Flyway

A Detroit Audubon Publication
Winter 2022

Our Winter Snowbirds

Fall to Winter Nature Gallery

Bell Bowl Prairie Saved, for Now

Join Us for Our 2022 Kenyan Safari

Detroit Grand Prix Zooms off Belle Isle

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A publication of Detroit Audubon

4605 Cass Avenue, Detroit, MI 48201-1256
Phone: **313-588-1015**
Email: staff@DetroitAudubon.org
Web: www.detroitaudubon.org

Rochelle Breitenbach, President
rochelle@detroitaudubon.org

Rebecca Minardi, Vice President

Brittany Leick
Program and Membership Coordinator and Office Administrator
313-588-1015
programs@detroitaudubon.org

Ava Landgraf
Research Coordinator 313-800-1578
alandgraf@detroitaudubon.org

Staff are often in the field, so there may be communication delays, but your calls and emails will be returned as soon as possible.

Flyway Editor: **Jim Bull**
Proofreading: **Rebecca Minardi and Emily Simon**

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Original articles, photos and art welcome at Flyway@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.

Mystery Bird

Can you tell what species this is just from what you can see in this photo by Bruce Szczechowski? For the answer go to page 15.

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Male American Goldfinch in late winter/early spring beginning to sport the bright yellow feathers of its breeding plumage. For most of the winter, males and female are both the same drab olive color. Photo taken at Pointe Mouillee by Dongfan Chen.

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2022 Upcoming Programs

People of all ages, genders, ethnicities, experience levels, and walks of life love to go birding. With that in mind, we have a wide range of events planned for 2022. We will now be offering three different monthly field trips: Beginner Birders (Beginner level (B)), Elmwood Cemetery (Intermediate level (I)), and Pointe Mouillee (Experienced level (E)). Everyone is invited to attend any of our field trips, but we note experience levels listed for those who find it helpful in choosing which field trips to attend. We always help beginners on all our field trips. Field trips designated (E) are usually longer, more physically demanding, and involve searching for birds that are much harder to see and identify.

Go to **www.detroitaudubon.org/birding/field-trips/** to learn more and to sign up! Detroit Audubon chapter members receive priority registration. Please email us at **staff@detroitaudubon.org** if you have questions regarding these field trips or your membership status. In order for us to notify you about a field trip prior to a public announcement, make sure we have your email address. Here are the field trips so far, but there could be pop-up field trips as well, so keep checking our website or our Facebook page.

JANUARY

Fri. Jan. 7 - Beginner Birders Field Trip (B)

$ Sat. Jan. 8 - Elmwood Cemetery Bird & History Walk (I)

$ Sat. Jan. 8 - Pointe Mouillee (E) Sun.

Sun. Jan. 9 - Detroit Riverfront Intro to Winter Birding

Thu. Jan. 13 - Christmas Bird Counts Webinar

$ Sat. Jan. 22 - Kensington Birding Walk

Sat. Jan. 29 - Winterfest at Belle Isle

FEBRUARY

Fri. Feb. 4 - Beginner Birders Field Trip (B)

Sat. Feb. 5 - Shiver on the River Winter Birding

Sun. Feb. 6 - Detroit Riverfront Intro to Winter Birding

$ Sat. Feb. 12 - Elmwood Cemetery Bird & History Walk (I)

$ Sat. Feb. 19 - Downriver Birding Blitz

Tue. Feb. 22 - How to Help Urban Birds Webinar

$ Sat. Feb. 26 - Pointe Mouillee (E)

$ Sat. Feb. 26 - St. Clair River Walk

MARCH

Fri. Mar. 4 - Beginner Birders Field Trip (B)

$ Fri. Mar. 4 - Owl Prowl

$ Sat. Mar. 5 - Trumpeter Swan Walk at Gallup Park

$ Sat. Mar. 12 - Elmwood Cemetery Bird & History Walk (I)

$ Sat. Mar. 19 - Pointe Mouillee Birding Walk (E)

$ Fri. Mar. 25 - Woodcock Watch

Are you interested in getting more involved with Detroit Audubon? Do you feel comfortable with your birding skills or have other knowledge you enjoy sharing with others? Or maybe you want to co-lead a program with one of the staff or other volunteers? Reach out to Brittany at **programs@detroitaudubon.org** if you're interested in becoming a Field Trip Leader!

Birding field trip by Brittany Leick

Join Us for Our 2022 Kenyan Bird and Animal Safari

Photos by Bruce Szczechowski

Scarlet-chested Sunbird.

Have you hit all the great birding spots in Michigan? Are you ready to spread your wings and take off to some place a little different? Are you getting tired of staying cooped up at home after two years of Covid-19 quarantine? Join us for our two-week long Kenyan Bird and Animal Safari this summer!

Africa is a magical place with a canvas of varied habitats, rich cultural heritage and diversity, and a wealth of natural resources while still maintaining its wild nature. Across the vast expanse of African landscapes, you can find places of unparalleled wonder. Imagine the sun rising in the east across tropical savannas with splashes of mighty baobab trees across a golden scenery of swaying grasses and a swirling sand tornado trailing across the dry volcanic-shaped valleys. Other marvels you are likely to find on our trip include towering giraffes bowing to drink from seasonal lush wetlands and floodplains; a plethora of kingfishers and shorebirds plying the tranquil freshwater and brackish lakes; numerous species of monkeys foraging in woodland savanna and grooming in the shade of umbrella acacia trees; and a cheetah sprinting after a gazelle prancing across the grasslands in the expansive Maasai Mara that merges with the Serengeti in Tanzania and stretches as far as the eye can see.

Above, L-R: Cheetah, Carmine Bee-eater, and Three-banded Courser. Below, Lesser Flamingos

Kenya, our destination, hosts 1,054 resident and migrating birds and 60 percent of Africa's total bird population, a veritable birder's paradise. Kenya is home to the Rift Valley where the human species got its start and is a global biodiversity hotspot famous for its extraordinary views of the Big 5 (elephants, lions, leopards, cape buffalo, and rhinos). Enjoy the chance to see bright pink Lesser and Greater Flamingos gliding over or wading in the water, Secretary Birds stomping as they hunt for grassland-dwelling prey, the Beautiful Sunbird flitting from flower to flower as it searches for nectar, or an African Fish Eagle calling out its yodeling yelp before catching a fish with a graceful, shallow plunge along the surface of lazy rivers and Rift Valley lakes.

An experienced birder, traveler, and trip leader, Bruce Szczechowski, in consultation with his amazing Kenyan partners and guides, Joseph Aengwo and Wilson Tiren, has crafted a one-of-a-kind 16-day itinerary to show you the best wildlife Kenya has to offer. This trip will be jam packed with visits to national parks and Rift Valley lakes to offer you a once-in-a-lifetime and unforgettable wildlife experience that is unsurpassed anywhere in the world. The highlights include exploring the Great Rift Valley and world-renowned parks including: Nairobi National Park, Amboseli National Park, Lake Baringo, Samburu National Reserve, Lake Nakuru National Park, and Lake Bogoria National Reserve. In addition, we are excited to announce that the trip this year will include the Maasai Mara National Reserve. Designated a conservation area in 1961, it is considered one the seven natural wonders of Africa, one of the ten natural wonders of the world, and of the most important ecosystems on Earth. Each night you will stay in a comfortable lodge or hotel where you can often bird right from the property.

If you're interested in learning more about the Kenyan Bird & Animal Safari trip, check out our webpage at **https://www.detroitaudubon.org/kenyan-bird-and-animal-safari/** or contact Brittany at **programs@detroitaudubon.org.**

Detroit s Grand Prix Zooms off Belle Isle

By Rebecca Minardi, Vice President

After years of protests, complaints, and befuddlement (why is a road race held inside a state park?!), Detroit's Grand Prix will be returning to downtown Detroit in 2023. The race had been held on Belle Isle on and off since 1992 and every year since 2012. The Grand Prix was originally held downtown when it started as a Formula One series almost four decades ago; thus this move will return the now IndyCar event back to its roots in the streets of Detroit. But more importantly, Belle Isle will no longer be subjected to a race that is disruptive and destructive. The race itself (until 2022) lasted just two days. However, the setup in the early years started in late winter when crews would spend months erecting concrete and chain-link barricades throughout the island. The construction was loud, ugly, and disturbing both to the Detroiters trying to enjoy a beautiful park and to the nonhuman species trying to live their lives. Though setup is alleged to now only take 39 days (with a 20-day teardown period), this is still two months of construction on one of Detroit's premier stopover locations for birds at the height of spring migration.

When Bald Eagles were found constructing a nest on Belle Isle in February 2018 for the first time in decades, there was heightened concern that the Grand Prix would disturb the eaglets who would still be in the nest in June. Board member Diane Cheklich and past president Leonard Weber monitored the eaglets and nest during the race to ensure that any disturbance would be recorded. Detroit Audubon officially took a stance against the race on the island, while board members, staff, and volunteers attended meetings to speak out about the race and ask the Belle Isle Park Advisory Committee not to renew the contract for the race. Despite protests, letters against the race, and countless meetings, it looked like the Grand Prix would be held on Belle Isle in perpetuity. Until it wasn't. Maybe the continued opposition got too awkward. Maybe officials decided a race downtown would bring more money to local businesses. Or just maybe someone in a position of power thought about how beautiful Belle Isle is in the spring, as the tanagers and thrushes and orioles return, and how their songs are a much better backdrop than the sound of roaring engines. Whatever happened, Detroit Audubon is grateful for the return of Belle Isle in the spring. Starting in 2023, it will be the peaceful place it was meant to be for people and the welcoming place it was meant to be for birds making their long journeys back north.

Bald Eagle in flight at Belle Isle by Bruce Szczechowski

Brittany Leick photo

Environmental Educational Opportunities Are Coming Back!

Are you an in-school or home-school teacher looking to offer some environmental opportunities and lesson plans for your students? Maybe you run a program outside of school that helps teach kids? Detroit Audubon offers environmental educational opportunities for kids of all ages.

Detroit Audubon is available to lead curriculum-aligned educational programs for metro Detroit schools. We offer a range of opportunities for your children to learn about birds, their feeding behaviors, food chains, adaptations, native plant and pollinator species, local habitats, and other conservation opportunities through stewardship projects, our fill-the-bill activity, or other various hands-on learning activities.

Imagine your kids learning about some of our local bird species and types of habitats in your own backyard before getting to use binoculars for the first time. Or maybe we take a field trip together to a nearby park where they'd get to observe local plant and animal species in addition to the local birds twittering around. Not sure if in-person is the best option? We could work together to create a video series that you could share with your students at home or in the classroom. Or are you interested, but have no idea what you'd like to do? Reach out to Brittany, our Program Coordinator, for ideas about field trips, in-class opportunities, and other virtual offerings.

We have our private Climate Change & Bird Safe Windows Webinar coming up this March for all interested schools and teachers. The webinar will be a partner program with the Detroit Zoological Society and River Raisin Institute and will include the webinar, virtual curriculum resources, age-appropriate book recommendations, window decoration materials, and more if you choose to participate.

Reach out to Brittany at **programs@detroitaudubon.org** for more information and details.

Kirtland s Warbler Census Shows Once-Endangered Songbird Continues to Thrive

Kirtland's Warbler on Belle Isle by Stevie Kuroda

In June 2021, state and federal agencies and droves of volunteers again partnered to count Michigan's Kirtland's Warbler population. The results show that the small songbirds have continued to flourish since their November 2019 removal from the federal list of endangered species.

"The power of partnership continues to yield excellent results for the Kirtland's Warbler after coming off the endangered species list," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Regional Director Charlie Wooley. "Recovery of this beloved species required a strong, creative set of partners, and that spirit continues into the future with agencies, organizations, and private entities working together locally, nationally, and internationally. I'm confident this strong partnership will secure the long-term future of this bird."

With the June survey results now tallied, the Kirtland's Warbler global population is estimated at 2,245 pairs, which is more than double the 1,000-pair recovery goal for the species—which has been exceeded over each of the past 20 years.

Researchers survey nesting areas, listening for singing males advertising and defending nesting territories. Each male found is presumed to have a mate, so the number of males also indicates the number of pairs.

This year's Kirtland's Warbler counts took place in Jack Pine nesting habitat situated across lands managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Nearly all the world's Kirtland's Warbler population nests in Michigan's northern Lower Peninsula.

In 2017 and 2019, partial surveys were completed. This year's thorough census was the first full count of Kirtland's Warbler since 2015, when 2,365 singing males were counted. This is believed to represent ALL the adult males of the entire global population of this highly localized (endemic) bird species!

In the Upper Peninsula, a record number of Kirtland's Warblers were recorded by census participants. Previous counts recorded 37 singing males in 2015, 44 in 2017, and 40 in 2019. This year, 67 singing males were found across the Upper Peninsula.

"Expansion of Kirtland's Warblers into new areas, and in greater numbers, is good news for the future of the species in Michigan," said DNR Director Dan Eichinger. "From the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance and American Bird Conservancy to our state and federal partners in the Great Lakes region, the effort and teamwork committed to the recovery of this species continues to pay great dividends."

In addition to the birds found in Michigan, Wisconsin surveyors detected 39 singing males, largely in central Wisconsin's Adams County. This is an all-time high for Wisconsin, which has been seeing increasing numbers since Kirtland's Warbler breeding was first documented there in 2007. Surveyors in Ontario detected 22 singing males, also representing an all-time high since surveys began there.

Kirtland's Warbler surveys have been conducted in Michigan since 1951. The species was among the first animals included when the Endangered Species Act was passed in 1973. Populations sank to a low of 167 pairs in 1974 and 1987 before mounting a gradual recovery. By 2001, the number of Kirtland's Warbler pairs in Michigan had surpassed 1,000, while the places the birds were located expanded to include the Upper Peninsula, Ontario, and Wisconsin.

Aiding greatly in the bird's recovery were cooperative efforts between state and federal agencies, along with conservation groups, to conserve and expand suitable Jack Pine habitat and control Brown-headed Cowbirds. Cowbirds are nest parasites who lay their eggs in the nests of Kirtland's Warblers and other bird species. The larger cowbird chicks out-compete warbler chicks for food, which causes them to die, while the warbler parents unknowingly raise the cowbird chicks. Recent studies by Nathan Cooper of the Smithsonian Institute have shown that cowbird parasitism is no longer a problem in the Lower Peninsula, so cowbird trapping has been discontinued there. Nest monitoring will continue and trapping could be brought back if cowbirds become a problem again. Very few cowbirds were being caught in traps recently so it seems that these adaptable birds have learned to avoid the young Jack Pine habitat. Cowbirds have not been a problem in the Upper Peninsula or Ontario, so trapping was never started in those locations. Cowbird trapping continues in Wisconsin.

The Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Plan was developed in 2015 and is now the guiding management strategy for the species. Additionally, a Kirtland's Warbler Funding Plan, funding and other commitments to habitat management, and cowbird control are in place to ensure continued conservation actions in the absence of Endangered Species Act protections and the funding that came with that designation.

The Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team, organized under the Endangered Species Act, disbanded in 2016 and was replaced by the Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team established under the Endangered Species Act. Today, the Conservation Team preserves institutional knowledge, shares information, and facilitates communication and collaboration among agencies and partners to maintain and improve Kirtland's Warbler conservation efforts.

The current team include representatives from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, the Michigan DNR, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, USDA-Wildlife Services, the Canadian Wildlife Service, Huron Pines, the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance, the American Bird Conservancy, and the California University of Pennsylvania.

Kirtland s Warbler to Be Featured on Michigan License Plate in 2022

The Kirtland's Warbler, long a symbol of conservation in Michigan, will be featured on a new Michigan license plate that will help raise money for wildlife habitat in the state. Beginning in January, Michigan drivers will be able to purchase the license plate through the Michigan Secretary of State for $35, with $25 of that fee designated to the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund.

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) chose to celebrate the Kirtland's Warbler species because it was removed from the federal endangered species list in November 2019. Through wise stewardship on the part of the Michigan DNR, the U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, partnerships with a network of nonprofit organizations, universities, and private citizens created a conservation coalition that saved this bird from extinction. Coming back from a low of just 334, the current population is both healthy and robust with more than 4,000 individuals!

The warbler nests in young Jack Pine forests. Ninety-five percent of the Kirtland's Warbler population nests in five counties in the northern Lower Peninsula. Small populations can also be found in the Upper Peninsula, Wisconsin, and Ontario. The warbler spends its winters primarily in The Bahamas, but wintering individuals have also been spotted in Cuba.

The Kirtland's Warbler is the perfect symbol for the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund because even though the bird is no longer considered endangered, it can only be sustained if conservation efforts continue for as far as we can see into the future. Kirtland's Warblers nest on the ground in even-age stands of young Jack Pine trees. Historically, the warbler's breeding habitat was created by wildfire sweeping across the landscape, burning mature Jack Pine trees, and opening new areas for young trees to grow. A fire-related species, Jack Pine cones only open when seared by the heat of fire. But with more humans living in and around the Jack Pine forests starting in the early 20th century, fires had to be extinguished to protect human lives and property. With young Jack Pine habitat becoming increasingly rare, the warbler went into a long, slow population decline until the 1980s, when humans began to harvest large areas of mature Jack Pine forests and replant them with young trees, using research findings by University of Michigan forest ecologists to mimic fire-created habitat. Today, over 90 percent of Kirtland's Warblers nest in these managed plantations. Some habitat is still created by wildfires before they are put out.

The Kirtland's Warbler is just one of the species that benefits from management of the Jack Pine ecosystem. Game species such as the White-tailed Deer, Wild Turkey, and Snowshoe Hare use the young Jack Pine habitat extensively. Of special interest to birders, the very early stages of succession attract other relatively rare Michigan breeding species, including Black-backed Woodpeckers, Clay-colored Sparrows, and Upland Sandpipers. Brown Thrashers, Vesper Sparrows, Lincoln's Sparrows, Eastern Bluebirds, Nashville Warblers, Common Ravens, and Brewer's Blackbirds are fairly common breeders in Kirtland's Warbler prime nesting habitat. The plaintive flutelike calls of the ubiquitous Hermit Thrush often blend with the loud melodic song of the Kirtland's Warbler. Mature Jack Pine stands often attract Ovenbirds, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and occasionally Spruce Grouse. Jack Pine management also helps to support the threatened Hill's Thistle, Allegheny Plum, Pale Agrostris, Bird's Foot Violet, Blueberry, Sweet Fern, Pink Lady's-slipper or Moccasin Flower, the yellow Frostweed with its supine stamens (plants), and the Secretive Locust and Dusted Skipper (insects). Eastern Hognose Snakes, Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrels, Badgers, and Black Bear find this habitat to their liking as well.

"The accomplishment of this species qualifying for removal from the endangered species list is a testament to the efficacy and power of ecology-driven conservation," said Michigan Audubon Executive Director Heather Good.

Both Detroit Audubon and Michigan Audubon have been strong supporters of Kirtland's Warbler management and conservation for over 60 years. The late Detroit Audubon board member Wilbur T. Bull helped coordinate the first census of the Kirtland's Warbler in 1951 when he worked for the then Michigan Department of Conservation in Roscommon (now the DNR). His son, Jim Bull, long-time board member and three-time Detroit Audubon president, is the longest serving volunteer on the Michigan census, now done every two years by the U.S. Forest Service. A comprehensive census of all nesting areas is completed every five years. For years he served as Detroit Audubon's representative to the Kirtland's Warbler Recovery Team, and he is an appointee and secretary to the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit created in 2013 to help support Kirtland's Warbler conservation. In 2004, he also co-chaired a campaign, along with Len Stuttman of Michigan Audubon, to make the Kirtland's Warbler our state bird, an idea that is seeing some resurging interest.

Since its inception, the wildlife habitat license plate has raised over $3.9 million for Michigan's Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. This is the only designated fund for nongame species in our state, "which is why your contribution matters," added Good. "It not only puts dollars into an area of natural resources management that is greatly unsupported and in need of resources, but it also conveys a message on the road and to our legislators about non-consumptive wildlife appreciation."


Kirtland's Warbler by Sharon Korte

The Common Loon, another avian species beloved by many, was the first nongame species featured on the Michigan's Wildlife Legacy license plate when it became available in 2006. Starting in December 2017, the nongame plate featured an elk. "I think the birding community will applaud seeing this change back to an avian species on the nongame plate, especially one that has such strong Michigan relevance," said Good.

Detroit Audubon, Michigan Audubon, and the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance encourage every Michigan driver to purchase the Kirtland's Warbler license plate to support our state's nongame wildlife conservation work.

(L-R) Gentiana puberulenta (downy gentian) at Bell Bowl Prairie by Cassi Saari https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:Gentiana_puberulenta_at_Bell_Bowl_Prairie.jpg&oldid=607622629; the airport expansion plan; and Bell Bowl Prairie.

Rare and Wonderful Bell Bowl Prairie Saved, for Now

By Rebecca Minardi, Vice President

Editor's Note: *Why are we covering the threatened destruction of a prairie in Illinois?*

For one, grassland birds are in trouble all over North America and birds do not know state boundaries. Detroit Audubon has long been concerned about and has been taking action to protect and restore native grasslands in southeast Michigan. Birds from the Detroit area might wind up attempting to nest in Illinois, and some birds from that state might wind up here. And since 1840, Illinois has been nicknamed "The Prairie State."

Two, we should be concerned when native grasslands are threatened anywhere and should work in solidarity with groups doing like work, wherever they are doing it. We can learn from other battles to protect grasslands, and perhaps in the future, some Illinois groups will help us in some of our efforts. It is really all one cause, isn't it? When I asked Rebecca why we should include this article in the Flyway she responded: "It's insanity and people should know about it full stop and some of our federal taxes are going to support this travesty!" So, read, and help by making a call or writing letter if you can. Sounds like there is a path forward and a relatively easy one—it is designing a road to go around, not through this rare, beautiful, and important piece of our national native grassland heritage! Long may the mashkosi (grass in Algonqian language) grow!
—JNB

When I got the news that Bell Bowl Prairie would be spared, at least for now, I shouted out loud. To think that there was even a possibility that an 8,000-year-old habitat remnant, just five acres, was in danger of being destroyed, is preposterous. But that is the world we live in, where very few natural spaces are considered sacred in the face of the insatiable human need for growth. In this case, Bell Bowl, a very rare dry gravel prairie, was slated for destruction for the expansion of the Chicago Rockford International Airport in Rockford, Illinois. Though 0.01 percent of native prairie remains in Illinois, the airport aimed to build a road through Bell Bowl for their continued $50 million cargo expansion. (Rockford is currently the fastest growing cargo airport in the world.) Environmentalists and concerned citizens balked; surely this road could be easily rerouted around this small, yet precious, patch of prairie?

After an endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee was spotted in the area in August, construction halted briefly, but was still planned for November 1. That's when all hell broke loose, and thousands of folks in Illinois and across the United States called and emailed airport and elected officials to ask, "why?" Why erase something so rare and so beautiful where when there are so few beautiful such habitats left? The Natural Land Institute (NLI), which has been caring for the prairie for decades, filed a lawsuit just days before the November 1 deadline. Somehow, something worked and for now, Bell Bowl Prairie is saved. The temporary reprieve lasts through March 1, 2022. With this time, the NLI and other groups can hopefully convince officials to follow the offered redesign ideas that protect the prairie. Unfortunately, if Rusty Patched Bumble Bees are overwintering on the prairie, we won't know for sure by this deadline as they do not leave hibernation to nest until the summer. Though airport authorities for now have agreed to remove a retention basin, they have not stated they will yet agree to move the access road.

In March, we will know if we will lose another grassland habitat forever for the sake of jobs, money, and expansion. Kerry Leigh, the Executive Director of NLI, wrote: "We … believe that the airport expansion doesn't have to occur at the expense of this ancient, and very special fragment of all that is left of the original Illinois. The old thinking of 'us' verses 'them', or the environment versus progress, has been replaced with the concept of 'both and'. Conservationists recognize that they are no longer just protecting an individual species, or a habitat, but that we are, ultimately, saving us." The battle isn't over. Consider calling or emailing elected officials (such as Illinois Gov. J. B. Pritzker and U.S. Senator Dick Durbin and Sen. Tammy Duckworth since federal transportation funds are helping pay for this project) and airport officials (such as Zack Oakley, the airport's deputy director of operations and planning) to remind them that saving habitats like Bell Bowl Prairie will ultimately help save us.

Rusty Patched Bumblebee, from USFWS via Picasa

Some Recent Rarities Sighted in the Detroit Metro Area

Photos by Robert Irwin, annotations by Jim Bull and Emily Simon

ICELAND GULL (Kumlein's subspecies)—This gull looks a lot like the larger Herring Gull but is much paler. The Kumlein 's is gray in the wingtips with lighter streaking on the neck. The other subspecies (Thayer's) with all white wings winters in Iceland but only nests in Greenland. Kumlein's is a rare but regular fall and winter visitor to this area.

(At left) LITTLE GULL—Our smallest gull, it is a Eurasian species that occasionally nests in the Great Lakes near Toronto but not in Michigan. Here it is rare. It has dark underwings unlike the light underwings of the similar Bonaparte's Gull. Its wing is also more rounded. We have seen them on our Point Edward to Pinery Provincial Park field trip in Ontario. This one was photographed at Pointe Mouillee headquarters.

(Above) VESPER SPARROW—This species' most distinguishing feature is its outer white tail feathers, visible when it flies. Its song starts with four flute-like notes then goes into a jumble of notes that sound a lot like a Song Sparrow. Its chestnut shoulder patch (not evident in this photo), white eye ring, and lack of central dark spot on its breast distinguish it from the similar Song Sparrow. It nests throughout the state, but its population is more robust in the western and northern parts of the Lower Peninsula. It used to be much more common, but is currently seen less often due to the disappearance of its native grassland habitat, especially in southeast Michigan. Its population is also sparse in the Upper Peninsula. This photo was taken at Humbug Marsh.

Late Fall to Winter Nature Gallery

White-crowned Sparrow
by Bruce Szczechowski

Hermit Thrush at Lake Erie Metropark
by Bruce Szczechowski

White-throated Sparrow at Lake Erie Metropark
by Bruce Szczechowski

Purple Coneflower fading, and (far right) fungus on dead log at Eliza Howell Park by Jim Bull

Black-capped Chickadee by Bruce Szczechowski

Golden-crowned Kinglet at Lake Erie Metropark by Bruce Szczechowski

Carolina Wren at Lake Erie Metropark by Bruce Szczechowski

Our Winter Snowbirds

by Jim Bull

It might seem hard to believe that as much snow as we sometimes get, and as frigid as it gets here, for several birds that nest further north, southeast Michigan is the sunny south, and the ideal tropical resort to get away from the harsh winter. Actually, it isn't about relaxation on the beach for them—it's about access to abundant food. Here are some of this area's winter guests; snowbirds, if you will.

WINTER WREN - A very secretive wren that nests not only in northern Michigan but as far north into Canada as the boreal forest extends. It has a long, bubbly, explosive song and will burst forth in song even here on its wintering grounds. The wren can sing for up to ten seconds, but it will often hop in and out of sight while singing. Waiting for it to sit long enough to click a shutter is a real challenge. It is our smallest wren at only four inches long with a very short tail. Up north the male does something unheard of in the bird world; it builds a nest to roost in while mom and the kids occupy the brooding nest a distance away. That's unusual because birds usually only build nests for raising young. Old woodpecker holes are its location of choice.

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW - Often mistaken for a Chipping Sparrow because both have the characteristic chestnut cap, this sparrow lacks the bold white and black eye line (supercillium) of the Chipping Sparrow which we only see in spring and summer. Probably the best identifier of this species is the dark black dot in the center of its breast, which the Chipping Sparrow lacks. In March and April be careful with your identification of sparrows with chestnut caps because these two species' ranges can overlap. But in the middle of winter, you will only find American Tree Sparrows. They are misnamed too, because they prefer fields and shrubby areas, not forests. It is thought that it got its name because early settlers thought it looked a lot like the European Tree Sparrow. They nest on the treeless tundra of northern Canada and Alaska and shrubby areas and marshes on the margins of the tundra. It feeds on seeds and readily comes to backyard bird feeders.

American Tree Sparrow at Humbug Marsh by Bruce Szczechowski

SNOW BUNTING - Snow Buntings often occur here in medium to large flocks feeding on seeds in open fields, marches, airports (including the Grosse Ile airport), and on beaches. Pointe Mouillee, the Antenna Fields nearby, the riverfront on Belle Isle, and the beach at Lake St. Clair Metropark are good places to look for them, but so is any farm field in winter around here. We often see them along the Lake Huron shore on our Point Edward to Grand Bend, Ontario, field trip each year. They often seem to hang around with Horned Larks, which nest in the same fields but usually stick around for the winter. They nest on the treeless tundra of far northern Canada and Alaska, the farthest north of any North American songbird. They are brown and white in winter, and black and white in summer when they sport their breeding plumage. Their light brown and white allows them to blend in with the cornstalks and stubble and snow in the fallow fields of the season, so the best way to find them is when a flock flies from one feeding spot to another.

Winter Wren by Bruce Szczechowski

Snow Bunting at Grand Bend, Ontario, by Sharon Korte

Northern Saw-whet Owl at Westcroft Gardens, Grosse Ile, by Jim Bull

NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL - While you can see several species of migrating owls at the Whitefish Point Bird Observatory near Tahquamenon Falls, on Lake Superior, in the Detroit metro area there are only two migratory owl species we see regularly: this species and the Long-eared Owl. On its breeding grounds in the northern Lower Peninsula and on up into Canada, Northern Saw-whet Owls can be heard giving one of their two songs, neither of which sounds anything like you'd expect of an owl. One sounds like the metallic sound made when sharpening a saw, which is where it got its name. The other one is an otherworldly beeping that sounds like sonar. This small owl is about the size of an American Robin. They do not have feather tufts, often roost in evergreen thickets, and will stay put all day if not disturbed. There are some ornithologists who band these owls every winter on Belle Isle, Pointe Mouillee, and Lake Erie Metropark. They have also been found on Grosse Ile, but can be found anywhere there are evergreen thickets.

LONG-EARED OWL - It looks like a skinny, shorter Great Horned Owl with longer "ear" tufts (all feathers, of course). They are only 13" to 15" tall compared with the Great Horned which ranges from 18" to 25" tall. They stay perfectly still in deciduous trees so they are extremely difficult to spot. One birder, who had a knack for finding them each year at Lake Erie Metropark, documented 11 spending the winter not far from the Marshlands Museum one year. It has several calls, some of which sound like a person crying bloody murder. Emily Simon and I once played a Great Horned Owl tape during the Christmas Bird Count on Grosse Ile, only to hear what sounded like a person shrieking for help; it was a Long-eared Owl responding for some reason.

(L) Long-eared owl frightened (in tangle) by Becky Matsubara. This image was originally posted to Flickr by Becky Matsubara at **https://flickr.com/photos/130819719@N05/28045676729** (archive). It was reviewed on 14 March 2018 by FlickreviewR 2 and was confirmed to be licensed under the terms of the cc-by-2.0.

Our Winter Snowbirds continued

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH - These little "upside down birds" nest in forests from mid-Michigan to the tip of the Upper Peninsula, and throughout Canadian forests. While the White-breasted Nuthatch is common in this area year-round, Red-breasted Nuthatches winter here some years more than others. They seem to be becoming more common here in the winter, while one used to have to go further north to see them. They are a little smaller than the White-breasted species, have a chestnut belly and breast, and a thick black eyeline bordered in white that are both distinctive. Its call is higher pitched and quieter than its more common White-breasted cousin.

Red-breasted Nuthatch in Grand Bend, Ontario, by Bruce Szczechowski

DARK-EYED JUNCO - ç all dark grey back and snow-white breast, its former name, "Slate-colored Junco," fit much better that is current moniker, "Dark-eyed Junco." The race that occurs here in the winter can still be called "Slate Colored Juncos," but because they can interbreed with other Juncos, they are not a distinct species. You can find nesting Juncos as close by as older stands of Jack Pine in the middle of the Lower Peninsula (pines that are way too old to attract Kirtland's Warblers). This sparrow has a conical beak that is ideal for cracking seeds. While they can perch in trees, they are most often found feeding on the ground, and they are readily attracted to bird feeders, if there is seed on the ground. On the breeding grounds you will hear its dry trill that sounds like a more musical Chipping Sparrow, but you are unlikely to hear them sing while they are here. Singing is all about establishing territory and nesting, which is not on the agenda during their stay with us.

Dark-eyed Junco, Grand Bend, Ontario, by Bruce Szczechowski

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER - It is amazing to find a warbler spending the winter, but a few Yellow-rumps will do that every year even though their usual insect fare is largely absent. It is known to eat berries, so it is that habit that likely keeps them going here in the winter. They have duller plumage in the winter, but still sport the yellow on the flanks, and on the base of their tail. This gives them their official common name and also their affectionate moniker, "Butter Butts." They nest in mature evergreen forests in the northern Lower and throughout the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and as far north as the boreal forest extends in Canada. When I was growing up, it was called the Myrtle Warbler. It is the first bird I ever identified by myself, from a stunned one that hit our picture window in Lincoln Park. Dad didn't tell my brother or me what it was, but let us get out our bird books and figure it out. We kept it in a cardboard box for about an hour, and let it go when it seemed revived (though I now know that it likely had internal injuries that made its chances of surviving pretty doubtful). This is one of our most ubiquitous wood warblers. I was struck by its beauty when examining it close up as it recovered in that box.

Yellow-rumped Warbler at Southgate Nature Center by Bruce Szczechowki

EVENING GROSBEAK - Although in silhouette they look very similar to the Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and while they did used to be classified in the same family, DNA analysis has demonstrated these two species are only very distantly related. They are now put in two different families. In good light, you'd never confuse the Evening Grosbeak with their bright yellow plumage with the Rose-breasted. Unlike the more solitary Rose-breasted, the Evening Grosbeak usually travels in large flocks and is considered an irruptive and irregular migrant to this area. I remember one winter growing up in Lincoln Park when we had a large flock at our feeders for two to three weeks. I haven't seen any around here since. We do see them every few years at feeders at Pinery Provincial Park in Canada. Two years ago, it was supposed to be a bumper year for them in southern Michigan, but I must not have been at the right place at the right time as I never saw a one. There was a cottage near Five Channels Dam in Glennie, Michigan, that used to be a dependable place to see them on Memorial Day Weekend, but in more recent years the folks who live there now do not have bird feeders, and the Grosbeaks have not been found.

Evening Grosbeak by Sharon Korte

Our Winter Snowbirds continued

FOX SPARROW—These reddish-brown sparrows with breasts sporting heavy streaking might suggest a Song Sparrow at first glance, but the color and their much bigger size give them away. Named because their reddish color reminded folks of the Red Fox, birds of this species barely qualify as a "snow bird" because they are early migrants, so look for them in late winter and early spring (late March to early April). Fox Sparrows nest across northern Canada through Alaska. On their Michigan stopover, they use both feet like White-throated Sparrows and Eastern Towhees to scrape away leaves looking for invertebrate prey in what Ted Black and George Kennedy in **Birds of Michigan** describe as "riparian thickets and brushy woodland clearings, edges, and parklands." Luckily for us, they do emerge from these dense tangles to also frequent feeding stations. It's always a treat to see the first one of the year, and when you do, you can be sure that spring is right around the corner.

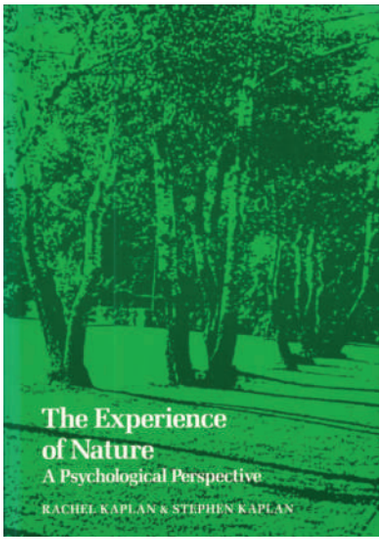
Fox Sparrow at Humbug Marsh by Bruce Szczechowski

Northern Flicker by Bruce Szczechowski

Mystery Bird Revealed:

If you said Northern Flicker, you are right. This species used to be called the Yellow-shafted Flicker because of the yellow feathers in its wings and tail, but it was combined with the similar Red-shafted Flicker, which occurs in the western United States, because they can interbreed. Now the two morphs are considered races of the same species. The Northern Flicker, our second largest woodpecker, can be identified in its undulating flight from its white rump, which flicks in and out of view. Its call is a loud "wick wick wick wick," which is also quite distinctive. The male is easily separated from the female by its black mustache, which looks like it is painted on.

Halo around the sun from ice crystals at Lake Erie Metropark by Jim Bull



The Experience of Nature:

A Psychological Perspective by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan

Review by Jim Bull

This book has a similar message to ***Braiding Sweetgrass***, which was reviewed in the fall issue. Both books reach deep down into the soil of meta-truth, reaching the same strands of earth sinew that connect us all and impart wellbeing. The message is as simple as it is profound—we NEED nature for our personal wellbeing and the wellbeing of this planet we ride through space on every day. Robin Kimmerer writes from the perspective of a botanist and from her deep sensibility grounded in her Native American spirituality and way of being in the world; the Kaplans write as scientists-pioneers in the field of environmental psychology. This book summarizes their work, the work of their students, and other researchers in this important but under-appreciated and little-known field.

I have to admit a deep bias with regard to this book. Both Rachel and Stephen Kaplan were valued mentors on my dissertation committee at the University of Michigan. Rachel, the co-chair of my dissertation committee, autographed my copy "with warmest good wishes." Stephen blessed me with this admonition, "Here's to a great future (and don't' forget chapter six!)!" What is chapter six about? "The Restorative Environment." When I would get stuck in a spot in my dissertation, not sure where to go next in the narrative to explain the study I conducted, Steve would often respond to my conundrum by asking a simple question, "Have you taken a walk in the woods today?" He was getting at something much more than the mix of work and play in my life. There was the need for balance, but there was also the importance of the immersion in nature for allowing my mind to work in the background to solve my problem. I needed nature to effectively figure out how to move forward. It is amazing, as busy as I was and as much as I often felt I just didn't have time for a walk, when I'd go do on a walk in a natural area, things would almost magically be much clearer when I sat down at my desk again. There is a reason for that!

What the Kaplans and other researchers have found is that experiences in nature help us rest what William James called "directed attention," which is the type of attention we try to cultivate when studying, writing a paper, or concentrating really on anything. By contrast, when you take a walk in the woods, you are not in that mode but using "involuntary attention" instead. It is the attention our bodies are tuned to hear naturally and does not require energy to focus on: the sound of a babbling brook, crickets chirping, a bird singing (if you are not madly trying to identify it), the wind in the trees, the crackling of a campfire. Having evolved in nature, we are naturally attuned to its sounds, but we are also ever alert for sounds that may be threatening or require our attention: the snapping of a twig, the unlikely shaking of a rattlesnake's tail, a thunderclap. A period of rest for "directed attention" not only helps us be more productive when we return to its use, but our minds often continue working in the background unencumbered by having to focus on something near at hand. After this rest, you sometimes may find your mind has come up with a solution for a problem you may have been working on for weeks or months.

My old elementary school had huge picture windows in my classroom (and many others) looking out on trees and grass in the front yard of the school. I noticed years ago those windows were covered up except for very narrow slats that let in some light but would be hard to look out of and see much of anything. A lot of schools have done this to keep students focused on their lessons instead of what is going on outside. That renovation was probably counterproductive. Research has even found that when students glance out a classroom window at a natural scene (trees, for instance) intermittently while they are working are more productive, less frustrated, and make fewer errors. I once gave a speech about environmental education building on this concept arguing that we should encourage students to do more daydreaming in class, not less!

If Steve Kaplan was to construct an ideal work environment for health and productivity, he said he would make sure there was access to a natural area and give people 45 minutes of paid time to walk in the woods each morning and afternoon. Can you imagine the boost to morale? I suggested this when I was a supervisor in the National Park Service, but that idea even in a park setting didn't fly. One day maybe the workplace, including parks, will wake up to what science is revealing about fostering productivity and creativity in the work environment.

The benefits of exposure to nature can be physical as well. The Kaplans and other researchers have found that when hospital patients could gaze out at a somewhat natural scene, trees blowing in the wind for instance, they healed much faster and required less pain medication than those in hospital rooms without those views. And what do most prisons have in common? The absence of any contact or view of green space. But researchers have found that prisons where inmates do have views of nature, or are able to spend time outside in nature part of the day, have significantly fewer violent incidents.

The Kaplans also found a strong preference for environments that incorporate nature trails that have some twists and turns in them which add a bit of mystery while at the same time promising more information up ahead; which draws you forward. A long linear trail is just not as interesting.

When they showed people photos of different scenes, people were very good at saying which they prefer. The Kaplans suggest that architects, landscape and park planners, and environmental officials might use this method to better assess what the public wants. Asking open ended questions, such as what do you want in this building and the land surrounding it, was much less effective. It I hard for people to answer that kind of question, but they are very good at expressing a preference for this scene or that one.

Many of these benefits from nature do not require vast wilderness areas but can come from bits of nearby nature. This suggests a human benefit dimension to Detroit Audubon's Detroit Bird City project which has been turning underutilized small parks in Detroit into native prairies or intentional meadows. Michigan State University researchers, measuring stress and other medical parameters of people living around Detroit Bird City parks under a grant from the National Institutes of Health have confirmed physical and mental health benefits found by the Kaplans.

The Kaplans also describe the deep dive they did into understanding the effects of folks having a wilderness immersion experience. They found an unexpected dimension unique to that restorative environment, a finding they did not anticipate as the rigorous scientists that they are. They found that "A deeply restorative experience is likely to include reflections on one's life, on priorities and possibilities, on one's actions and one's goals." What they also found in analyzing journals of participants reflecting on their wilderness experiences was a remarkable feeling of being "at one" with nature, what might be called a "spiritual" benefit. This was not something an academic psychologist was expecting to find.

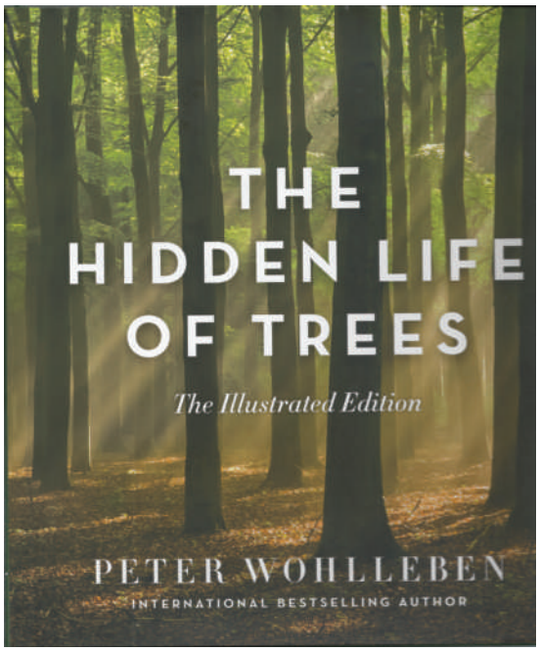
They conclude: "A striking aspect of this analysis is that the lofty (but frequently neglected) spiritual domain and the mundane (and often also neglected) practical aspects of [the benefits of nature] have much in common. . . Perhaps it is time for governments and mental health professionals and economists to acknowledge what many others have already figured out. It is rare to find an opportunity for such diverse and substantial benefits available at so modest a cost. Perhaps this resource for enhancing health, happiness, and wholeness has been neglected long enough."

The Hidden Life of Trees:

What They Feel, How They Communicate, Discoveries from a Secret World by Peter Wohlleben

Review by Jim Bull

Two books reviewed in one issue of the Flyway? These two books, along with ***Braiding Sweetgrass*** reviewed in the fall issue are tied together, like three legs on a tripod that support the camera that looks outward and inward at the same time, enabling us to not only see that which has been invisible to us before but also dig in more deeply to better understand this planet and our fellow creatures on this little spaceship. In the case of this book, it helps us look more "deeply" in the most literal sense too!



When I was in graduate school at the University of Michigan, Arjen Wals, a fellow Ph.D. student of the same professor, William Stapp, and I would travel to Detroit twice a week as we both facilitated and did research on middle school students involved in action research projects to solve or impact their environment in a positive way. As we drove from Ann Arbor to Detroit along M-14, Arjen pointed out a large spreading oak tree in a field to the north of the highway, with a circle of small saplings completely surrounding it. We made sure to watch for this tree family each day on our trip to and from Detroit.

After reading Wohlleben's book, I now know this was probably a "mother tree" and the small saplings encircling her, were her "children." In an old growth forest this family would not be just a curiosity, but a relationship with deep ties that were critical for the life of the little saplings. I learned long ago that a key characteristic of the species in old growth forests (then called "climax" forests, a term now out of favor), is that saplings can grow in the shade of the larger trees. I just accepted that as fact and never asked the next most important question, "How do they do that?" It turns out that there is a huge network of both roots and fungi (mycorrhizae) underground in the forest connecting the mother and her children. How do the children survive in the shade when there is not enough sunlight for them to photosynthesize and make food on their own? The "mother tree" sends sugar she made with her massive crown of leaves to the children through interconnected roots and a massive underground fungal system connecting them all. Without the mother tree feeding the children, they would have no chance of survival.

The network of fungi, thin threads of cells, are like the fiber optic cables of the forest. Through this mass of interconnected cables food is sent not only to young trees trying to make it in the shade, but to help sick trees heal, and even to keep stumps of cut down trees alive, including one stump that carbon dating revealed to be 1,400 years old. Was this a mother tree that her children were now helping out as she once helped them?

But it is not only food that is sent through this network. Messages are also sent between trees this way—in what Wohlleben calls "the wood-wide web." For instance, trees experiencing a pest infestation can warn other trees so they can start producing noxious compounds to ward off that particular pest. They also can coordinate when they produce fruits or nuts, so as to ensure the best success of the whole crop in becoming seedlings versus food for squirrels and mice.

Trees in their natural state, in old growth forests, live in the slow lane with much of their amazing activity hidden either deep in the soil or deep inside the trunk, branches, or leaves. The fungal fiber network takes time to develop and is largely absent in sterile monoculture tree plantations, on city streets, and in urban yards or gardens, leading to stress, sickness, and short-lived trees. The compacted soil around urban trees also means that air spaces in the soil are closed up, so that the tree has trouble breathing—taking in carbon dioxide and emitting oxygen from its all-important roots. The roots do not have the freedom to spread widely as in an old growth forest, and the tree is not part of a communicating, supportive wooded community that helps all trees thrive.

One chapter deals with tree interactions with animals, including birds, and gives us the tree perspective on woodpecker cavity nests and their sometimes subsequent nuthatch or owl tenants. Another delves into research that indicates that people have more of a sense of calm and peace in forests where the trees are more content. Animal rights have come a long way in the last couple decades. Wohlleben raises the prospect that maybe trees should have some inviolate rights too. So, read this book and then after doing so, see if your thinking changes at all. Whether your mind is changed or not, I can assure you that your thinking will at least be challenged.

Mycorrhizae—soil fungi—from Piedmont Master Gardeners

While this book is 250 pages, it is a small book with pages only 4.75 by 7.5 inches in size with wide margins. Each of its 36 chapters provides astounding information from recent scientific research in an engaging way that indicates that trees may even have feelings, "lungs" for breathing, and a brain of sorts. Each chapter is quite short—4-8 pages—so it is easy to read one or two chapters between other activities. At least for me, when I completed one chapter, it was hard not to go on to the next chapter. Even if I only thought I'd have time to read one or two chapters, I often was enticed to read at least one or two more!

Not only is Wohlleben a master at explaining complex concepts in a way that is easy to understand, but more importantly his passion for old growth forests comes through loud and clear on each page. It is love story to and about forests that will help you appreciate forests in ways you never dreamed of before. I highly recommend it.

This book was first published in 2015 by the David Suzuki Institute (Suzuki of the much-acclaimed CBC television program "Nature") and Greystone Books in Vancouver, Canada. A coffee-table edition with stunning photos and an abridged text (just six chapters but with chapter subheads that correspond to some of the chapters in the longer book) was published in 2018, also by the David Suzuki Institute and Greystone Books. I own both, but I strongly recommend reading the longer book. The coffee table edition is a delight to keep on your coffee table to dip in and out of as well.

Flyway

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4605 Cass Avenue
Detroit, MI 48201-1256

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Blue Jay at Pinery Provincial Park, Ontario, Canada (taken on our Point Edward to Pinery field trip), by Sharon Korte