPCOMING DAS FIELD TRIPS

Sunrise Serenade at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve

Friday, June 22, 2012, 7 p.m., for camping, or Saturday, June 23, 4:30 a.m., for Sunrise Serenade; breakfast to follow.

Birding experts will be on hand to help us keep track of when each species first begins to sing. Join friends for a campout on Friday night or arrive by 4:30 a.m. on Saturday if you don't wish to camp. By 7 a.m. we will provide a hearty breakfast for everyone. Bring friends, family, blankets, chairs, and a tent if you'd like to camp—please, no pets. Please also bring plates, cups, and utensils for breakfast. Attendance is limited, and a \$5 donation is suggested. Contact the DAS office at (248) 354-5804 by Thursday, June 21, for reservations.

Address: 2252 N. Prospect Rd., Superior Township, MI 48198.

Entrance is on Prospect Road half way between Geddes and Vreeland Roads.

IHM Campus, Monroe

July 21, 2012 (Saturday) 8 a.m.–12:30 p.m.

Leaders: Jim Bull and IHM staff

We will tour the rare oak savannah, native prairies, wetlands on the property. We will then tour the Motherhouse and the campus with an IHM tour guide. Cost is \$12, and lunch is available for an extra \$8. Send checks made out to Detroit Audubon Society to 24433 W. Nine Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48033.

Address: 610 W. Elm Ave., Monroe, MI, 48162. IHM phone is (734) 241-3660.

Take I-75 South to exit 14, Elm Avenue. Go west towards Monroe and cross over Monroe Street (M-125). Look for the Motherhouse entrance on the right. Park in the west lot, where Jim Bull will meet the group.

PASSING OF GEORGIA REID

It is with fondness and admiration that we say goodbye to Georgia Reid, who passed away May 5, 2012. She was a fine birder and a great woman, and she will be missed by many. For more about Georgia and the amazing life she shared with so many, please visit the DAS website at www.detroitaudubon.org.

SONGBIRD NESTS

POST-MIGRATION BIRD-WATCHING

by Leonard Weber

During the brief spring migration, many Southeast Michigan birders concentrate on trying to see as many as possible of the warblers and other songbirds that migrate through. I am one of these, scheduling visits to migration hotspots like Point Pelee, Ontario, and Magee Marsh, Ohio, each May, hoping for close-up views of these birds in their bright breeding plumage.

An increasingly large part of my annual bird-watching, however, is now spent looking for and watching songbird nests. I start hunting for nests as early as April (American Robins and Common Grackles are the earliest nest builders that I usually find), but nest watching becomes a more primary focus after migration season, from late May through July. As many birds have more than one brood, nesting season is extensive.

Finding nesting birds and observing their nesting-related behavior is an immensely enjoyable and satisfying way of getting to know birds better:

- In June 2011, after locating several different Baltimore Oriole nests in Eliza Howell Park, I returned several times to watch both female and male adults fetching insects for the young in the nests. And—just as exciting—I had the opportunity to point out the hanging nests and the feeding orioles to several individuals for whom this observation was a new experience.
- A little later in 2011 I watched a female House Finch pulling threads repeatedly from an old rag and flying off with them. The male was constantly accompanying her and standing by (as a guardian?) as she selected what she wanted to add to the nest. I did not know previously about this role played by the male House Finch in nest building and am now wondering how widespread this behavior is among males of other species.

For a few species, finding nests is not easy. It is not easy precisely because birds commonly locate their nests so that they will not be found. Nests can be so expertly camouflaged that sometimes, even after I have found a nest and know exactly where it is, I still have a hard time actually spotting it when I return later.

I have occasionally found a nest (of a Mourning Dove, for example) just by looking up into a tree and scanning the low branches. This does not happen often, however. As a rule, I find bird nests by letting the birds lead me to them. When a bird repeatedly returns to the same tree or shrub or thicket, it is for a reason. In breeding season, that reason is likely to be nest-related.

I have been most successful in finding nests at two different times in the breeding process—when the adults are still adding to the nesting material or when, after the eggs are hatched, they are feeding the young. In both cases, the trips to the nest are frequent, and the bird is likely to be carrying something in its beak. When a Northern Cardinal, an insect in its beak, flies repeatedly through the yard to the same shrub by the side of the neighbor's house, it is a pretty safe bet that a nest is located there.

There are other signs to watch for as well when trying to narrow down the area where the nest might be found. Sometimes, the male of the species will act as a sentinel, often on a very visible perch, while the female is on the nest. When I see a Red-bellied Woodpecker at the top of the same branch regularly in breeding season, I suspect that there is



Baltimore Oriole at nest. Photo by Margaret Weber.

a nest in a nearby cavity. I have found several Common Grackle nests by taking a closer look after seeing one repeatedly use the same perch. The sentinel is usually not in the same tree as the nest; while his lookout post provides a clue, it does not help me find the location as much as birds flying frequently into the same tree.

Sometimes, birds will announce by their scolding that we are in the neighborhood of their nest. Many of us have experienced male Red-winged Blackbirds flying low overhead, apparently trying to chase us from the area. On the basis of this behavior, we can conclude that we are near a nest, but we don't know exactly where—and their "attacks" may be just threatening enough that we do not stay around very long to search.

Even when we have identified the likely nesting area, it can still be quite difficult to find the actual nest. While looking branch-to-branch is sometimes successful (one might find a Cardinal nest by going right up to the suspected scrub and peering in), many times it is not. We often need to have the bird lead us all the way to the nest. When returning to the nest, birds will often alight first on a branch a little distance away and then work their way to the nest. To find the actual nest, we need to watch them carefully even after they arrive at their nesting tree.

Even with the best effort, I am not always successful. I have often seen Song Sparrows carry insects into a thicket, only to disappear totally from sight. They do not lead me to their nests.

Field guides to bird nests provide useful information on the nesting times and habitats of different species. They also describe the color and size of the eggs, but I rarely see the eggs. Once I find the nest, I am content to observe adult behavior from a moderate distance.

If looking for and watching birds is "birding," then perhaps looking for and watching nests is "nesting." June is a good month for nesting.

LAST YEAR'S FUNDRAISING REFLECTS DOWNTURN

From 4/1/2011 to 3/31/2012, 261 members gave a total of \$12,470 to Detroit Audubon for the general fund. This is about half as much as was given last year, but almost 50% greater than two years ago. With 6,000+ members, the rate of member giving was about 4.4%. The list below shows donors by total giving categories. Those marked with * gave more than once.

Please consider giving to help DAS continue to develop programs and events for bird education. We deeply appreciate your support for DAS. Please advise us if your name is not listed.

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CUMULATIVE MORTALITY: HOW MANY DEAD BIRDS IS TOO MANY?

The cat brings a bedraggled Ovenbird into the house. The bird is already dead. You quietly dispose of it. A Wood Thrush hits your window and dies on the patio. You wince as you give it the same treatment. A Philadelphia Vireo crashes into a communication tower in Mississippi. You might have seen it in Ohio over the weekend, but now you can't. Similar events are played out across the country day in, day out. Each individual case may seem inconsequential to the overall population of a particular bird species, but what about the cumulative effect that these deaths have on birds?

At American Bird Conservancy, we talk with many of the stakeholders involved in activities that harm birds—from people who feed feral cats to representatives of the pesticide industry. Without fail, each one disputes the seriousness of their impacts, and points the finger at some other cause of bird mortality as being the "real culprit." Cat advocates blame habitat loss, the wind industry blames mountaintop coal mining; a representative of the communication tower industry once suggested to us that the real problem was birds getting drunk from eating fermenting berries along highway medians and crashing into cars. We address each diversion (including the very real issue of poorly planned highway plantings) with patient persistence, carefully researched scientific evidence, and when necessary, legal action.

The top threats that migratory songbirds face are, in fact, natural: severe weather events—especially in the fall, and depredation by native predators. Fortunately, populations of most migratory songbirds have breeding strategies that are designed to cope with these levels of mortality. Most songbirds have high reproductive rates, specifically designed to withstand heavy losses during the high-risk strategy of migration. So perhaps these mortality factors are all just fine: a few birds here, a few birds there; a thousand more there, a million more there. So long as the habitat is still there, perhaps they can withstand everything we can throw at them and then some.

At ABC, we have done a lot of thinking about the issue of cumulative mortality recently, in particular in relation to the development of the wind industry. It looks as though wind turbines will be killing somewhere between one million and four million birds each year when the industry is fully built out across the country; a relatively small number when

compared to the massive mortality caused by cats and collisions with windows, both of which number in the hundreds of millions, perhaps even billions. Of course cats don't kill many Golden Eagles, and windows don't threaten Whooping Cranes, but in terms of mass casualties, wind is definitely not the biggest threat. But what if we are already close to a tipping point for some bird populations? At some point, particularly in the face of ongoing habitat loss, an additional million will be a million too many, and populations of even common birds could begin a slow decline towards extinction—and even if not toward extinction, isn't there a point at which we can agree there are fewer birds and higher population risks than we desire?

Nature is not a laboratory; we cannot test these theories in controlled isolation and see what happens. Most bird populations are too hard to monitor, changes often happen too gradually, and they are generally too hard to link to particular threats when many threats are acting concurrently. So rather than just pointing fingers at others, we believe we should minimize all significant causes of bird mortality.

The primary driving factor of private industry is profit maximization, which means that any push for additional environmental safeguards will usually be met with the response that it costs too much and is too burdensome. This tactic is leveraged with the notion that jobs and the economy will be negatively impacted as a result. More often than not, this is a fallacy, but where it is true, it is invariably a short-term consequence. As taxpayers, shareholders, and citizens, we need to demand more from industry. As stewards of the land for the generations that will follow, we have the responsibility of taking the longer view beyond a company's balance sheet for this fiscal year.

The hunting community addressed the declines of waterfowl this way when they set up a major funding program for wetland acquisition and restoration, and just a few decades later this effort is a global model of conservation success. Isn't it time that other interest groups started thinking this way too?

(This article originally appeared in the American Bird Conservancy's June 2011 Bird Calls newsletter. It is reprinted with permission.)

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Tree full of Turkey Vultures in Farmington. *Photo courtesy of Sherry Stewart.*



Feathered Tales

Compiled by Beverly Stevenson

Sherry Stewart passed along a photo of a tree full of Turkey Vultures on Grand River in Farmington. Sherry estimated 80 to 100 vultures roosting in a neighbor's yard. Dave Sutter reported a nesting pair of Cooper's Hawks in his yard on Merrill north of 19 Mile in Macomb County. The hawks are nesting on 60-foot pines that Dave planted. And Ron Cassizzi was awestruck by a pair of Pileated Woodpeckers hammering on an oak on his land outside St. Helen.

In other reports to the DAS office, Kenea from Grosse Ile called to report about 200 herons on an island in the Detroit River, which she saw from her home on East River Road. And Charles Robertson reported watching Chimney Swifts around a 60-foot powerhouse chimney on Main Street in Clarkston. Charles saw them gathering each night about dusk. He has been watching them since 1946 and noticed their numbers have declined to about 100.

Detroit Audubon is the fortunate recipient of some interesting donations. Jack Lutz, a long-time member and volunteer, donated a facsimile of volume 1, number 1 of Audubon Magazine, originally published in February, 1887. A single copy then cost 6 cents and contained 24 pages. One article was entitled "Woman's Heartlessness." It was an appeal to women to stop wearing feathers as adornments on their hats. One woman was quoted as saying, "I think there is a great deal of sentiment wasted on the birds. There are so many of them, they will never be missed any more than mosquitoes." Thanks for sharing!

Also received from another long-term member and volunteer, Ray Coleman, was a beautifully framed photo that he took of an Eastern Bluebird. It complements our office perfectly. Thanks so much, Ray!