

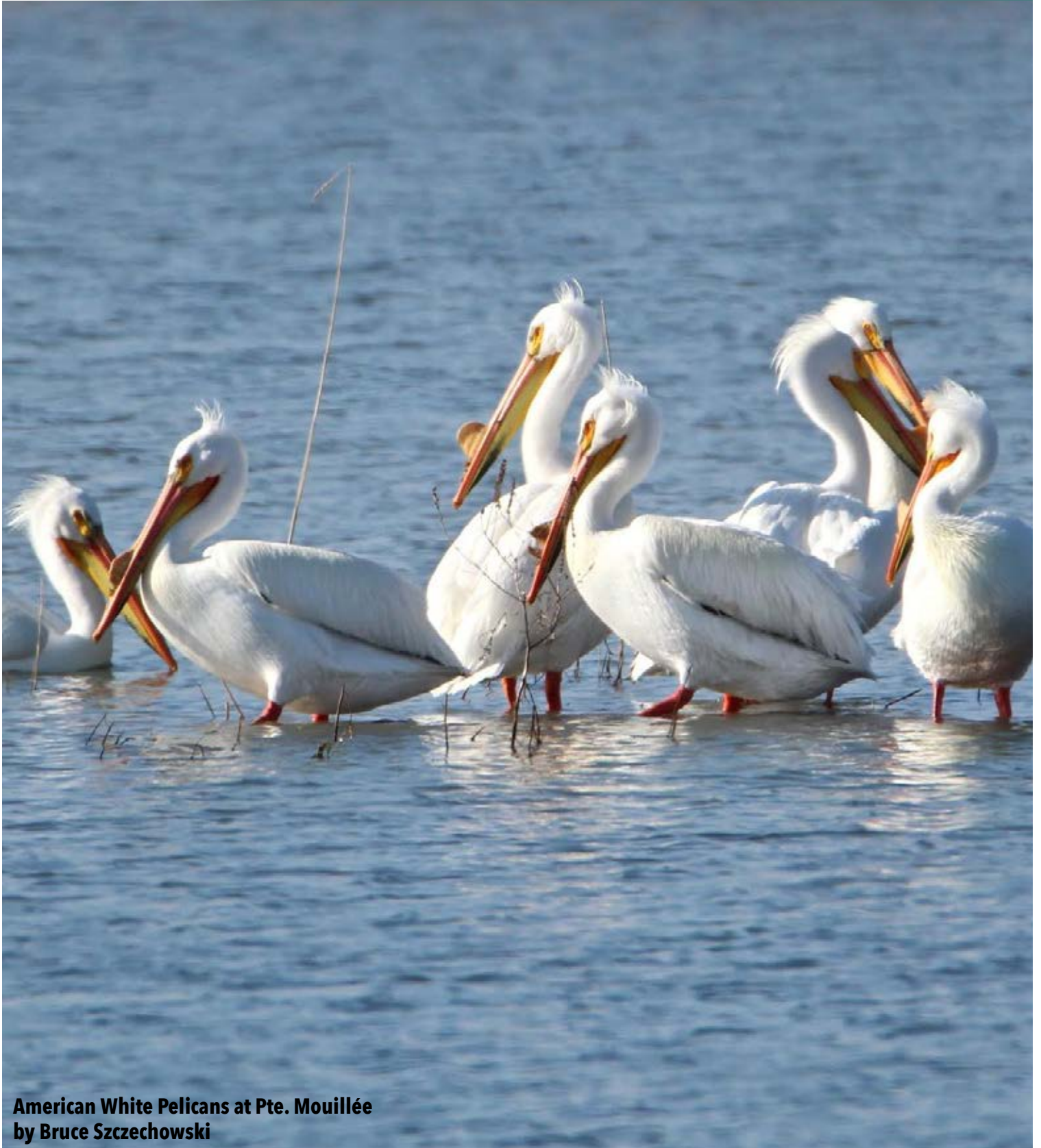
Flyway

Summer 2018

A Detroit Audubon publication

www.detroitaudubon.org

The mission of Detroit Audubon is to foster the appreciation and conservation of birds and the environment we share. Our three mission areas are: Education, Research, and Action.



**American White Pelicans at Pte. Mouillée
by Bruce Szczechowski**

Flyway

A publication of Detroit Audubon

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MYSTERY BIRD:

Can you guess the identity of this commonly heard, but not so often seen songbird? Hint: its song sounds like it is telling us to "Drink Your Tea!"
Photo by Bruce Szczechowski

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**Erin Rowan on the
St. Clair Cruise.
Diane Cheklich photo**



**L-R: Ekanem Obong (Let's Do
Something Detroit), Bailey
Lininger (DA), Karen Tumblin
(DA), Diane Cheklich (DA).
Diane Cheklich photo**

Farewell...

from Research Coordinator and Office Administrator, Erin Rowan

It is with a heavy heart that I say goodbye to Detroit Audubon, my colleagues, our partners and volunteers. I am so proud of all the work we have accomplished together in the last two years.

Our collaborative efforts have resulted in 1) the increase of Detroit Audubon's Safe Passage building collision monitoring from 11 buildings to over 44 buildings, 2) the increase of our Community Science volunteer corps to over 90 individuals, 3) over 300 Black Terns banded and hundreds of nests monitored, 4) Detroit becoming the 29th Urban Bird Treaty City, and 5) the preparations for Detroit Bird City's first vacant lot restoration, which is expected to break ground this Fall!

Our organization's foundation has been strengthened with a new mission statement, vision and strategic plan. We have created a new member and donor database, increased our active donors and members with personalized appeals, and have worked with some incredible staff, contractors, partners and

volunteers every step of the way!

I will be starting a new joint position with Audubon Great Lakes and MI Department of Natural Resources based out of Detroit in mid-August, so I won't be far away! The MI Birds Program Associate position will be focused more on programming, outreach and communications as it relates to MI birds and state managed lands. I'm thrilled to be taking this next step in my career with Audubon Great Lakes and MI Department of Natural Resources and thank Detroit Audubon for helping me on my professional journey.

If you have worked with me or Detroit Audubon over the years, please feel free to join me and my colleagues at Detroit Audubon at Jolly Pumpkin on August 10th from 6-7.30pm for some conversations, celebrations, libations, hugs and farewell! If you can't make it on August 10th, hopefully I'll get to see you at a MI Birds program in the future!

Volunteer Spotlight: Karen Tumblin

Karen Tumblin, our dedicated office volunteer, has been with Detroit Audubon for over 2 years and has donated countless hours of her time and organizational skills to help us get our office files and Nature Bookstore organized and up-to-date. Karen also sits on our Conservation Committee and has assisted in the planning and preparation for our Detroit Bird City project, volunteered as a door-knocker to raise awareness about the project, and assisted with bird surveys at our Detroit Bird City pilot parks.

This summer, when our Research Coordinator and Office Administrator was out in the field, Karen took on even more responsibility and helped keep Detroit Audubon up-to-date on donor and member data entry, deposit preparation, and thank you letters. Detroit Audubon, and I personally, want to thank Karen for all of her hard work and dedication over the years! Her support through her volunteerism has helped propel Detroit Audubon to where it is today and we are forever grateful!

BULLY PULPIT: ENJOY BIRDING? THANK HUNTERS!

By James N. (Jim) Bull, Ph.D., President

I am not a hunter and I doubt I will ever be. I have no desire to hunt birds or any other animal except with my binoculars and my cameras. That said, I am grateful for hunters and as a birder you should be grateful too.

Let's be clear hunters now compared to hunters in the 19th century are two entirely different species. In the 1800s and early 1900s relentless commercial hunting drove the Passenger Pigeon to extinction even though their population numbered in the billions and a flock flying by could darken the skies for days. Market hunters also were decimating egret, Roseate Spoonbill, and other wading bird populations as huge numbers of these birds were killed because their delicate breeding plumage was in demand to adorn lady's hats. Even whole songbird carcasses were killed to decorate lady's hats. Out of concern for those birds, the Audubon movement was born. National Audubon and Detroit Audubon are proud and direct descendants of that movement.

Sports hunters and fishermen were then and continue to be our allies. They along with Audubon were in the forefront of not only the bird conservation movement but the conservation movement in general. One hundred years ago the efforts of a coalition of sportsmen and birders won passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which protect many species from ever being hunted, and strictly regulates hunting of designated game species like ducks, geese, grouse, and wild turkeys.

Ardent conservationists that they are, modern sports hunters have done much more to preserve habitats that birds need to thrive than non-hunting birders have. They know that without habitat the birds



White-tailed Deer.
Bruce Szczechowski photo

they hunt will not be around for very long. And many if not most hunters are passionate about protecting birds and zealous to adhere to bag limits to ensure game populations thrive. They also support scientific wildlife management that protects and restores ecosystems that all wildlife, including game and non-game birds need to flourish.

First enacted in 1937, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, also known as the Pittman-Robertson Act, levies an 11% tax on "sporting arms and ammunition" including not only guns and ammunition used for hunting but bows and arrows as well, which is distributed to the states and territories of the U.S for up to 75% of the funding for acquisition and improvement of wildlife habitat, introduction of wildlife into suitable habitat, research into wildlife problems, surveys and inventories of wildlife problems, acquisition and development of access facilities for public use, and hunter education programs. That act has purchased more wildlife habitat and has funded restoration of more wildlife

habitat than any other single source. According to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service webpage that was updated in January 2010, over two billion dollars has been distributed to states through this program which also means that states have kept up their 25% match contributions with over \$500 million dollars.

Hunters also pay for wildlife habitat management through hunting license fees. In addition to their license fees, duck hunters also pay through purchase of the required federal duck stamp (with has a wonderful legacy of wildlife artists who compete to design the stamp each year as well).

In addition, sportsmen's groups like Ducks Unlimited, the Ruffed Grouse Society, The National Wild Turkey Federation, and Pheasant Unlimited have also contributed billions of dollars to save and enhance wildlife habitat, and for wildlife research, which while centered on game species, helps non-game species in these ecosystems as well. Ducks Unlimited's website boasts that

they have conserved 14 million acres of waterfowl habitat in North America since 1937! I attended the open-house for Ducks Unlimited new state headquarters building in Dexter, Michigan this spring and thanked their staff and members for their efforts that have provided important habitat for game and non-game bird species as well.

Some of the best birding areas (and of course bird conservation areas) in Southeast Michigan exist only because hunter dollars funded them. Pointe Mouillée, probably THE best birding area in Southeast Michigan, and the most extensive area of Lake Erie marshes still extant, is only there because of sport hunter dollars. Likewise, some other favorite birding spots like Pontiac State Game Area, the Port Huron State Game Area, and the Lapeer State Game Area which support species like Grasshopper Sparrows and Cerulean Warblers are there because of and are managed with hunter dollars. And the St Clair Flats State Wildlife Area where we carry out our research to understand the decline of the Black Tern and ultimately to help recover that species is a state game area funded by hunter dollars. And the Michigan DNR also provides us with the boat our Research Coordinator uses almost daily during June and July when doing her research and provides the gasoline to fuel the boat as well.

Where would we be without the funds, and the time and sweat of hunters that provide so much of the habitat that supports the birds we like to observe? Yes, it can be aggravating that many parts of these state game areas are off-limits to birders for much of the fall while hunters have their field days. But, we should ask ourselves, "What if this area provided by hunters didn't exist at all?" Because

that is the alternative. When I ask that question, and when you ask that question our best response is gratefulness and hopefully a commitment to step up to the plate ourselves to help fund conservation efforts.

I have long thought that birders need to push for legislation to tax binoculars, bird seed and other birding supplies so that we are helping to provide funding for wildlife habitat as well. Hunters should not be alone in this and it would give us a stronger voice at the table. Individually we can step up by paying for a duck stamp each year. They sell them to non-hunters as well, you know, and the funds all go to protecting and restoring wetlands which all waterfowl and other marsh birds need.

Some other significant contributions by hunters: Retired Rep. John Dingell, often called the "Dean" of the House is an avid hunter and it is because of his love of the outdoors that he became one of the chief architects of most of the landmark environmental legislation passed in the wake of Earth Day in 1970 including the National Environmental Policy Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. It was chiefly through Dingell's influence that Section 404 of the Clean Water Act was included which protects wetlands over 5 acres in size.

He also was instrumental as were hunting groups in the coalition that Detroit Audubon helped lead in saving Humbug Marsh from development. And it was on a duck hunting trip with philanthropist Peter Stroh that the two of them cooked up the idea of creating an international wildlife refuge on the Detroit River. They presented that idea at an international conference I attended whose purpose

was to create a vision for the Detroit River's future. Our small groups had just reported out when Dingell and Stroh walked in and presented the international refuge concept. We all loved it but it seemed almost too far-fetched. It wasn't. Within two years the refuge was a reality and not long after that Humbug Marsh became its first acquisition and it is still the gem in its crown of many fine wildlife units within the refuge. While the refuge provides opportunities for birding, wildlife observation, and environmental education, it also has many areas that are open to hunting as well. Without hunters that refuge would not have been possible, and Humbug Marsh might have been turned into an intensive housing and commercial development. We are more successful when we work with our allies.

While Detroit Audubon and hunting groups will disagree on some issues, we share much more in common than that which separates us. Detroit Audubon has and will continue to oppose hunting of some species namely Mourning Doves, Sandhill Cranes, and Gray Wolves, but we are not against hunting generally. Hunters are some of our most important allies in what is literally a fight these days to keep hold of the conservation gains we've made, while hoping we can make some progress as well.

Detroit Audubon is a member of the Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative (MIBCI), MI Birds, and our staff both serve on the Michigan Bird Conservation Steering Committee, all of which bring together a coalition of birding groups, hunter groups, environmental groups, state and federal agencies, and the Michigan State University Extension Service to work together on conservation interests of mutual concern. The goal of MI Birds is to "work together to

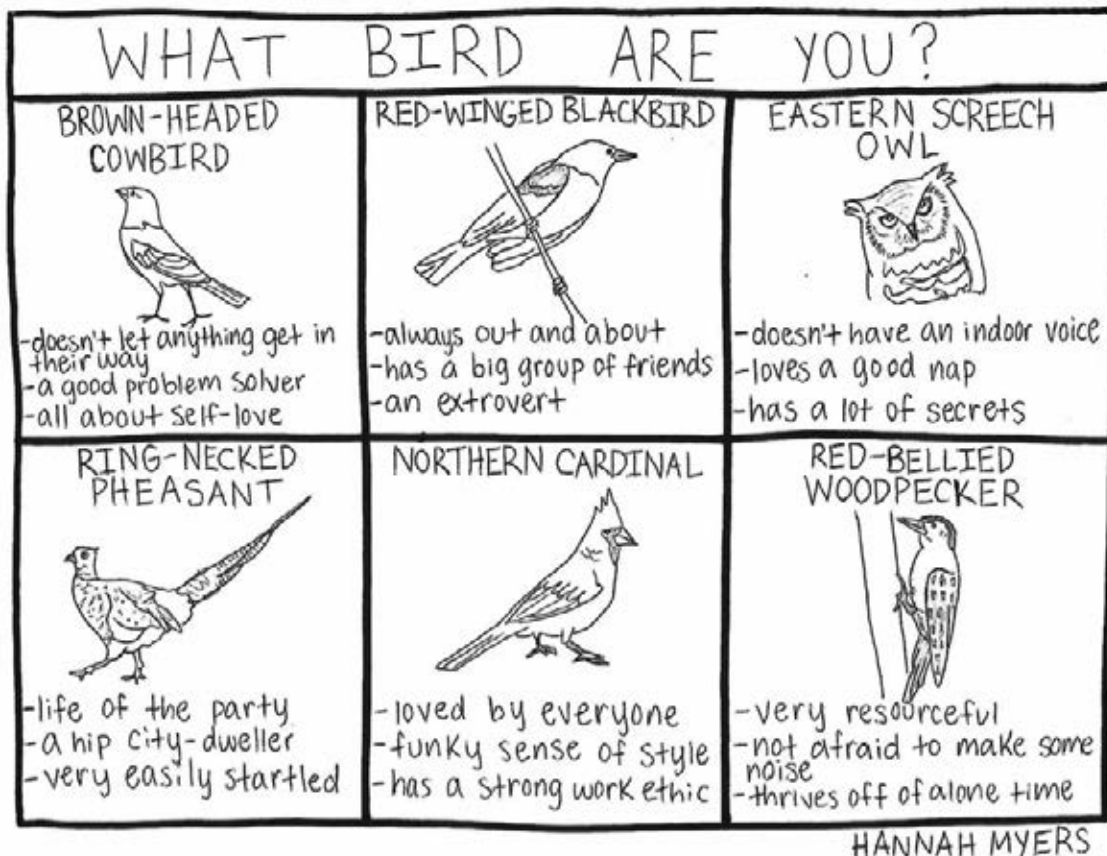
create broad societal support for bird conservation." The shared values we agree on are: 1) The outdoors enhances our quality of life, 2) Michigan's outdoor heritage is important, and 3) Sustainable wildlife populations are important. Extinctions should be prevented. We also are sponsors of a MI Birds calendar that highlights different bird species with beautiful photos and text each month and lists important bird partner hunting and birding events each month. Learn more about this coalition and partner events by visiting (and liking) their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/MIBirdspage/>

It should also be noted that Detroit Audubon worked closely with the Michigan United Conservation Clubs,

Michigan's leading sportsmen's group, in the 1970s on the successful citizen's initiative campaign known as "the Bottle Bill" that resulted in the Michigan mandate for returnable bottles and bottle deposits for containers of carbonated beverages, a law that still has overwhelming public support. Efforts have begun to upgrade that law to include water and juice bottles which have become much more prevalent in the years since the law was enacted.

Love birds? Enjoy birding? You might want to thank hunters for all they have done and continue to do to provide the habitat which is essential for sustaining all those birds we love to observe, and for being strong allies in supporting bird and environmental conservation generally.

SIDE NOTE: Detroit Audubon has also long supported control of Mute Swans, a beautiful but alien invasive species that is raising havoc with native waterfowl populations, and we've supported control of White-tailed Deer in area Metroparks as well. Without that control deer would destroy ecosystems and especially wildflowers that are important parts of our flora and fauna. Just look at the fenced exclosures in some of the Metroparks, that keep deer out, to see what the vegetation would be like with no deer pressure. It is our fault—we've developed the land right up the border of most Metroparks and we've long ago eliminated the deer's natural predators. Birds and wildflowers like Trillium benefit from this White-tailed Deer control.



Swooping Scoops: The American White Pelican

By Grace Martin

Michiganders are encouraged to keep their eyes to skies this summer as some monumental migrants makes their way to our shores. The American White Pelican has made a visit to the Great state of Michigan. The pelicans are truly a wonder to behold. They have an impressive 9-foot wingspan that ranks them among one for the largest birds in North America. To give you some perspective, that's a longer reach than even the likes of top athletes like LeBron James!

Conservation Status

According to the Audubon's Guide to North American Birds, colonies are vulnerable to disturbance and habitat loss. Populations of the American White Pelican declined through first half of 20th century but have been experiencing substantial spurts of population growth since 1970s (Audubon). Conservationists suspect that increased population sizes may be one of the reasons migratory routes have expanded to Midwestern states like Michigan.

Where Do Pelicans Typically Occur?

The American White Pelican is usually found in western and southern regions of North

America near lakes, marshes, or salt bays. Flocks, squadrons, or scoops of Pelicans stop to rest along their migratory routes along lakes and rivers. With an abundance of lakes, rivers, and marshes, it's no surprise that the colonies of pelicans felt welcome in our waters.

Pelican Hotspots

One of the best spots to observe the pelicans in action is at the Pointe Mouillée State Game Area in Monroe County. The area is comprised of mainly coastal wetlands near the mouth of the Huron River. The park is the outdoors enthusiast's must see. It is a fantastic spot to observe all kinds wildlife as you hike or bike along the shoreline.

How Can I Learn More?

If you would like to learn more about the pelicans and where to see them at Pointe Mouillée, please call the DNR offices at (734) 379-9692. You can also visit The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website. Simply head to the section called All About Birds (or use www.allaboutbirds.org) and scroll through information about the behavior, breeding, distribution, migration, and habitats of the American White Pelican.



Great Egret. Bruce Szczechowski photo

2018 Field Trips

August

4th: Pointe Mouillée \$

September

8th: Eliza Howell Park

15th-16th: Hawkfest at Lake Erie Metropark

22nd-23rd: Swift Night Out Festival

October

6th: Lake Erie Metropark

13th: Crosswinds Marsh

19th: Elmwood Cemetery

20th: Eliza Howell Park

November

2nd: Owl Prowl

9th: Elmwood Cemetery

10th: Point Edward and Lake Huron Shore \$

17th: Sandhill Cranes at Jasper-Pulaski FGWA \$

24th: Belle Isle

December

1st: Elmwood Cemetery

16th: Detroit Audubon Christmas Bird Count

22nd: Rockwood Christmas Bird Count



White Pelicans in flight at Pte. Mouillée. Bruce Szczechowski photo

Pte. Mouillée—Paradise Lost, But A Wildlife Sanctuary Reborn

Story and Photos by Bruce Szczechowski

Pt. Mouillée, dubbed the “wet point” by early French fur traders, is a microcosm of humankind’s global interference with Mother Nature. Once an expansive, majestic river delta jutting into western Lake Erie, this wetland complex is now a fragmented--though ecologically-important--version of its former self. Once sprawling tens of thousands of coastal acreage near present-day Rockwood, Michigan, today the artificial wetland complex covers approximately 4,500 acres. However, unlike 31 of the 32 miles of coastal wetlands once lining the Detroit River, which were drained and filled over time, this unique Lake Erie coastal marsh located just north of Monroe (and about 30 miles south of Detroit) began to lose its majesty following the damming of the Huron River, particularly construction of the Flat Rock Dam to provide power for Ford Motor Company operations in the mid-1920s.

Slowly but surely, Lake Erie storm waves began withdrawing more “sediment savings” than the dammed Huron River could annually deposit. By the 1960s, due the erosion of the once protective barrier sandy island, the impressive Pt. Mouillée wetland complex was a mere figment of its former self. An historical fish nursery, waterfowl magnet and sportsman’s paradise soon became an eroded and dying ecosystem, further assaulted by the unrestrained contamination of the lower Great Lakes by massive inputs of industrial, sewage and agricultural pollutants.

With the re-awakening of environmental consciousness in the late 1960s and early ‘70s, governmental programs were initiated to help restore and protect Great Lakes water quality and mitigate loss of wetlands. Ironically, dredging of contaminated sediments from the Rouge River and shipping channels within the Detroit River--and their deposition in a confined disposal facility (CDF) that doubles as a man-made “barrier beach” (known today as the “banana dike”)--has played a key role in the initial restoration of the Pt. Mouillée wetland complex. While concerns remain about the long-term integrity of this particular CDF and leaching of toxic contaminants, absent removal of the Huron River’s Flat Rock Dam ambitious “environmental engineering” alternative allowed a fairly significant portion of the original expanse of marshland at Pt. Mouillée to begin healing and regenerating since the CDF’s completion in the early ‘80s.

The Pt. Mouillée wetland complex is now essentially a managed enclosed ecosystem, surrounded by a network of dikes laced with several causeways, and whose water levels can be controlled by culverts to facilitate wetland revitalization. Even in the face of past and ongoing threats from invasive species, like Purple Loosestrife, Round Gobies, Phragmites, Mute Swans and other non-natives

needing constant monitoring and control efforts, Pt. Mouillée in its current rendition has once again become a thriving, albeit chronically disturbed, wildlife sanctuary that provides crucial habitat for an incredible number of species, particularly waterfowl and shorebirds, along with myriad other migratory bird species.

I have been a fairly regular visitor to Pt. Mouillée for the last 30 years or so since completion of the artificial barrier reef and impoundment of the marsh by riprap and dikes. Through all the adverse human impacts on Pt. Mouillée’s ecology Mother Nature has been irrepressibly tenacious in her resolve to bounce back from human disturbances; and, with an assist from concerned citizens, an impressive number of native species continue to thrive within the restored Pt. Mouillée marshland. Birds, in particular, paying more attention to migratory cues and inherited behaviors enhancing survival, rather than to human activities putting their survival in peril--have been able to surmount the bevy of human landscape changes and ecological insults thus far, by and large, to continue on their evolutionary journeys without humanity cutting them short.

Now a part of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge--as well as receiving “Important Bird Area” status--Pt. Mouillée serves as a beacon of hope to all who visit and are able to appreciate its impressive biodiversity, particularly the annual bird migrations during spring and again in late summer/early fall. These serve as a testament to how conservation efforts and human restraint can allow life to flourish, rather than being buried beneath the foundations of human development. It is mainly for this reason that I find I must regularly visit Pt. Mouillée and other natural places to renew my sense of hope in humankind by witnessing these migratory miracles.

Spending time in nature allows a person to literally witness time-honored “rights of passage”--seasonal trials wherein species’ fitness is often tested by tremendous feats of endurance, not the least of which are long-distance avian migrations. Nothing is as uplifting to me--especially after a long, cold Great Lakes’ winter--as seeing feathered friends returning each year to the places I have always experienced their company in the past. Even trekking out to Pt. Mouillée during winter months and admiring the hearty birds that never left (like American Goldfinches and Black-capped Chickadees), or Arctic summer residents who adopt Pt. Mouillée as their overwintering grounds (like American Tree Sparrows and all manner of waterfowl), warms my winter-weary soul more than a toasty wood-burning stove on a frigid January day. Keeping in touch with one’s natural surroundings on a regular basis has

**Dunlins fill the sky at
Pte. Mouillée.**



a way of bonding a person to other living things and instilling in a person what I like to call a “living chronology of places” (a rudimentary way of telling seasonal time by the living things or life events occurring in an oft-frequented nature area), which comforts the mind with familiarity and provides assurance to the concerned soul that all is still well with the world. Greeting and welcoming these feathered friends each year in the places I know I should still find them, and in the time-frame I expect to see them, is an annual reawakening of eco-consciousness that tempers my pessimism about the impending fate of life on Earth at the hands of humans with a positive dose of optimism that life

still has a fighting chance.

Pt. Mouillée has always been one of the special places that sparks such eternal optimism in me. Just as surely as most Michiganders see American Robins returning to their yards every spring—even in cityscapes—and would certainly notice their absence if spring arrived without their jubilant melodic songs filling the air in the early morning and late evening hours, so too I would notice during certain seasonal junctures the absence of foraging migratory shorebirds (like Yellowlegs, Dunlin and Whimbrels), rafts of ducks (like Canvasback, Redhead, scaup and myriad other waterfowl), the overwintering of stately Tundra Swans with



**A Whimbrel
calling in flight.**

their hauntingly beautiful calls, scores of elegant herons and egrets wading among cattails, fish-eating ospreys nesting on human-made platforms, too-numerous-to-count Canada Geese staking claim to their "rented" muskrat lodges, the hordes of Red-winged Blackbirds filling the air with their irrepressible territorial vocalizations, the alarm cries of abundant Killdeer scurrying along the dikes just ahead of human intruders, etc., should such things vanish from the Pt. Mouillée landscape.

In late February I am always thrilled to hear and see "my" first single male Red-winged Blackbird, with its yellow-bordered red-epaulets, in the vastness of the Pt. Mouillée wetland complex. As an avid birder, I am often possessive of first sightings of the year (and I feel I am not alone in that regard). My possessiveness is not borne out of selfishness or wanting to keep particular bird sightings to myself (for I am always eager to share them with others, especially photos); but, rather, it is borne out of "biophilia"—a term for "love of life" coined by the eminent biologist and naturalist, E.O. Wilson—and my need to deeply connect with other living things. Such connections seem to have a way of mending frayed neural circuitry overstressed by life in a human-altered and biologically-degraded world. Therefore, I eagerly document each annual "new bird" sighting—whether a very common species or one of the rarest—in digital pictures or in my memory banks as special in a personal way that no one else could possibly understand.

You may be asking: How can such a common bird—a bird some, especially farmers, might call a "pest" and which in coming weeks will number in the thousands in the marsh—be so enthusiastically

embraced upon its return to its nesting haunts. After months of cold and snow, the first sighting every year or more often the first calls of a solitary Red-winged Blackbird warms my biodiversity-starved, winter-weary soul, lifting my spirits by letting me know that one of Leopold's "cogs in the wheel" hasn't gone missing... The first female won't arrive for several weeks, but I always keep a keen eye open for her arrival, too. So far, she hasn't disappointed, and for that I am grateful.

Generally, I'll walk 5-6 miles while offloading the stress accumulated from living in the modern world—my eco-centric global paradigm too often collides with the still predominant human-centered worldview, and I have an innate need to nurture my biophilic soul with frequent trips to nature-filled places and biodiverse spaces. As a biologist and teacher (with some medical school training to boot), I have hypothesized that urban and suburban life stressors cause deleterious epigenetic changes that only trips into nature can reverse; and, rare bird sightings just give me even more incentive to repair my genetic damage. They also generally increase my hiking mileage an additional 5-6 miles (with hikes of 12-14 miles not uncommon when trying to track down another Snowy Owl, American Avocet, Glossy Ibis, Black-necked Stilt, Red Knot, Glaucous Gull, Eurasian Ruff, etc.).

Needless to say, my Pt. Mouillée visits serve many purposes—exercise, destressing, meditation, to name a few—but, the primary reason is that I need such visits to keep me grounded and a little saner in a sometime surreal world. It is too easy to disconnect from the natural world and its cycles by immersing oneself in cyber space and material pursuits, allowing the artificial to supplant the real. The Earth, in my opinion, is suffering greatly because of this disconnect and, rather than being assimilated into an increasingly superficial existence, I find trips to Pt. Mouillée and other nature areas ground me in the reality of life and fill me with gratitude for the life-giving functions only nature's vitality can provide.

Though Pt. Mouillée offers an abundance of bird life—approximately 300 species have been documented visiting the wetland complex during its history—there are certainly many more sights to behold and enjoy, from impressive sunrises along the shoreline of Lake Erie to muskrat lodges providing more than homes for muskrats (such as sunbathing spots for cold-blooded animals, like snakes, turtles, and frogs, as well as nesting sites for birds, such as geese and ducks) to the return of the once rapidly-declining mink population to the blooming of floral species that attract myriad butterflies, including the Monarch. Of course, what

is seen above the waterline is only a small sampling of what lies beneath the surface—an even more diverse collection of plankton, invertebrates, amphibians, fish and aquatic plant life. While my main focus is generally on the bird life, feasting my eyes on all the other wonders Pt. Mouillée has to offer is a very welcomed bonus!

Spotting 5-foot-long Northern Water Snake draped across branches of willow growing along the Lake Erie shoreline basking in the sun is always an impressive sight. Even the state-threatened Eastern Fox Snake can be seen on occasion slithering across the dikes, as well as sunning Blanding's Turtles—a species of special concern. I caught my first glimpse of surprisingly large Spiny Soft-shelled Turtle hauled up on mudflats along the dikes lining the north end of the Pt.

Mouillée complex. All these sightings add to my wonderment about the natural world and bolster my optimism that our fractured world is being restored. Aside from its biodiversity and peaceful setting, Pt. Mouillée and its 20+ miles of trails are also used regularly by joggers, bikers, recreational hikers, hunters and trappers, as well as fishermen.

While some may view repetitive visits to an area—largely making observations of the same species year-after-year—as boring, that sentiment couldn't be further from the truth. For me (and many other birders I know), taking note of new arrivals each year, or

tallying Christmas Bird Count species and numbers, is one of life's labors of love. Welcoming back individuals from familiar species—and quite likely, individual birds I've probably seen in years past (at least I always feel that's the case)—fills me with a joy that must surely be analogous to the boundless joy a family dog feels every

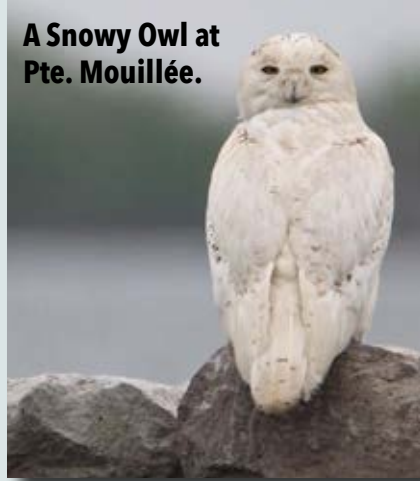
time it welcomes home a human member of its adopted pack, no matter how long the person has been gone or how many times they return; and, over time, it seems I have adopted all birds and other lifeforms as part of my extended family, and I wouldn't have it any other way!

The numerous Snowy Owls appearing from mid-December of last year into June of this year at Pt. Mouillée (as many as ten in one day!) was an awesome occurrence that I reveled in. Thus I took advantage of any opportunity I had to visit Pt. Mouillée to catch another glimpse of these majestic and beautiful raptors. I believe I walked a couple

hundred miles this past year just to seek out Snowy Owls at this marsh refuge, traversing snow and treacherous ice and often bitter temperatures just to get a few more looks and pictures of them. In fact, iconic birds can make birders—especially those who love taking photos of them—do some pretty dumb things!

Take, for example, my late winter excursion in early March to Pt. Mouillée to see the Snowy Owls for about the twentieth time

**A Snowy Owl at
Pte. Mouillée.**



**Great Blue Heron in flight at
Pte. Mouillée.**



since the new year rang in, when I just happened to catch sight of a couple of Short-eared Owls. It was late afternoon and the sunlight was dimming, but one of the Short-eared Owls had alighted on a signpost in the Long Pond Unit about a mile from the parking area on Sigler Rd. The ice was thinning, and my instincts warned me to be cautious on an abnormally warm late February day. However, as an avid birder and photographer, I of course threw caution to the westerly wind and decided that such opportunities don't present themselves very often. Slowly I made my way onto the ice-covered pond—I had already walked a couple miles across another ice-covered unit to get a few pics of a Snowy Owl resting on a muskrat lodge—so I had convinced myself that I could walk on water a second time to capture a shot of a rather rare Short-eared Owl. As I slid carefully over the ice I began noticing some water percolating through holes in the ice that had formed around last year's cattail stalks protruding through the ice—not a good sign, but not anything that would deter me from my prime directive. I took a zig-zag path toward the bird, as I have found this type of approach seems less intimidating to birds and makes them less prone to fly off before I am able to capture the birds at a distance that I consider more optimal for a worthwhile photo. I proceeded to follow this approach, stopping every now and then to take a few pictures of the owl from a distance, just to document the bird for posterity and eBird. That strategy, though, quickly disintegrated along with the thinning ice beneath my feet—taking a few more steps I heard a cracking sound and saw a few “spider-web cracks” forming around me, so I quickly headed in another direction, not really worried too much about where the Short-eared Owl was anymore. PHEW, disaster averted! I once more fixed my gaze on the owl that I was getting closer and closer to with every step. Just about in range, I thought, as I began to support my camera and zoom lens to get the Short-eared Owl shot of a lifetime. Suddenly, without warning, I heard a loud crack and through the ice I went! Luckily, I wasn't far from the dike and the icy water was only chest-deep. My feet hit the mucky bottom and I never shot out of water as fast as I did at that moment, like a penguin being chased by a Leopard Seal! Fortunately, the ice I immediately flopped myself onto was firm enough to allow me to “swim” over—yes, I have had first-aid survival training, so I instinctively knew to move horizontally over the icy surface, rather than try to immediately stand upright again. Needless to say, I immediately looked to see if the Short-eared Owl was still



The one that got away... Bruce nearly froze trying to get a shot of a Short-eared Owl. This photo is by Jerry Jourdan.

there—it was, but my rational brain finally started to take over my obsessive-compulsive brain. Being soaked in water that must have added another ten pounds to my winter clothing, feeling the chill beginning to set in on my body, and having plunged my two-month-old iPhone 8 under the water and wondering if it would still work, I knew what I should immediately do; but, maybe my camera was still operational, and since I was already soaked and not far from my car—hell, I could run all the way back if hypothermia started to set in—I could still get that once-in-a-lifetime photo... Alas, the lens and camera were waterlogged! My choice was made for me—time to carefully head to dry land and back to the car for a soggy ride home. Moral of the story: Rare birds can make avid birders do extremely foolish things, and they wouldn't think twice about

attempting to do them again!

I could go on and on about the amazing bird life at that appears each year at Pt. Mouillée like clockwork, from courting male Forster's Terns presenting their lifelong mates with a fish offering in early April to the massive, pouch-billed American White Pelicans now showing up in increasing numbers in recent years in late April through May to the waves of Whimbrels heading to the Arctic in impressive migratory flocks—I saw a thousand in mid-May this year during a single day—to the November invasion of Tundra Swans whose numbers continue to increase throughout late fall and winter months; but, perhaps that is for another article. Suffice it to say that there are very few places so close to a major city that host such a fascinating array and abundance of migratory species during the spring and fall migrations, or the hundreds of thousands of waterfowl that congregate during winter months, particularly in Lake Erie along the shores of Pt. Mouillée after the wetlands freeze over (or flood into the area following the winter thaw as they use Pt. Mouillée as a staging area on their way to Canadian summer haunts). And while appreciating the seasonal passage of time that birds tell, one can regain a sense of the miraculous nature of life on Earth as the descendants of dinosaurs carry the evolutionary torch tens of millions of years forward to the present day; and, I pray they will continue to do so next year and every year thereafter as I continue making regular treks along the trails of Pt. Mouillée to observe my familiar—and perhaps not-so-familiar—fine feathered friends, so I can be assured once more that all is still right with the world...

**Killdeer at
Pte. Mouillée.**



POINTE MOUILLÉE STATE GAME AREA HISTORY

By Jim Bull

While there is some "dry" land in the state game area including the small parking lot area on Lake Erie where the headquarters building stands, it is mostly comprised of wetlands, 4,040 acres of coastal wetlands to be exact! Its name, given to the area by French Fur Traders, fits very well since it literally means "Wet or Moist Point." Certainly this point has always been marshy—one of the most extensive marshlands in SE Michigan if not the whole state, and one of the premier places for shorebird migration.

It began its life as a game area in 1875 as the Pointe Mouillée Shooting Club established on 2,000 acres bought by several wealthy men. This land and some additional acreage was purchased by the state of Michigan in 1945 to create the present Pointe Mouillée State Game Area which also includes the 130-acre Celeron Island. A barrier island that protected the marsh washed away and thus began a period of severe erosion of the coastal marsh area. For awhile it was feared that all of this extensive marsh would be washed away-- lost forever!

In 1963 the state constructed a dike to protect 375 acres of the marsh. Meantime there was concern about polluted sediments in the Detroit River and the Rouge River. To clean them of those sediments and to maintain the channel for shipping these areas had to be dredged, but how could those contaminated sediments be disposed of? After studies indicated that building Confined Disposal Facilities (CDFs) (diked areas in lakes and bays) could be done without recontaminating the river or bay, congress passed several bills that allowed this type of disposal, but only after an environmental impact study was done prior to authorization. A proposal was drawn up and approved to build a Confined Disposal Facility (CDF) just lakeward of the coastal marshes at Pointe Mouillée that would do double duty by serving as a new barrier island to protect the marsh from erosion. Detroit Audubon supported building this diked disposal facility to protect

this important coastal marsh. My father Wilbur Bull, a Detroit Audubon board member spoke on the organization's behalf in support of this proposal at a public hearing. The construction was completed in phases from 1976-81, creating what is now known as the "banana dike" because of its shape. Although there are often good birds on that dike, that part of the area is owned and operated by the Army Corps of Engineers and is still used to dispose of contaminated sediments.



In the 1970s, the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority (HCMA) was looking for an area to create a park near where the Huron River empties into Lake Erie to complete the green necklace of parks surrounding the Detroit area along both the Huron and Clinton rivers. They briefly considered purchasing Pointe Mouillée to create that park. Detroit Audubon, with my father Wilbur Bull again taking the lead, spoke out in



**Army Corps of Engineers map.
Used by permission,**

opposition to the proposal. Detroit Audubon supports metroparks which have some of the best birding areas around, but the fear was since much of the area was wetland that a good portion of it might be filled into create picnic areas and other public amenities. A traditional metropark and Pointe Mouillée did not seem to be a good match and we feared birds would suffer. Luckily HCMA found a much better location for a park just a little further north--the present Lake Erie Metropark, which also has extensive marshes, but includes woodlands and good areas for picnicking and other public uses (like the wave pool) that just would not have been possible at Pointe Mouillée without draining a good portion of the marsh.

In addition to the plethora of traditional marsh birds like Common Gallinules with their horn-like toot, which can often be seen with chicks following behind, Pointe Mouillée is known for attracting unusual, birds that are far away from their usual haunts. These include Glossy and White-faced Ibis, Red Knot which breeds in the arctic but

usually heads up the east coast with a major stopping point to feed on hermit crab eggs on Delaware beaches, Glaucous Gull, White Wagtail which is common in open areas throughout Eurasia and which sometimes ventures into Alaska, but SE Michigan is far out of its range. Tricolored Herons and Snowy Egrets are often seen as well. And it is not just in migration that one can see rare birds well away from their normal range. For several years a pair of Black-necked Stilts, a western bird with a black and white delicate body, and long bright red legs nested at Pointe Mouillée.

And Pointe Mouillée is one of the few places in SE Michigan where one can regularly see Northern Harriers with their characteristic white-rumps flying low over the marsh seeking sustenance, and Short-eared Owls whose silent low flight over the marsh as it hunts suggests a giant moth. The latter two are more easily seen in winter. Several Osprey, once extirpated, as well as Bald Eagles

nest within this state game area. Yellow-headed Blackbirds have also appeared in recent years. And near the south end of the causeway near Roberts Road there is an extensive bed of American Lotus, a state threatened species. It is a floating plant with huge round leaves (up to 2.75 feet in diameter!) that curl on the edges, and large yellow flowers that turn into tall stalked seedpods that look like huge showerheads. It is also Michigan's official symbol of clean water.

The 14 miles of dikes and causeways are only accessible by foot or bicycle unless you go on one of our two field trips to the area

each year when we obtain a special permit to take a very limited number of vehicles on the dikes. The dikes are covered in coarse gravel which is hard to walk on and not easy to bike on. Mountain bikes, with their wide tires, work the best. Some birders even have been seen to hitch a trailer to bikes to carry their spotting scopes, which is really a must to maximize your birding experience at Pointe Mouillée. Our field trips are in winter (January or February,) and in late July or early August when shorebird migration is

at its peak. There just are not many spots in SE Michigan with shallow marshes and mudflats that provide habitat for migratory shorebirds needing to refuel before continuing north. Joe Robison, manager of the refuge tells us that they are in the process of constructing a mudflat near the Roberts Road entrance which will be more reliable than the areas in the CDF, which are controlled by the Army Corps of Engineers. Some years there

is abundant mudflat habitat, while other years there is virtually none. It all depends on water levels and what is happening with the CDF. Some former great mudflats for shorebirds have been subsequently filled in with dredge spoils, which is the primary purpose of the CDF. Pointe Mouillée can and will make shorebird habitat a priority. We greatly appreciate Joe and his staff including Zach Cooley for making it possible for use to drive the dikes with special use permits. We do bird surveys on those field trips and turn in reports to the biologist to help them document the current status of bird populations in the state game area.



Pointe Mouillee. Jim Bull photo



ANTENNA FIELDS

By Jim Bull. Photos by Bruce Szczechowski

Near Pointe Mouillée there is another place that is a must see area for rare grassland birds, so a good place to bird before or after you visit the marshy state game area--- what are known as the Antenna Fields. From the Sigler Road parking lot for Pointe Mouillee come back to US Turnpike (the extension of Jefferson Avenue). Turn left or south. You will see radio antennas on your right side. That is your destination. Now you have two choices, you can turn right on Labo Road, or go on further and turn right on Haggerman Road (I prefer to do the latter). Near the intersection of Labo and Haggerman Roads is where the radio antennas are located.

Once you turn on Haggerman Road, roll down your windows and look and listen. You will probably see Horned Larks in the field which is usually bare soil or very short stubble on your left, but they may be right on the road, or in the field on your right. There can be large numbers of them too. Listen for their tinkling call too. They are here year-round!

In winter, this is a good area for large flocks of Snow Buntings and occasionally Lapland Longspurs.

Keep your eyes peeled on both sides as Northern Harriers are often seen flying low over the fields on both sides hunting. Their white-rump and their behavior of flying low, almost moth-like over the fields are give-aways.

When you get to the fence around the antennas, look and listen for Eastern Meadowlarks with their bright yellow breasts and black V-shaped vests, and their plaintive flutelike song that sounds like they are saying, "Spring is Here!" You will usually see them in the grass beyond the fence but they may be in the field outside the fence closer to US Turnpike too.

During the spring and summer perched the fence and in the field beyond you can almost always count on seeing Bobolinks, a blackbird of open fields. The male has a cream colored hood, and extensive white markings on its back. You will also hear their delightful tinkling song that sounds like they are saying their name and a little bit more, "Bob o link spink spank." The brown-streaked females will only be seen in the grass field beyond the fence. Also on or around the fence you are likely to see Savannah Sparrows with their bright yellow lores (region between the eye and the beak). Their song is similar to a Song Sparrows only shorter. Some years we've also found Clay-Colored Sparrows here with its tan cheek patch and its characteristic insect like song, "Beez Buzz Buzz."

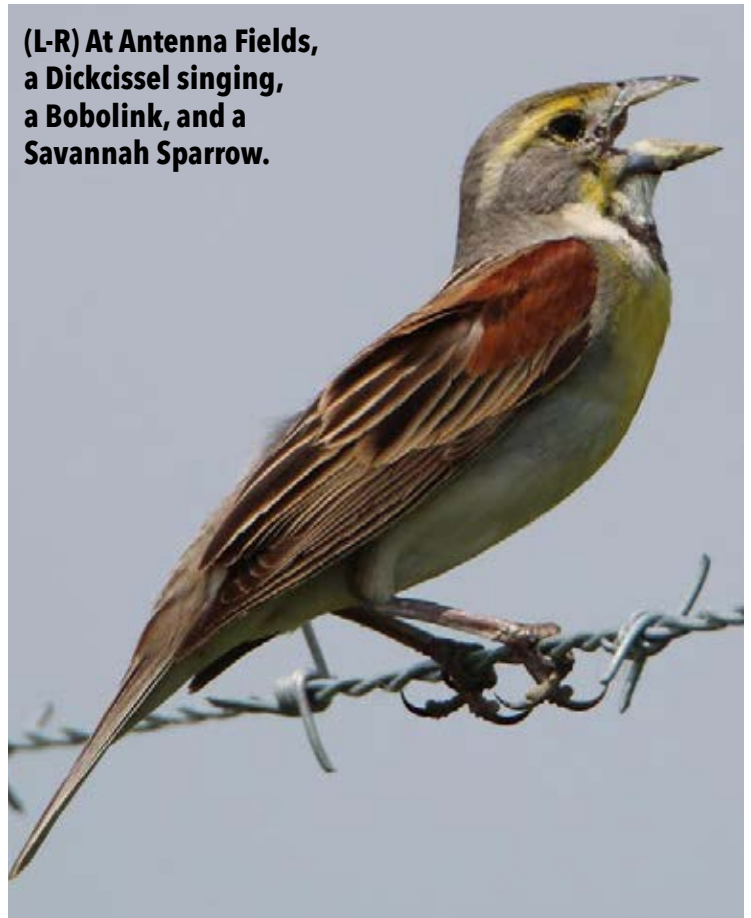
This spring and summer the antenna fields yielded a special treats--Dickcissels on the fence and in the field beyond--- at least a dozen. These sparrow-like birds are often mistaken for young

meadowlarks because they have the brown back and grey belly of a sparrow (even though they are more closely related to buntings), they have a bright yellow breasts and black bib like very like a meadowlark. They have a distinctive song that sort of sounds like they are saying their name. Peterson gives it as "dick-ciss-cissciss-ciss" or "chup-chup-klip-klip." These birds are only sporadic breeders in this area. Haven't seem in the antenna fields before, but some years they have nested in Oakwoods Metropark grasslands (and I did hear and see two there this year as well).

There aren't many places to see these rare grassland birds, so the antenna field are a treat.

Warning, if it has rained a lot Haggerman Road can get very mushy and undriveable unless you have a pickup or four-wheel drive vehicle. Two options for those of us with smaller cars are to either turn on Haggerman and park on the side of the road before it gets mush and walk the road to bird, or you can take Labo instead which is a paved road and take it to the intersection with Haggerman which is very near the antennas. You can usually drive on that part of the road to the antennas or it is a shorter walk to get to that prime birding spot.

(L-R) At Antenna Fields, a Dickcissel singing, a Bobolink, and a Savannah Sparrow.



A Horned Lark at Antenna Fields.



Natural History Book Review

By Bailey Lininger

This is the first in a new series for the Flyway: a survey of books that we, here at Detroit Audubon, think you might like! They will not all be brand new releases, but will hopefully inspire you to make a trip to your library or local bookstore in search of some fun new reading material.

What the Robin Knows: How Birds Reveal the Secrets of the Natural World

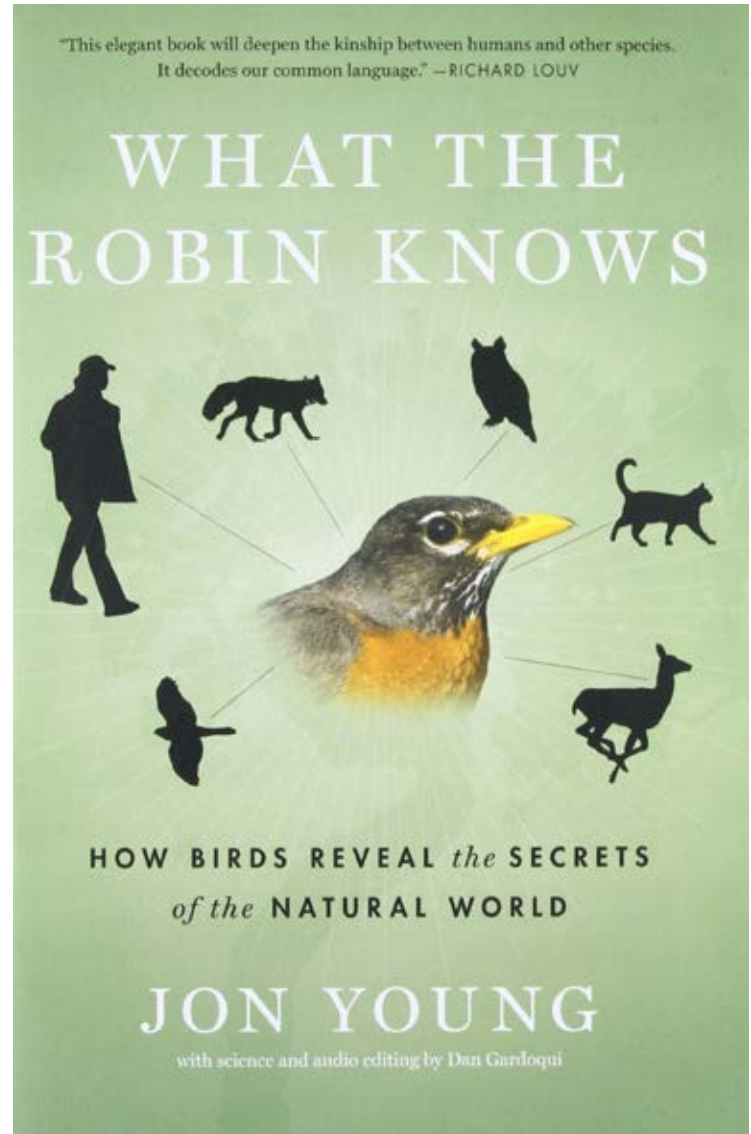
By Jon Young

Jon Young begins his second book, **What the Robin Knows**, with a situation that many birders would be thrilled by--a rare and exciting sighting of a bird far out of its normal range. The bird in question was a Ruff, and with Young being in New Jersey, this was a rare sighting indeed. For many authors, this would be the entire book--rare sightings and the adventures that go along with tracking down these uncommon birds. This, however, is not that book.

Jon Young, while undoubtedly an avid and skilled birder, is much more than that--he is a true expert in the work of connecting people, deeply, to the natural world. His first book, **Coyote's Guide to Connecting With Nature**, was a huge hit in the environmental education world and is an excellent primer on connecting kids--and adults!--to nature. With this as his lens, Young writes a decidedly unconventional birding book, forgoing tales of exciting international journeys and instead focusing on the birds that we see everyday, all around us. Young explains that he's "had a lot of great birding moments in North America, the Hawaiian Islands, Europe, and Africa, and I've drawn solid lessons from them, but this fact remains: the American Robin in my yard has much more to teach me as I sit quietly beneath a tree first thing each morning."

What, exactly, can a robin teach us? A lot, according to Young. His central thesis is that by truly listening and watching the common birds around us, we can tap into what Young calls "deep bird language [...] the key to understanding both the backyard and the forest." Furthermore, Young argues that in learning to understand deep bird language, we can open up an entirely new kind of awareness of and connection to the natural world.

This may seem like a big claim--how can the simple, common birds around us really teach us much of anything?--but Young delivers. Each chapter of this book is broken down into a separate skill for the reader to learn, and he takes you through simple, concrete ways of understanding bird language. Young brings the reader much farther into bird language than most have ever been before--miles past simply learning a few songs and vocalizations--into a place of truly coming to understand what information birds are communicating with each other, and what we can learn



from eavesdropping on those conversations. At the same time, he emphasizes the bigger goal of understanding how birds fit into the landscape around them: "Our focus on the five vocalizations [songs, companion calls, territorial aggression, adolescent begging, and alarms] will get pretty microscopic, but the purpose is macroscopic. We want to think about birds and their habitats as anthropologists consider humans and their cultures."

When I read **What the Robin Knows** in graduate school, one of the chapters that stuck with me most was Chapter 7: A Shape for Every Occasion. I was new to birding at that point, and felt stuck--I wasn't a great birder by ear, and didn't understand how much I could learn from watching birds. This chapter changed everything

for me because it taught me to look at bird body language instead of just focusing on color, shape, or sound. In this chapter, Young goes through twelve different "shapes" that birds (or groups of birds) take in response to an external threat. He begins with "Bird Plow", which "is created when a person (or other perceived and immediate danger) appears suddenly and with a brisk trajectory--somewhat ignoring the impact he is having on his surroundings." Ah, I thought, so that's why I never see birds when I'm traveling down the trail with a group of rowdy kids! He explains how birds will react differently--and thus create a different shape--to a mammal lurking on the ground, an owl up above, or a nest-robbing crow alongside them. As someone who loves to spot birds of prey and lurking mammals like coyotes, this thrilled me. And, it worked! The next few hikes I went on were richer and more interesting because of this new knowledge.

There are many things to appreciate about this book, but one of the aspects I like most is the way that Young humanizes birds. I

know, I know, if you're a scientist of any kind you may be cringing right now--we're not supposed to humanize animals!--but I find the affectionate and funny dialogue that Young gives to his avian subjects truly charming. It makes the book easy to read and even easier to connect to. In a world where connection--between humans and nature, and even between us and our fellow humans--is lacking, I love that Young does away with any overly scientific pretense and instead lets the bird's personalities and quirks shine.

What the Robin Knows is an engaging, informative, and transformative read--for me, many of the lessons I learned when reading this book have stuck with me long after finishing. Young relays a truly staggering amount of information in a short book (only 180 pages!), and does it with aplomb, telling fun and interesting stories all the way.

**A young Lark Sparrow.
Bruce Szczechowski photo**





MYSTERY BIRD REVEALED:

If you guessed Eastern Towhee you are right. Related to sparrows, but more cardinal-size, they are denizens of dense shrubby undergrowth which is why they are seldom seen. The male has a dark-black back, while the female is paler brown. Both have the characteristic chestnut colored side-flank, which gave them their former name, Rufous-sided Towhee. The problem was that the western Spotted Towhee also has the same chestnut flanks, thus the name change. If you get close enough and see it in the right light, you will see it has a red eye, at least in Michigan. In states further south some individuals of this species have white-eyes. In a survey of birders some years ago, it was identified as the bird most commonly cited as THE species that hooked people on birding. It is common but not often noticed by non-birders.