



A Detroit Audubon Publication

Winter 2019-20

Fluywan



Winter Waterfowl
Birds Are Disappearing
Farewell to John Conyers

Calling All Young Birders
Wonders of Nature in Winter
The Remarkable Black-capped Chickadee

Flyway

A publication of Detroit Audubon

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Flyway is published four times a year for Detroit Audubon members with at least basic membership status. Back issues are uploaded to our website.

Opinions expressed by the authors and editors do not necessarily reflect the policy of Detroit Audubon.

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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.

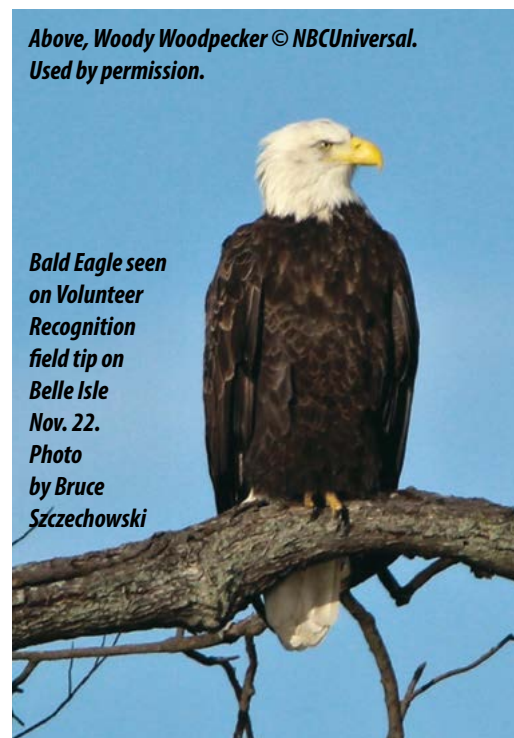


Front Cover Photo: Pileated Woodpecker by Bruce

Szczechowski. The crow-sized Pileated Woodpecker, until recent years, has been a denizen of dense forests in the northern Lower and Upper Peninsulas, and to some extent in western Michigan. It has been entirely absent in southeast Michigan, although its range extends south from Ohio to the southernmost extent of the United States, and west to Minnesota and eastern Texas. The bare spot on its range map in southeast Michigan has been filling in over the last several years, but mostly on the fringes. We think this may be the first one ever seen on Grosse Ile—it was found by Bruce Szczechowski and Larry Urbanski in a woods right in the downtown area (behind the post office near the new playscape) during the Rockwood Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 22, 2019. Often the bird's presence is first confirmed by the large rectangular holes they chisel out of trees with their massive beaks in search of carpenter ants and grubs. Their laugh-like call is similar to the Northern Flicker's but much louder. Their territorial hammering is extremely loud as well. Other animals such as Wood Ducks, Eastern Screech Owls, falcons, and Flying Squirrels are known to use their abandoned holes for nesting. Pileated Woodpecker territories can be up to 100 acres in size, so unless their nest is in the vicinity they may not be seen repeatedly in the same spot. What good news this is, that southeast Michigan is now wooded enough to attract this crested woodpecker, which is known to many as the "Woody Woodpecker woodpecker," because it most closely resembles that cartoon character with its large red crest and similar laughing call. That cartoon character has been making a comeback in recent years as well.



Above, Woody Woodpecker © NBCUniversal. Used by permission.



Bald Eagle seen on Volunteer Recognition field tip on Belle Isle Nov. 22. Photo by Bruce Szczechowski

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Mystery Bird

Can you identify this bird even though it has tucked its beak under its feathers, which waterfowl often do on very cold days? Check your answer on page 13. Bruce Szczechowski photo

Calling All Young Birders Ages 12 to 18! *by Jill Noll*

When my son tells his friends he is a “birder,” he gets a funny look. It is not the typical response one gets from a 16-year-old boy when asked, “What do you like to do?” It is a well-known fact that nature, and being outdoors, are good for you. Research supports that time in nature builds confidence, provides stimulation, boosts curiosity, and reduces stress and fatigue. In addition, a recently published study has stated that wild bird populations in the continental United States and Canada have declined by almost 30% since 1970. For these reasons, it is imperative that we get our kids interested in birds and nature to facilitate an awareness of the outside world and the treasures that it holds.

Detroit Audubon is launching a new Young Birders Club, specifically for youth ages 12 to 18, led by 2 young birders in the community: Travis Kaye (my son) and Jessica Decker. Please see their bios below.

These two passionate young birders have committed to lead monthly bird walks at Palmer Park, a treasured Detroit nature park and recreation site for more than 100 years, located between McNichols and Seven Mile Roads west of Woodward Avenue in Detroit. They will be leading the bird walks on the first Saturday of each month from 8 to 10 a.m.

When choosing a location for the monthly walks, several factors contributed to Travis’s and Jessica’s decision. First, they wanted to choose a location or park in Detroit because, after all, this is Detroit Audubon. Next, because both Travis and Jessica are busy 11th graders, they wanted to choose someplace close to their homes (both live near the Detroit Zoo). In addition, in her research, Jessica found that Palmer Park is an ancient woodland, with some of its trees over 350 years old. She felt it would provide good and known stopover habitat for migratory birds. Finally, since few sightings lists exist for Palmer Park in eBird, a citizen science database established by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Jessica felt that the monthly hikes would provide a good opportunity to document the area bird population and contribute to what is known as citizen scientists!

In addition to the monthly walks, Travis and Jessica plan to lead seasonal walks in different locations to target specific birds. For example, winter months are good for viewing winter visitors like Snowy and Short-eared Owls. Spring and fall are good times to view neotropical migrants, including warblers and tanagers. Dates, times, and locations for these additional walks will be published by Detroit Audubon once decided.

On January 4, Travis and Jessica, and I participated in the first Detroit Audubon Young Birders walk at Palmer Park. We saw 13 species and a total of 168 birds, including 2 beautiful Red-tailed Hawks. That’s pretty good for a cold January day in Detroit. It was just the 3 of us, but we are hoping to spread the word and get more like-minded youths out to enjoy nature and see amazing birds.

If you are interested in nature and learning about birds or know someone who is,

please consider joining Travis and Jessica at Palmer Park and tell your friends. The next Young Birder walk will be at 8 a.m. on Saturday, March 7. No prior experience is necessary. If you do not own binoculars, Detroit Audubon will lend you some. We look forward to seeing you!

Jessica Decker, 16, is a junior at Ferndale High School. Jessica began birding at age 11 by watching the birds in her Oak Park backyard. She now enjoys

participating in bird walks, conferences, and camps in Michigan and Ohio and looking for birds on family trips. Jessica is a member of the Michigan DNR Youth Conservation Council and enjoys musical theater and Star Wars.

Travis Kaye, an avid birder, is an 11th grader who attends Berkley High School. He has been intrigued by birds and nature since the age of 9, when his mom took him to Point Pelee National Park. He has been a member of Detroit Audubon since 2016 and was awarded the Detroit Audubon Young Birders Scholarship to attend Hog Island Audubon Camp in 2017. He is also a member of the Ohio Young Birders Club. He volunteers at the Bird Center of Washtenaw County and the Detroit Zoo. Some of his other hobbies include watching basketball and bird photography. At school he is a member of the crosscountry, swim, and track teams, as well as the orchestra.



Upcoming 2020 Field Trips

Please join us for a field trip this winter and spring. We welcome birders and nature enthusiasts of all abilities, and we even have binoculars to borrow if you don’t have your own. These field trips are free unless designated by a dollar sign (\$). Go to www.detroitaudubon.org/field-trips to get details for each trip and to sign up!

February

- 8 Young Birders Owl Prowl
- 9 Elmwood Cemetery Walk
- 29 Winter River Walk

March

- 7 Young Birders Palmer Park
- 7 Owl Prowl \$
- 13 Elmwood Cemetery
- 21 Belle Isle Young Birders

April

- 4 Young Birders Palmer Park
- 10 Elmwood
- 10 Woodcock Watch \$
- 11 Pheasant Walk

Ducks (mostly Canvasbacks) in flight.



Wonderful Winter Waterfowl

By Ava Landgraf, Research Coordinator • Photos by Bruce Szczechowski

I have never liked winter. My whole family always loved skiing, snowboarding, and ice skating, but I spend winter avoiding all of those activities. Especially in Michigan, winter can be a difficult time for our physical and mental health. However, here along the Detroit River we have something special: thousands of ducks that gather on the icy river which give me, and maybe you, a reason to get out in the cold. The only part of winter I truly look forward to is grabbing a scope and watching the ducks float, feed, and flip around in the water as if it weren't zero degrees Celsius.

Winter waterfowl can be a great introduction to birding. You can line up the scope on an interesting bird, and someone else can peer into the scope to find that exact bird. When the temperature is below freezing and a lot of ice forms, ducks will gather in whatever open water is available. This herds thousands of ducks into one area! You can stand in the same place and see 10 or more different species.

If a duck is eating or sleeping, there's a good chance it is also preening. The birds release oil from their uropygial gland located above their tail. They collect oil from this gland on their beak and then rub it throughout their feathers. This is why you commonly see birds appearing to itch above their tail. For ducks this oil is especially important for keeping a waterproof barrier on their contour feathers so their downy feathers underneath stay fluffy and warm.

Looking at waterfowl can be very different from other bird watching. Instead of zipping around tree to tree, most ducks are slowly drifting with the current. Some will repeatedly dive down to find food, but they usually come back up not too far away. Hooded Mergansers (some of my favorites) dive down quite often, as they are trying to catch small fish in their serrated bills.

Some of the most common ducks on the Detroit River are Canvasbacks. Record-high counts of these ducks on the Detroit River (around 79,000) suggest that at

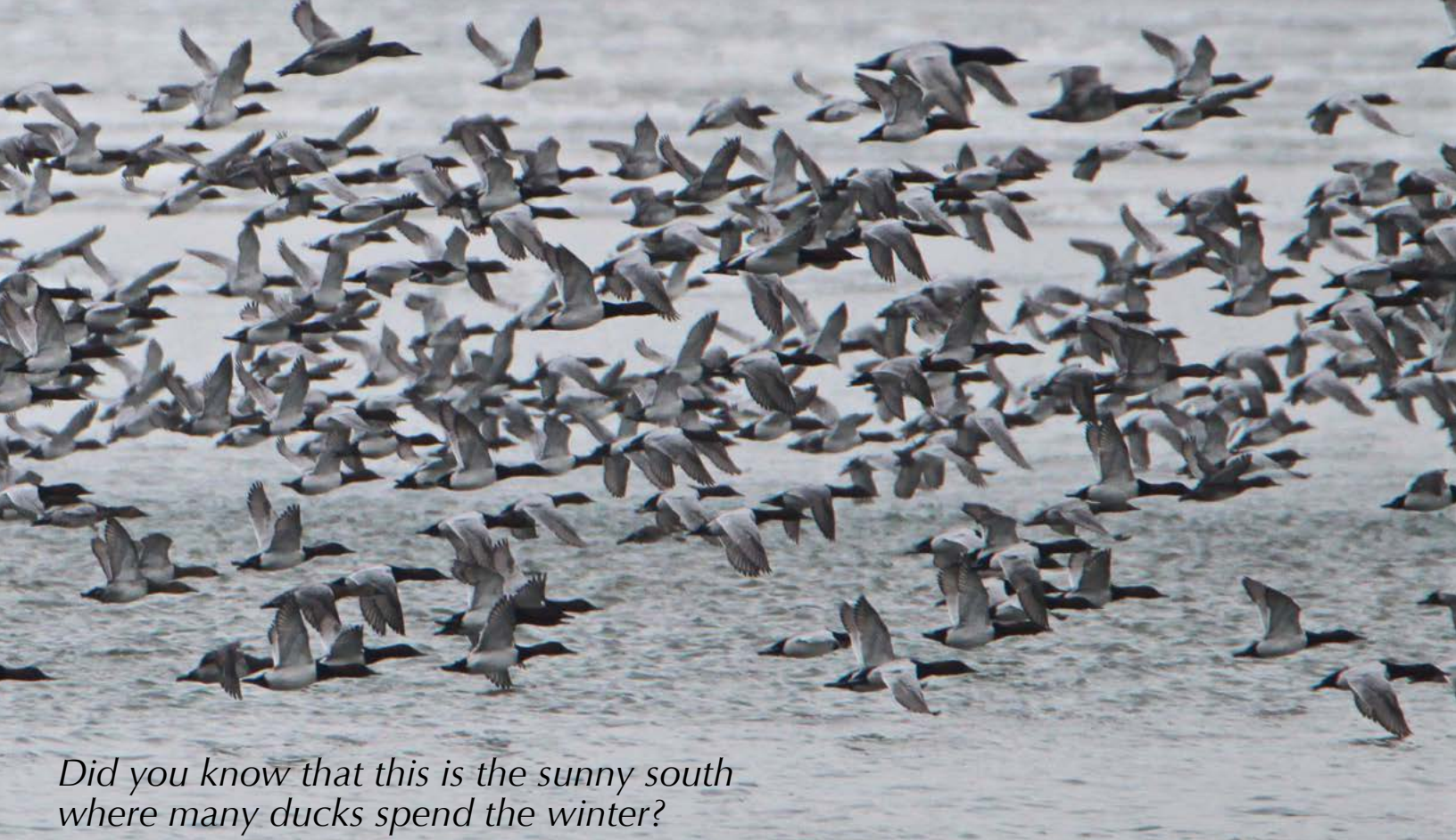
times the Detroit River holds 10% of the global Canvasback population. Similar to Canvasbacks are Redheads. Canvasbacks and Redheads can look very much alike, with reddish heads and whitish backs. Winter plumage in ducks can make them especially tricky to identify, but the best way to tell them apart is head shape. Redheads have a steep forehead that connects with their bill at a sharp angle. Canvasbacks have a much gentler sloping bill and forehead.

Another common favorite is the Bufflehead. Everything about this duck is compact and cute; even their name is cute. They are the smallest of the diving ducks, with big round heads

and short bills. To me, their heads appear to be half the size of their body. Cavity nesters in Canada and Alaska, Buffleheads are small enough to usually nest in old Northern Flicker cavities!



*Above, Bufflehead males;
at right, a female.*



Did you know that this is the sunny south where many ducks spend the winter?

I adore our winter waterfowl. They give me a reason to go outside when it's below freezing. I still cannot wait until winter ends. Before it does end, make sure you take a trip over to Belle Isle, which is great place to view these winter visitors. Every winter there is a big hubbub about Snowy Owls in the Detroit area, but actually these ducks are the main winter attractions. Hope you enjoy them as much as I do!

Hooded Mergansers:
below, a female and at right, a male.



Special and Rare Winter Waterfowl of Southeast Michigan *by Jim Bull*



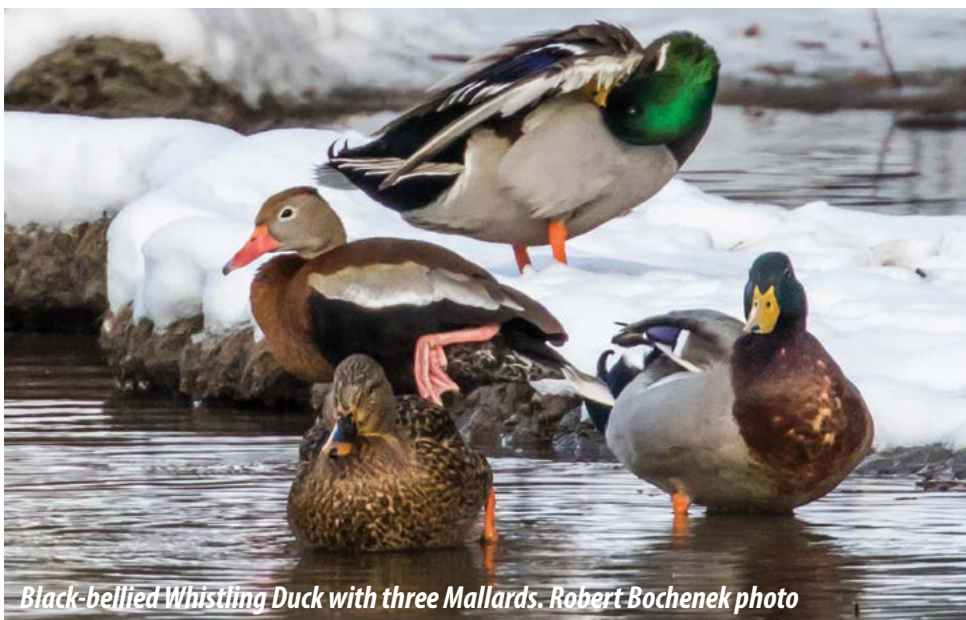
Tundra Swans on Lake Erie. Robert Bochenek photo

Every Christmas for years in our family, we'd wake up, have a special Christmas breakfast, and open presents; then once Mom had prepared the turkey and put it in the oven, we headed out to Lake Erie Metropark to see the thousands of Tundra Swans gathered there, looking like puffy little mini-islands of white in lines against the blue lake that seemed to go on forever.

As their name implies, Tundra Swans nest on the Arctic tundra in northern Canada and Alaska. Like the hundreds of thousands of Canvasbacks and other ducks that make this area their home for all or part of the winter, Tundra Swans are attracted there by the abundant wild celery or eelgrass beds (*Valisineria americana*) they like to feed on. As long as there is open water they will be there. Some stay all winter. Most head further south by early January, but they aren't gone for long. By March, they are back in huge numbers, usually staying through April on their way back north to their Arctic breeding ground. Formerly called the Whistling Swan, they were aptly named because their call is a mellow whistling or cooing sound. Tundra Swans tend to gather on Lake Erie in open water, sometimes quite close to shore, whereas Mute Swans are the species most likely to be seen anywhere on the Detroit River, in marshes, and on smaller lakes.

Tundra Swans are slightly smaller than the exotic, invasive Mute Swan; and unlike the Mute Swan, Tundra Swans have straight necks and all-black beaks except for a streak of yellow near the base of the beak (called the lores), which is hard to see unless they are very close. Adult Mute Swans have orange beaks with a bulbous black knob at the upper base. They also have the characteristic curved neck and the high-arched wings that evoke the archetypical swan shape for many. Introduced from Europe because of their beauty, Mute Swans escaped captivity and are aggressively keeping many native waterfowl from breeding; thus their numbers are being controlled by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and many park systems throughout the state.

There is one more swan native to Michigan, the Trumpeter Swan, named for its loud bugling call. From being hunted nearly to extinction, they have made a comeback due to reintroduction efforts by the Kellogg Bird Sanctuary, the Michigan DNR, and the Detroit Zoo, with several breeding populations now throughout the state. In the Detroit area we mainly see this much larger swan in migration, and only rarely in winter. About the same size or a little larger than the Mute Swan, they have a straight neck (like the Tundra Swan) and an all-black beak.



Black-bellied Whistling Duck with three Mallards. Robert Bochenek photo

Another special duck occasionally seen here during the winter and in migration is the Long-tailed Duck, which also nests on



Harlequin Ducks. Jim Bull photo



the tundra. In winter it frequents the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts and the Great Lakes. In southeast Michigan they are infrequently seen and then often in small numbers, and sometimes only solitary birds. On Lake Huron several dozen to a hundred may be seen, but out in the middle of Lake Michigan, according to Caleb Putnam, formerly the state Important Bird Areas Coordinator, they can be seen in rafts numbering in the tens of thousands! They get their name from the long, thin, pointed tail of the male in both breeding and nonbreeding plumage. In nonbreeding plumage, which is what they sport while visiting us, they are also

known for having the most extensive white of any diving duck.

This winter there have been two rare visiting ducks in this area: Harlequin Ducks and the Black-bellied Whistling Duck. Although Harlequin Ducks breed in the Arctic and usually spend winters along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, several have been hanging out this winter near the Blue Water Bridge in Port Huron. They are a small, dark sea duck with splotches of white on the face and, in males, on the body as well. They were named “harlequin” for a type of French clown because of their strange markings that some thought somewhat resembled that humorous figure.

An even rarer duck that has been lingering in the Farmington area since July 2 and which was seen as recently as January 29, is the Black-bellied Whistling Duck (formerly the Black-bellied Tree Duck). This duck normally can be found in Texas, Florida, and other southern states, but even there it is at the very northern edge of its range, which stretches from Mexico into South America. This individual set the all-time record for staying in an area outside its normal range—207 days, so far. It was first spotted and identified by Mike Mencotti. According to Bob Bochenek, who saw it on the first day it was sighted and who has been following it ever since, this individual is likely the first ever to be photographed with a backdrop of snow! I saw and photographed this duck, a life bird, on Monday, January 6, on the edge of open water in a stormwater pond in a Farmington Hills housing development, but because it was a cold day and this southern bird kept its beautiful pink beak tucked underneath its wing feathers the whole time, we present one of Mr. Bochenek’s photos showing the whole duck, glorious pink beak and all. As of January 30, eBird records indicated that it was frequenting Shiawassee Park in Farmington Hills, associating with a group of Mallards. The long-legged, long-necked whistling ducks are thought to be more closely related



Long-tailed Duck. Bruce Szczechowski photo



At left, contrast the Mute Swan’s curved neck and yellow beak by Bruce Szczechowski with Tundra Swan closeup by Dominic Sherony. Note straight neck and yellow spot at base of bill (lores).

to geese than to other ducks. Of the two closely related species once collectively called “tree ducks,” only the black-bellied species sometimes perches in trees, hence the name change. The Black-bellied Whistling Duck visiting this area has been seen only on the ground or in the water.

Wonders of Nature in Winter

All photos by Bruce Szczechowski except as noted.

Clockwise from top left:

Mink at Pointe Mouillée 1-30-20.

Northern Harrier, Pte. Mouillée 1-28-20.

Short-eared Owl, Pte. Mouillée 1-30-20.

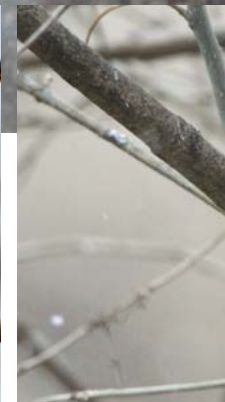
White-breasted Nuthatch, Grosse Ile 12-22-19 Rockwood Count.

Golden-crowned Kinglet, Belle Isle 11-23-19.

Northern Cardinal, Belle Isle 2-1-20 by Jim Bull.

Northern Mockingbird, Riverview 12-22-19.

*Female Red-Bellied Woodpecker, Grosse Ile 12-22-19,
Rockwood Count.*





First Volunteer and Partner Recognition

For years Detroit Audubon has held a volunteer and partner banquet on a weeknight in December, all of which have been classy affairs complete with holiday decorations, a wonderful program, and amazing food. But all too often in recent years, snowstorms, illness, and competition from a plethora of other holiday parties resulted in decreasing attendance.

This year our president and staff came up with a new idea—a morning field trip followed by a volunteer and partner recognition brunch at the Belle Isle Nature Center, which is directed by one of Detroit Audubon's board members, Amy Greene. This new event was held on Saturday, November 23.

Meager attendance was not a problem this time around—over ninety people signed up for the morning field trip, which was open to not just volunteers and partners, but to members and the general public as well. Eighty of them actually showed up for the trip, gathering in the nature center parking lot. Leaders Jim Bull and Bruce Szczechowski were not expecting the group to see much, based on their early morning drive around the island—the weather was so mild that the large numbers of ducks that can often be found on the river around Belle Isle just were not there. Ice further out will hold waterfowl in close to shore, but with no ice, they have the whole river, Lake St. Clair, and Lake Erie in which to disperse.

As expected, as the caravan made its way around Sunset Point and followed The Strand along the Canada-facing side of the island, there was just open water, with no birds for us to stop and view with binoculars and spotting scope, until we came to the fishing pier near the Coast Guard station. Right on the side of the road in a tree on the edge of Lake Okonoka was a Bald Eagle. It was easy enough to view with the naked eye, but with the spotting scope it filled the field of vision. It was such an incredibly close, clear view that it was hard to draw the crowd away from it to the river side of the road to view the few Buffleheads, Canada Geese, Mallards, Ring-billed Gulls, Bonaparte's Gulls, and Common Goldeneyes that were hanging around the fishing pier.

Our next stop was around the bend on Lakeside Drive, where four Great Blue Herons perched low in trees on the far edge of Lake Okonoka, as well as an unusually cooperative American Kestrel. At the nearby parking lot for Blue Heron Pond, we trained our spotting scopes on a huge number of ducks on the far side of the pond—more Redheads and Canvasbacks than you could count, Buffleheads, Hooded Mergansers, Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Mergansers, a few Ring-necked Ducks, Ruddy Ducks, and Gadwall. And a large murder of American Crows flew over as well! It was hard to tear ourselves away, but it was getting close to brunch time.

About 60 of the group stayed for the volunteer and partner brunch. Detroit Audubon president Rochelle Breitenbach, who counts catering among her many other talents and pursuits, along with staff members Sarah Halson, Ava Landgraf, and Noah Levinson, and a few board members including Amy Greene, set up the usual classy tables, transforming the room into a fine-dining venue. They also set up a veritable smorgasbord of pastries, quiche, fruit, bagels, many choices of fruit juice (served from wine bottles!), and fair-trade, shade-grown coffee. Nobody went away hungry unless they just decided not to partake!

Ava Landgraf, our research coordinator, and Sarah Halson, our program coordinator, took turns narrating a PowerPoint with photographs highlighting the many programs and projects Detroit Audubon accomplished during 2019 with the assistance of our many volunteers and partners. The staff and President Breitenbach expressed heartfelt thank-yous to those gathered for helping make all those

accomplishments possible.

Then came time for two special recognitions. Ava Landgraf gave a presentation featuring the work of Guadalupe Cummins, who for several years has put in many 12-hour days as a volunteer on the flats of Lake St. Clair helping our first research coordinator Erin Rowan, and then her successor Ava, count, capture, and band Black Tern adults and chicks. Lately Guadalupe has also donated her time and much-needed expertise to conduct plant surveys of the underutilized parks in Detroit we are transforming into native grasslands. She has been instrumental to research that will show precisely how the biodiversity of these parks has been improved because of our project. Guadalupe's full-time job is doing environmental assessments for an environmental consulting firm, so her volunteer work for us is somewhat of a busman's holiday. For the enormous amount of time, expertise, and friendship Guadalupe has gifted Detroit Audubon with over the years, she was presented with the Black Tern Leadership Award—only the second recipient of that award! For more about Guadalupe, see our Volunteer Spotlight in the Fall 2019 issue of the Flyway (page18).



Guadalupe Cummins receives her award. Jim Bull photo

Next, President Breitenbach honored the tremendous contributions of board member Diane Cheklich. Diane is an independent filmmaker and the owner of a solar energy company who lives just a block away from our office. Former President Jim Bull recruited Diane for the board after talking with her on several Detroit Audubon field trips and based on a recommendation from former board member Richard Quick. Once she came on the board, as a result of discussions with her about her interests, Jim asked her to chair the Conservation Committee—a very important committee, but one that had not met or done much of anything in years.

Wow, did that change once Diane took the helm. After she recruited local Detroiters to serve, the committee met regularly (sometimes several times in a month). They invited experts to advise them, and they attended meetings where important decisions or discussions about Detroit's future were happening. Soon, Detroit Audubon's simple resolution to start a Detroit Area Native Grasslands Initiative finally

Field Trip and Awards Brunch Held

got some legs. What had been an overarching idea had its first implementation in the project Diane and her committee call “Detroit Bird City.”

They started working with Urban Neighborhoods Initiatives to spruce up a park in southwest Detroit, holding bird house-making workshops and not only leading bird hikes, but also teaching key youth in the area to lead them too. In the process they wrote and produced a guide booklet, which is still on our website, for those wanting to garden with native plants. From there, Diane and her committee proposed adopting five underutilized parks in Detroit to serve as the pilot for creating more native grasslands. This was already in the Detroit Parks and Recreation Department’s plan, but it started happening when Diane and Detroit Audubon agreed to spearhead the effort. They surveyed all the underutilized Parks in Detroit and came up with a process to decide which ones would be best to start with. They began learning as much as they could about native grasslands and reaching out to the local communities to involve them in the planning and to make sure they were on board with the proposed changes. She brought Sanaa Green from Audubon Great Lakes’ Wild Indigo program in to help with that process. She is also coordinator of a \$35,000

National Geographic Society grant Detroit Audubon received for this project, and a \$56,000 subcontract over the next four years on a grant Michigan State University is working on, looking at specific impacts of these park transformations on the human neighbors. And as many as 100 residents in Detroit and in nearby suburbs have decided to devote some of their land to native prairie plants as a result of hearing about our project, including Diane’s solar energy company! You can read more about Callahan Park, the first park that was transformed into a native grassland last year, in the Fall 2019 Flyway (p. 10). Four more will be brought online in 2020!

Diane also took footage of our Black Tern research and produced a video to help us educate the public and potential donors about that program (also accessible via our website), and she is currently finishing a film on Ring-necked Pheasants in Detroit, which she decided to use as a vehicle to also tell the story about why restoring native grasslands is important.

She also serves on Detroit Audubon’s Great Lakes Safe Passage Committee, which is focused on collecting data and taking action to minimize bird collisions with buildings. She designed a new flyer for that project, among her many other contributions.

We would not have accomplished any of this without the vision, leadership, and hard work of volunteer and board member Diane Cheklich! For her way over-the-top contribution to Detroit Audubon and, more importantly, to birds and Detroit’s environment, Diane was given the inaugural Jim Bull Award for Outstanding Service by a Volunteer, named for Detroit Audubon’s immediate past president.

Thank you to all our volunteers and partners, without whom only a fraction of our accomplishments would be possible. And congratulations to Guadalupe and Diane for their past service. We look forward not only to their continued contributions to our mission, but to your contribution, too. If you’d like to volunteer, email Program Coordinator Sarah Halson at programs@detroitaudubon.org.



Diane Cheklich receives her award. Bruce Szczechowski photo



Birding at Blue Heron Lagoon on morning field trip. Jim Bull photo

Black-capped Chickadee: Braving Michigan Winters with Remarkable Strategies

By Sabrina Salome • Bruce Szczechowski photo

All year round, sun or snow, the Black-capped Chickadee is a backyard staple, happy to make itself a regular at your sunflower seed station. While you wait for those showiest of birds—Northern Cardinals, a splash of red against a snowy backdrop, or those colorful springtime warblers—the chickadee is a constant. It's easy to overlook among seemingly more exciting birds, but are you missing something by overlooking them?

Imagine a winter day in Michigan. The sun is rising around 8 o'clock, long after most animals might have preferred to start their day. You pull on a thick coat, shuffle outside into the snow, and scrape the ice from your windshield. You go through a handful of tools just to get yourself to work on time: jacket, boots, gloves, scraper. And you hope the roads are salted, too. In the car, you blast the heat. Outside, birds the size of golf balls are whizzing through the air, not looking half as sheltered from the cold as you are.

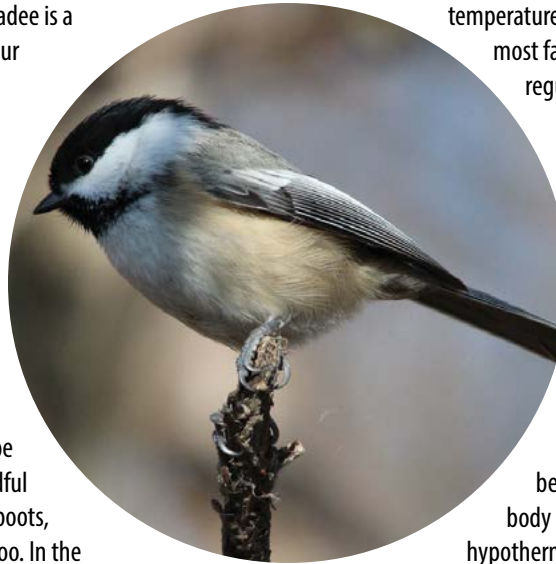
If you've ever thought them unremarkable, you'll want to spare a second glance at Black-capped Chickadees. Being warm-blooded like us, birds make their own body heat. But the colder it gets outside, the more challenging this is to do, and that's especially true if you're small. Similar-sized warblers have long since flown south to wait out the winter (and who can blame them?). The Black-capped Chickadee is by no means a heavyweight among birds, and yet they're still here, braving the Michigan winter.

Both birds and people layer up to prepare for winter, and for being so light and delicate, feathers provide surprisingly good protection against the elements. Those of us who invested in a new down coat for the season have some idea of how this works. The chickadee readies itself for winter by molting—shedding its old feathers to replace them with new ones—ensuring fresh insulation that will last the winter season.

Most of us spend our workday inside, enjoying the luxury of temperature control. If you're anything like me, you're packing your lunches so that you don't have to brave the cold again until it's time to go home. The chickadee knows a little about this strategy. Flying burns both precious body heat and energy, both of which are in short supply in the wintertime. To save on both, the chickadee caches leftovers—storing extra food items for later.

Stashing leftovers means they spend less time searching for new sources of food. As any animal would tell you (wild or human), free leftovers are always a good thing, but that's especially true when the weather is unforgiving. And unlike us, who can keep the lights on well past sunset, the chickadee is bound by a strict winter clock. Sunset at 5 o'clock means that many fewer hours are spent foraging as compared to the spring or summer months, making quickly accessible food sources particularly valuable.

By the time you're tucked into bed, the chickadee probably is, too. But how is a little bird like that standing the cold? It's one thing to keep warm under a down coat on a frigid day, but what about when nightfall brings single-digit



temperatures? Extreme conditions call for what is no doubt the most fascinating of the chickadee's winter adaptations: regulated hypothermia.

While we might relate to some of the strategies chickadees use to handle the cold, this is not one of them. Unlike the hypothermia we humans are familiar with, this is not a freefall into dangerous bodily temperatures. It's a lowering of the body temperature in a way that is not only controlled and purposeful, but is, miraculously, safe for the bird. Maintaining a cooler body temperature overall means that these birds need to generate and retain less heat to survive the night. Human beings have no such luxury. If you lowered your body temperature even five degrees, you'd already be hypothermic and in a life-threatening situation.

While the Black-capped Chickadee itself might not be striking, that it manages to survive a harsh Michigan winter is. Keep these impressive little birds in mind while you set up your winter feeder. They'll be sure to stop by and will no doubt appreciate all the help they can get.

First Annual Detroit Audubon Artwork Contest 2020

Contest begins February 15, 2020. Entry deadline is March 15, 2020.

Winners will be selected in the following age groups:

5-8 years old

9-12 years old

13-17 years old

The winners in each age group of this contest will be published in the Summer 2020 issue of the Detroit Audubon Flyway in our Kids Corner Section. Runners-up will be announced in that same issue.

Design artwork on 8.5" x 11" sheet of paper based on the theme Birds of the Detroit area

Your artwork should be original—do not use anything that might be under copyright

Be creative! You may design your artwork digitally or by hand using marker, crayon, pencil, charcoal or oil/acrylic paints.

Individuals may submit as many entries as they like.

Please note your name and age on the back of your artwork.

For the best quality, mail or arrange a time to drop off entries to Detroit Audubon. Digital scans of the artwork will also be accepted if emailed to staff@detroitaudubon.org. Artwork will not be returned.

Killdeer photo by
Bruce Szczecowski

40 in 2020: Breeding Birds of Detroit

Are you a beginning birder looking for some expert guidance? Have you been on one of our Elmwood Cemetery walks and are interested in exploring new locations and birds? Are you just beginning your bird list and need some help getting started? We have an excellent new program for you!

In 2020, Detroit Audubon is offering a special program, led by Leonard Weber, designed to assist beginning (and near beginning) birders as they improve their ability to recognize and identify by sight at least 40 of the bird species that breed in the Detroit area. The “40 in 2020” program is for those not yet fully proficient in recognizing on their own a number of the birds they encounter on nature walks. Attention will be given to the nesting habitat and nesting practices of these species.

Leonard Weber, in his senior years, enjoys watching birds and studying nature—and sharing his observations with others. He is a former board member and past president of Detroit Audubon, and a continuing field trip leader. Most of the nature walks he leads are held in Eliza Howell Park in Detroit. Leonard writes a weekly blog highlighting his latest sightings in the park (elizahowellnaturewalk.wordpress.com).

Some of the birds on the “40 in 2020” list include Sandhill Crane, Wood Duck, Bald Eagle, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Song Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Cedar Waxwing.

Program details: The program includes three field trips (three different locations; see below for location information) on Saturday mornings—April 25, May 30, and June 20.

Each field trip is scheduled for 2½ to 3 hours, starting at 8:30 a.m.

Participants are expected to take part in all three field trips. Individual field trips are not open to those not registered for all three.

The group is limited to 20 individuals.

Registration is required. You do not have to be a member of Detroit Audubon to participate, BUT priority will be given to Detroit Audubon members if the group limit is reached. Please contact programs@detroitaudubon.org to register or register online.

There is no fee for the program. There is an entrance fee (single-day admission or annual pass) required for Kensington Metropark

Field trip locations:

April 25- Kensington Metropark

May 30- Eliza Howell Park

June 20- TBD

From the Detroit Free Press 12-6-19. Reprinted with permission.

Our Birds Are Disappearing

By Diane Cheklich, Kami Pothukuchi, Heidi Trudell

A recent study by *Science Magazine* showed that 30% of North American birds have disappeared over the past 50 years. Even common species such as sparrows, robins, and Blue Jays have experienced huge losses.

Birds pollinate flowers, keep insects under control and signal the health of ecosystems. They add beauty and wonder to our environment. Detroit is blessed with a great richness in bird life. The Detroit River is a globally recognized migratory bird flyway. The city hosts 300 different species of birds throughout the year. Unfortunately, the journeys of many birds are cut short as they die in collisions with the city's buildings downtown and elsewhere. In urban areas, collisions with buildings alone kill an estimated billion birds per year in North America.

Birds often fly into buildings when they see the surrounding trees and sky reflected by glass facades, or as they try to get to the other side of see-through corridors, thus dying a violent death. At night, building lights will disorient a bird's navigation system, causing it to fly in circles and die from exhaustion.

Fortunately, there are many ways to prevent bird-building collisions. One is to turn building lights off at night or draw shades over windows. This “dark sky” strategy has the potential to prevent 80% of nighttime bird deaths. Turning lights off also saves money on energy and maintenance for building owners.

Since 1999, Audubon chapters, in partnership with local groups, have organized voluntary “Lights Out” programs in many cities including Detroit, Atlanta, Cleveland and Chicago. In May, Portland, Ore., adopted a municipal Dark Skies Initiative to reduce light pollution.

Another solution is to treat glass panes on buildings to eliminate reflections and reduce transparency with products that are readily available in the marketplace. Cities could also require that new buildings use bird-safe glass, as Toronto, Canada, recently did.

Toronto Green Standard is the city's sustainable design guidance for new private and city-owned developments. The standard consists of four tiers of performance measures that promote sustainable site and building design. To gain planning approval, buildings must meet Tier 1 requirements, which include measures to minimize bird collision as well as light pollution.

In May 2017, the City of Detroit signed on to the Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds, created by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In the treaty, municipal governments and their partners pledge to protect birds from the hazards they face, including building collisions. Detroit, it is time to deliver on the agreement!

Detroit Audubon calls on city officials and residents to rise to the urgent challenge of saving and protecting our birds. The city should adopt ordinances and codes to require that new buildings are safe for birds. It should enact other measures to encourage collision deterrence and “lights out” operation.

Residents could also help by growing native plants, reducing or eliminating pesticide use, and keeping cats indoors. These proven strategies can prevent bird deaths and help restore dangerously depleted populations. Let's work together to save our birds!

Diane Cheklich and Heidi Trudell are members of the Detroit Audubon's Safe Passage Committee. Kami Pothukuchi is Distinguished Service Professor of Urban Studies and Planning at Wayne State University.

A Sad Farewell to Rep. John Conyers, the U.S. Congress's Top Environmentalist *By Jim Bull*

On October 27, 2019, Detroit Audubon, the city of Detroit, Michigan, and the world lost an icon, a Detroit native who worked tirelessly for civil rights and environmental justice—Rep. John Conyers, age 90.

Conyers marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Selma, Alabama, and elsewhere, providing both presence and leadership to the civil rights movement. He was the only candidate for office that Dr. King ever endorsed. He did so from the pulpit of Detroit's Central United Methodist Church in the fall of 1964 with Conyers in the congregation.

Since winning his seat in Congress at age 35, and for the 53 years and 27 terms he served, Conyers sponsored countless bills to strengthen civil rights; to help the poor, laborers, and unions; and to hold federal officeholders accountable. As chair of the House Judiciary Committee, he asked searing questions of those charged with making sure our justice system is fair and equitable, pushing for fair sentencing and insisting on strong enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. He was also co-founder of the Congressional Black Caucus. After Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama, her life and that of her husband were threatened. They moved to Detroit in order to feel safer. John Conyers hired her to work in his office. At one point she told him he needed to reduce her salary because she was receiving so many awards. He told her he would not do that and that it was privilege to have the “mother of the civil rights movement” working in his office. That is where she worked until her retirement—a total of 27 years!

Perhaps Conyers is best known for introducing a bill to make Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a national holiday just days after Dr. King's assassination in 1968. He reintroduced that bill, and worked tirelessly with the King Center for its passage, over and over again. Stevie Wonder's hit song “Happy Birthday Dr. King” helped build momentum for the idea. On his 18th try after 17 years of defeats, his bill finally passed both houses of Congress and was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan in 1986. The federal holiday was first celebrated two years later in 1988. All of those accomplishments are widely known.



Rep. John Conyers with Jim Bull, past President of Detroit Audubon, at the Detroit International Wildlife Refuge Benefit Dinner.

What many people do not know, however, is that John Conyers had THE strongest voting record in Congress on environmental legislation, according to the League of Conservation Voters' assessment from the time that organization first launched its annual environmental report card. He had a great mentor for that role, having worked for Rep. John Dingell for three years as a legislative aide before running for congress himself. We

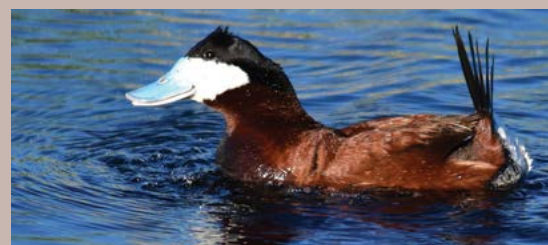
lost Rep. Dingell, another icon of the conservation movement, in 2019 as well. When Dingell retired from Congress in 2015, Conyers assumed his mantle as “Dean of the Congress,” an honorary title given to the longest-serving individual in congress. Among the environmental issues supported in bills he authored, and for which he fought hard, was a permanent ban on oil drilling in the environmentally sensitive Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, where many birds we enjoy seeing in migration nest and raise their young. That bill did not pass, however. He was a key supporter on countless important pieces of environmental legislation that did pass. Among Conyers' many awards and recognitions was being honored by Detroit Audubon as Conservationist of the Year. He was presented with a plaque commemorating the occasion at our awards dinner during our annual conference. The plaque we gave him hung on his office wall in Washington, D.C., until he resigned from Congress in 2017.

Rest in peace, John, and thanks for all you've done for people who didn't have many other voices standing up for them, and for all you've done for animals, plants, and ecosystems, which have no voice at all. They and we are forever grateful to have had such a faithful friend and ally.

Note: Rashida Tlaib, another strong environmental advocate and recipient of our President's Award for Environmental Leadership, was elected to Conyers' vacant seat, in which she still serves today.

Mystery Bird Revealed

If you said Ruddy Duck, you are correct. The top photo at right is a non-breeding plumaged male; below right is a male in breeding plumage. You can tell the Ruddy Duck in any plumage by the upright tail held at about a 45° angle. The male in winter has a clear large white patch on the side of his face, while the female in all plumages has a dark line through that white patch. In breeding plumage, the male's bill is pale blue; and his breast, belly, and back are rusty in color. That rudder of a tail is often diagnostic, although they don't always hold the tail erect outside of the breeding season. Some do breed in Michigan, but most only stop by in migration and may stay all or part of the winter in some areas. The male's courtship display is a comical pumping of his blue beak up and down, often touching his breast; after doing this vigorously several times, he ends with a “jerk and sputter” sound. The female lays as many as 10 eggs even though she can't possibly sit on them all. Sometimes she moves some of her eggs to a communal nest—an egg repository nest for several females. Those eggs do not get incubated and will not hatch. Ornithologists are puzzled about why that behavior persists. —Bruce Szczecowski photos



Book Review: The Naming of the Shrew *By Sabrina Salome*

Naming every animal on Earth is no small feat. Why complicate it by using a language that nobody speaks anymore? In his book *The Naming of the Shrew*, author John Wright prompts us to pay closer attention to what he calls the “true” names of the animals we think we know.

Most animals have at least two names—a common one, like American Robin or Blue Jay, and a “scientific binomial,” a two-part name used to distinguish species across cultural and language barriers. The scientific name is ideally, though not always, written in Latin. As a dead language, or one that’s no longer evolving through casual use, Latin words and what they mean stay consistent over time. They also serve as the only names for often-overlooked species, like certain insects or fungi, who Wright says, “do not have a common name because most people could not care less if they had one or not.”

The history, rulebook, and pronunciation of a dead language probably doesn't strike most people as a riveting read, and names like *Turdus migratorius* (the American Robin) and *Passer domesticus* (the House Sparrow) don't exactly roll off the tongue. Wright seems keenly aware that this is not a topic most people would pick up a book about, and he's candid about who really needs to know scientific Latin: Not most people. Wright even opens one of his chapters in the classroom of his own former Latin teacher, where he describes himself as completely and totally uninterested in the subject.

Since then, Wright's had an obvious change of heart. But he doesn't insist on anyone's learning Latin so much as he simply enthuses about it, sharing stories that make us to wonder what we'll be missing if we dismiss it as boring. He doesn't hide his blatant preference for fungi (and I was left endeared to them

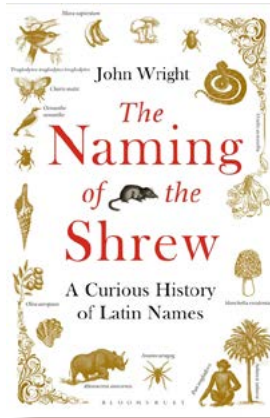
because of it), but there's something here for everyone. Not hiding my own blatant preference for birds, I was charmed by the backstories of those like *Aix sponsa*, the "betrothed water bird," given to the North American Wood Duck.

Wright explains that Carl Linnaeus, famously known for bestowing Latin names, thought the male's colorful plumage made it look "dressed for its wedding."

While many Latin names capture the essence of an animal in a way that their common names don't, not all birds have been so lucky. The Brown Noddy's *Anous stolidus*, for instance, means "mindless fool," and Wright says: "The outright winner in the useless names competition is *Egretta egrettoides*: 'egret that looks like an egret.'" Despite their history and purpose, they are far from being either strictly informative or elegant and whimsical. Wright's book describes names that have been used to honor royalty, make pop culture references, and flirt discreetly in addition to their original, noble task of categorizing life on Earth.

Scientific Latin is a niche interest, but one I share with Wright, and his take on it is refreshing. I was relieved to come away with not just a better understanding of Latin names, but also, at last, some clue as to how to pronounce them. Wright describes the purpose of his book as “to inspire a delight in Latin names,” and with a merging of science, storytelling, and humor, this book hits the mark. For those of us fascinated by birds and other creatures, Latin turns out to be yet another way we can get to know them.

So, yes, it might be less complicated to call the Secretary bird—a leggy, snake-eating raptor found in Africa—just that and nothing more. Or, we could call it the “snake-bearing archer,” *Sagittarius serpentarius*. Which would you rather be known by?



*Fox Squirrel at Elizabeth Park,
Christmas Bird Count. Jim Bull photo*

STOP (Sudden Temporary Outdoor Phenomena) Field Trips

By Leonard Weber; photos by Margaret and Leonard Weber

Detroit Audubon is starting a series of new field trips in 2020 called Sudden Temporary Outdoor Phenomena (STOP). You can be one of the first to join us for these field trips, which are designed to give you an opportunity to view time-limited annually recurring animal activities, when only an approximate date for when they will occur can be given in advance. These field trips are open to both adults and children. Participants are welcome to bring cameras.

If you are interested in participating in these impromptu field trips, please send a message to programs@detroitaudubon.org. Put "STOP field trips" in the subject line and include your name and contact information in the body of the email. You will then be added to our STOP contact list. As soon as the behavior begins, everyone on this list will be notified electronically of the times in the ensuing days when a guide will be on site to help participants observe and understand the behavior they are watching.

In 2020, the following STOP field trips will be offered (of course exact date can't be given, that's why we call them "sudden"!). Others may be added in the future.

American Toad Breeding Pond, Eliza Howell Park

Annually, usually within a few days before or after April 20, adult toads return



to the wet meadow breeding pond for about three days of loud calling and mating. During these days they can be both heard and seen from about 4 p.m. until dark.

Praying Mantises in Goldenrods, Eliza Howell Park

Annually, mature Praying Mantises can be watched for several days to a week in and near blooming goldenrods, preying on insects, mating, and laying eggs. This usually occurs about the second week of September, but it varies from year to year.

When these phenomena are first observed, those on the STOP field trip list will be informed of the dates and times when someone will be present on site to assist participants to view these exciting nature happenings.



***American Toad male, singing;
and Praying Mantis, preying...***