

A Detroit Audubon Publication

Winter 2021



# Flyway



Get the Birds To Come to You

Young Birders November Walk

Recent Bird Safe Building Legislation

American Robin: Common yet Complicated Enigma

Volunteers and Partners Who Made Our Work Possible in 2020



# Flyway

A publication 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.**



## MYSTERY BIRD

Can you identify this bird? If you're good you should have enough in this photo to clinch it.  
Photo by Bruce Szczechowski at Humbug Marsh, Nov. 2020.

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## On the Cover

**Male Northern Cardinal at Elizabeth Park December 11, 2020, by Jim Bull.** Although it has long been a favorite on Christmas cards with its brilliant red combined with evergreen foliage vividly displaying holiday colors, the Northern Cardinal is really more of a southern bird that has expanded north, including into Michigan, over several decades. Home bird feeding stations with sunflower and safflower seeds may have helped entice them north. The male is bright red, while the female is more of an olive green with some red tinting. The male's song is one of the loudest amongst North American songbirds. The female of this species is known to sing as well. Kaufman (*Lives of North American Birds*, 1996) says she sings mostly before the nesting season begins, but Black and Kennedy (*Birds of Michigan*, 2003) say she sings from the nest and may be communicating that the male should bring food to her and their nestlings. Their thick conical beaks are ideal for cracking seeds and drawing the blood of banders who aren't careful. The name "cardinal" comes from the similarity of their coloration to the robes of Roman Catholics prelates.



# Young Birders November Walk

*Article and photos by Jessica Decker unless otherwise noted*

Opportunities to gather with friends in person are limited these days, which is why I've been looking forward to the first big Detroit Audubon Young Birder's Walk at Palmer Park since quarantine started. It was wonderful arriving at the park and seeing friends I haven't spoken to in months, as well as some new faces. We couldn't have asked for more beautiful weather either. Being November, we could have been walking through a half-foot of snow and sub-freezing temperatures. However, the sun remained unblocked in the sky the entire time, bringing the temperature up to a comfortable spot in the mid-seventies.

While the birding itself was a little slow at the start, it was nice to just catch up with people and get a breath of fresh air. A small group of Brown Creepers did eventually make themselves known to us with their high-pitched chirps, and they gave us a nice view of them hopping up some oak trees. It's always nice to see them, considering what masters of camouflage they are and how difficult it is to find them if they don't feel the need to be found. The birding got a little better once the sun got higher in the sky. We



*White-throated Sparrow by Bruce Szczechowski.*



managed to find some American Robins, Blue Jays, and Tufted Titmice before leaving the woods to head towards the pond. A deer also wandered across the path as we went, giving us something nice to watch while the birds sat quietly.

Out at the pond, the usual Mallard ducks and Canada Geese milled about on the surface of the water, enjoying the warm weather just as we were. As soon as they saw us, the ducks came straight over

looking for handouts, but they left disappointed when they realized there were none to be had. We kept our eyes out for any Wood Ducks or other oddities, but there were none that we could find. That's birding though. It only makes the times when they do show up more exciting.

A small group of foraging White-throated Sparrows made an appearance as we turned around to head back into the woods. They allowed us to get quite close and have a really good look at them. Their bright yellow spot and striking black-and-white crown have made them one of my favorite sparrow species, and I always get excited to see them when migration comes around, even when the peak of it is over like it was at the time of the walk.

After continuing through the woods without much action for another few minutes, I, unfortunately, had to break off from the group and head out in order to make it to a prior obligation. My mom and I took the rest of the trail back to the parking lot alone, but we did get the chance to see a beautiful Red-tailed Hawk putting on a show in a clearing, flying in circles to keep up in the wind. Because of the sun, we could clearly see the bright orange-red coloration in its tail feathers shine through.

While this particular walk may not have had the most exciting variety of birds, the birders themselves more than made up for it. This Saturday walk was the first time since early March that I've had the chance to spend time with other birdwatchers, and getting back out there in the field was a blast. I can't wait to do more walks as things continue to open up and see what this winter brings.





# What You Need To Know About Recent Bird Safe Building Legislation and Why It Matters

*Article and photos by Heidi Trudell unless otherwise noted*

Estimates suggest that 600,000 to 1 billion birds die \*each year\* in North America due to collisions with glass. The good news? We can help. Glass collisions are an entirely human-caused source of bird mortality, and it is within our power to fix it.

We have all heard a thump at the window, but we haven't all pieced together the situation; when birds hit windows, it is a life-threatening occurrence. Blunt trauma for a bird does not always mean a quick and painless death (broken necks only occur in about 3% of collision deaths). On the contrary, birds that are able to fly away from the window are quite likely to succumb to their injuries later. Birds need to use their face to access food and eat it, which is difficult at best with a concussion or a broken beak.

Window collisions are extremely common, but we don't think they're common because we only detect a very small percentage of the strikes. With more people working from home during the lockdown this spring, collision intakes at bird rehabilitation centers hit record numbers. And spring was the slow season! Fall migration is when collision numbers peak, to match the increase in the bird population (note: window collisions are not natural selection—glass is undetectable to birds of all ages and sexes). Migrating songbirds are at highest risk, and also in the steepest declines, so bird safe windows or window treatments are critical to their survival.

## What needs to happen when a bird hits a window:

### GRAB IT IMMEDIATELY.

Don't hesitate. You cannot help a bird that has gotten away from you. Gloves are a good idea for hawks and owls.

### CONTAIN IT.

In many cases, an unwaxed brown paper bag will suffice, as long as it is clipped shut. Shoeboxes are okay as well. Paper towel liner is okay; any material that will snag tiny toenails is not. Larger species may require much



*Buildings kill birds. Photo by Jensen Bigelow, Detroit Audubon intern 2019*

larger boxes.

### CALL A PROFESSIONAL.

Rehab, which involves anti-inflammatory medications, pain killers, supplemental oxygen, species-appropriate food, and about 72 hours of observation, provides the best odds of survival.

Southeast Michigan is lucky to have the Bird Center of Washtenaw (734-761-9640), based in Ann Arbor. Our only rehab specializing in songbirds, it takes in over 1,400 birds per year, funded 100% by small donations and grants.

Animal Help Now ([ahnow.org](http://ahnow.org)) uses your location to find nearby rehabbers, and has a free app that can be downloaded for all wildlife emergencies, not just for birds! Wildlife rehabbers, even if they're not in your area, may be able to talk you through the situation.

What does this have to do with legislation?

Building codes and legislation often go hand in hand. Architects tend to design "to" the code requirements, no more, no less. There are many design considerations that architects can employ to reduce risk to birds, but if they're not written into the code, they're going to be ignored. Since we know better, we should do better. When bird safe policies are written into law, we can ensure that dangerous practices aren't perpetuated. While largely imperfect due to loopholes (voluntary vs. mandatory, building height minimums, etc.), these codes are laying a foundation for more effective ones in the future. They are normalizing considerations that are long overdue. Development is largely required to consider environmental impacts, but even now many of the "environmentally friendly" designs are actually worse for birds than their standard counterparts. This is often due to increased use of glass for improved daytime lighting. More glass is more dangerous.

## The primary methods of bird collision prevention addressed in codes:

- Interruption or elimination of reflections

- Elimination of see-through glass corners and walkways
- Using bird safe products around atriums, water features, and indoor vegetation
- Requiring bird safe products be used for glass within 40-60 feet of ground level
- Lighting modifications (in most codes International Dark Sky Association standards or similar are encouraged)

This year's star bill, H.R. 919, which is better known as the Bird-Safe Building Act, was introduced by Rep. Mike Quigley of Illinois in 2019. As a bipartisan bill, it serves as a reminder that birds belong to all of us, regardless of artificial political boundaries. The bill passed the House of Representatives this summer, and while its fate in the Senate is uncertain, this act is one of many indications that bird safe building codes are gaining traction. As it applies only to federal buildings, it does not bring sweeping changes uniformly across the country, but it may very well be an early sign of what's to come as design trends tend to adapt to best practices over time.

Last summer the Canadian Standards Association added a 36-page document, CSA A460:19, to the National Standard of Canada. "Bird-friendly building design" is a thorough examination of what practices should be adopted or eliminated to ensure lower risk for birds. Hopefully this standard will be adopted across the provinces and influence U.S. policy in the long term. Fingers crossed!

New York City has even dipped a toe into bird safe building codes, with legislation passed by their City Council in December 2019. "This bill would require that materials that reduce bird strike fatalities be installed on newly constructed or altered buildings." The summary reflects a code that is both short and sweet. Notably, it omits any mention of lighting. Not long after the New York City bill passed, Madison, Wisconsin, passed "Section 28.129 of the Madison General Ordinances requiring bird-safe glass treatment on specified buildings and structures," welcome news for such a trying year.

### Finally ...

More and more major cities are adopting codes, launching collision monitoring projects, and becoming aware of the sheer scale of the bird collision problem. "Bird City" programs are popping up across the country with pledges to support pollinators and habitat. While none of these codes apply to homes yet, it is worth noting that every home is a risk to birds and that if every home in the average subdivision (according to 2016 numbers, 50 homes per subdivision) fixed their windows, between 100-500 birds per year would be saved, conservatively. It doesn't sound like much, but the median home age in the United States is 37 years, so if your neighborhood is 37 years old, that means between

3,700 and 18,500 birds have already died. They vanish quickly—raccoons and other scavengers see to that—but we have the opportunity to reduce the body count.

Just as those newfangled "seat belts" became popular for cars, modified glass and building codes need to be adopted sooner than later because the death toll is adding up as songbird populations plummet.

It takes bird safe glass to have bird safe buildings, to have truly bird safe communities.

For further information these sources are suggested:

Detroit Audubon Safe Passage webpage: <https://www.detroitaudubon.org/conservation/project-safe-passage-great-lakes/>

American Bird Conservancy: [abcbirds.org/collisions](http://abcbirds.org/collisions)

FLAP Canada: [flap.org](http://flap.org)

Global Bird Rescue: [globalbirdrescue.org](http://globalbirdrescue.org)

3 Billion Birds Population Decline Study: [3billionbirds.org](http://3billionbirds.org)

Heidi Trudell (author): [JustSaveBirds.com](http://JustSaveBirds.com)

Product Guides:

American Bird Conservancy tested products: [birdsmartglass.org](http://birdsmartglass.org)

Sun City Bird Club Guide to Bird Window Collision Prevention Systems: [suncitybirdclub.org/windowstrikes](http://suncitybirdclub.org/windowstrikes)

To contribute to global bird collision data:

[Birdmapper.org/app](http://Birdmapper.org/app)

**Note:** Heidi Trudell is a coordinator for Washtenaw Safe Passage, and serves on the boards of Detroit Audubon and the Bird Center of Washtenaw. She has been a window collision researcher, bird safe building consultant, and advocate since 2003. She also serves as a Conservation Committee member for the Black Swamp Bird Observatory.



Dead female Ruby-throated Hummingbird.

American Woodcocks.





Originally published in *The New York Times*, Oct. 17, 2020. Reprinted with permission. Paul Stenquist is a Detroit Audubon volunteer and recent photograph contributor to the *Flyway*. His Baltimore Oriole in flight was on the cover of our summer issue.

## Get the Birds To Come to You *By Paul Stenquist*

**Backyard birding has become the perfect pandemic pastime. Here's how to draw more species to your yard, and maybe get a good photo, too.**

Hosting a gathering of friends at your home may not be advisable at this time, but getting together with a flock of feathered friends is a great diversion. During the pandemic, birding has become a popular escape with sales for seed suppliers, birdhouse builders and other bird related businesses “through the roof,” according to Audubon Magazine.

Extending an invitation to the bird community is simply a matter of offering a meal. A backyard rich with trees and shrubs is an ideal place to hold the get together, but a patio or rooftop will suffice. Provide a bounty of goodies and birds will gather like eager children. Once the birds become regular guests, you can enjoy hours of entertainment watching the beauties, identifying them and, if you wish, photographing them.

### Set the table.

You can attract birds with a single feeder of mixed bird seed, but drawing a large and varied population requires multiple feeders, each offering treats meant to attract certain species. Tubular feeders, fitted with perches too small for large birds, are meant to attract finches and other small birds. This type of feeder can be filled with thistle seed — a favorite of finches — or mixed-seed finch food, which supplements the thistle seed with sunflower chips and millet, and attracts a greater variety of small birds.

A feeder with perches spacious enough for large birds, filled with a wild bird food blend that is rich with nuts, fruit and sunflower seeds, will attract Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, grackles and other big birds. A cage hung from a tree and containing suet cakes laced with peanuts or fruit is a favorite of woodpeckers, but other species will indulge as well.

Red hummingbird feeders and orange Baltimore Oriole feeders filled with sugar water will attract these magnificent specimens. Oriole feeders generally include a spike for mounting a section of orange and a cup for grape jelly — a favorite of the pretty black-and-orange birds.

### Patience please.

With feeders in place, patience is required. The birds will discover your banquet, but it could take weeks. Sparrows may show up first and other small birds will follow. Soon Blue Jays, Northern Cardinals,

grackles and others will arrive. Hummingbirds will stop by in the warmer months.

Once your feeders are established, you'll see birds you haven't seen before. Exactly what species you'll encounter depends on where you are. In Michigan over the summer, an array of feeders attracted Baltimore Orioles, Tufted Titmice, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, warblers and Pine Siskins. During spring and fall migrations, birds on their way through your area may drop in for a snack.

When your home has become a favorite feeding ground, you can sit back and enjoy the show. A printed field guide, like “The Sibley Guide to Birds” or “The Stokes Field Guide to the Birds of North America” will help you identify your visitors. If you'd rather go digital, the Audubon Bird Guide app is helpful.

Watching birds battle for position at the feeder is entertaining, as is taking note of the way they come and go. Some birds, including sparrows, fly rapidly in a straight line, like miniature missiles, flapping their wings frantically. Others, including finches, flap them intermittently, rising and falling like a roller coaster. Some birds have elaborate dining habits. Nuthatches pluck a seed from the feeder, wedge it in a tree-bark crevice and pound it with their beaks to break it open. In spring, you may see sparrows race back and forth from the feeder to nearby branches, where their young wait to be fed.

### Get a closer look.

Observing birds with the naked eye is entertaining, but most birders use binoculars. You can get a good pair for less than \$150, or you can spend \$3,000 on the best models. Audubon publishes a guide to binoculars



*Rose-breasted Grosbeak.*  
*Paul Stenquist photo*



*A female American Goldfinch scolds a male.*  
*Paul Stenquist photo*

that offers choices at every price level. Look for models that provide 8x magnification or more, so a bird will appear at least eight times larger when viewed through them than when viewed with the naked eye.

### **Or take a picture.**

Close-up photos of birds like those you see in National Geographic are stunning, but the equipment needed to achieve those results can be expensive. However, more modest photographic results are pleasing as well and can be achieved inexpensively.

Smartphones with a telephoto lens like the iPhone 11 Pro or the Samsung S10+ can record an image that approximates what you see with your naked eye. Other affordable options will provide more magnification. Hammacher Schlemmer offers digital camera binoculars for approximately \$200 that can produce 8x images. Sharper Image offers a similar set of binoculars with 12x magnification. Both can be mounted on a tripod and will produce acceptable images, but not the kind of crisp high-resolution

photos seen in nature magazines.

If you want to approximate professional quality results you'll need a high resolution 35 millimeter digital camera and a telephoto lens. Even if you buy used equipment, expect to pay at least \$500. But that's less expensive than even a very modest vacation, and for some it may be a worthwhile entertainment investment that provides many more hours of enjoyment than would a weekend trip to a ski resort.

There are two types of digital cameras marketed as 35 millimeter models. One type has a full-frame sensor. The other type has a smaller sensor, is less expensive and is usually described as an APS-C model. Because the APS-C camera has a smaller sensor, the captured image is proportionately larger. A 400 millimeter lens on most APS-C cameras has approximately the same magnification as a 600 millimeter lens on a full-frame camera. Good quality APS-C cameras with sensors that record more than 15 megapixels of image data can be found used for \$300 to \$600.

*Female Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding on  
Bee Balm. Paul Stenquist photo*



*Paul Stenquist photographing birds.  
Jim Bull photo*



The lens is the most important part of a birding rig, and you can find bargains by shopping around. For telephoto zoom lenses with sufficient focal length to achieve substantial magnification — 400 millimeter or more — you should expect to pay at least \$500 for a new lens, but perhaps half that for a used one. You'll also need a sturdy tripod and a ball head or gimbal head for bird photography. Gimbal heads are better for birding but more expensive; a smooth operating ball head is adequate.

When shooting, use an exposure mode that allows you to set the shutter speed while the camera automatically chooses the aperture. For perching birds, a shutter speed of 1/500th-second will usually yield sharp results when using a tripod. To shoot a bird in flight with a hand-held camera, try a shutter speed of 1/2000th.



# The American Robin: A Common Yet Complicated Enigma

by Kelli Barrett

The American Robin is our ubiquitous songbird. We hear them singing cheerfully from seemingly every tree. We see them splashing in birdbaths and poking around gardens. Despite their familiarity, these red-breasted birds have managed to maintain an aura of mystery. Michiganders, like residents of most other states, regularly wonder whether the robins that settled in their backyards and neighborhoods migrate south or stick around for the winter.

The robin's migration patterns also continue to mystify scientists. The majority of robins do head south, but not all of them. Unscientifically speaking, it seems that robins living in an area huddle up and determine whether they should stay or go for the winter. Many Michigan robins will choose to stay local, forming flocks, searching for fruity shrubs, and roosting in trees together at night.

What ultimately drives robins' decision to stay or go? Ornithologists have ideas, but they're not totally sure. It most likely has to do with a plentiful supply of the berries they eat from fruit trees and shrubs like holly, hawthorn, and crabapple. And what motivates a robin to fly short and far distances?

Scientists would indeed like to understand more about this common bird. That's why researchers launched a first-ever study to track individual robins across seasons. National Audubon showcased the study in its fall magazine. Biologists involved in the project discovered varying migrating patterns. Four birds tagged in Denali National Park flew over 5,500 miles roundtrip to Texas, while two birds tagged in Washington, D.C., never ventured more than four miles from the area where they were tagged.

It's challenging work, but finding out where these birds go and how they're faring is crucial, scientists say. Robins are widespread and adaptable, explained Emily Williams, a biologist involved in the study. If scientists detect a decline in migrating or year-round robins, this could indicate environmental stressors that could be disastrous for more specialized, sensitive biodiversity. Robins can be sentinels, canaries in the coal mine that warn of larger problems. For instance, robins were one of the first avian species found to be affected by DDT. The bird experienced mass mortality when the pesticide was rampant, but it swiftly recovered after the ban.

So scientists continue to unpack their mysterious migrating patterns. In the meantime, the "to stay or go" decision of robins remains a topic of conversation. A few years back in Belleville, where I live, a flock of wintering robins made the local newspaper. Residents couldn't recall such

*American Robin feeding on yew berries  
by Bruce Szczechowski*



a large group settling in the area during winter.

Indeed, data-collecting research from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology found that more robins are staying around their northern habitats all winter, or at least returning sooner. The research suggested that one possible reason is a boost in urban landscaping so there's more of the fruity food supply robins rely on. It's also possible warmer winter temperatures may be a factor, though robins add warm, downy feathers to their plumage, helping them withstand cold and snowy seasons.

Robins are more subdued and quieter during the winter, so it may seem like they've left when they're actually still around, just hustling for berries instead of bugs. Spotting robins during these winter months will almost always prompt comments about the bird's migration, like, "I guess these robins decided to stick around." And when we first see robins and hear their carol in early spring, we're uncertain whether they've wintered here with us or traveled far away. So we wonder.

Robins may be one of our most widespread songbirds, but they continue to pique our curiosity.



## SNOW GOOSE SHOWS UP ON BELLE ISLE FIELD TRIP

by Jim Bull, photos by Bruce Szczechowski

*It was only our second stop on our Belle Isle Field trip on November 28, the Saturday after Thanksgiving. We pulled into the parking lot for the swimming beach and bathhouse, and as soon as I got out of the car and took a gander at the large flock of Canada Geese, I noticed a white one. I figured it must be a domestic goose mixed in, but it wasn't—it was a Snow Goose (white morph). We got very good views of it feeding on the grass, but just as we were about to leave for our next stop, it took off, giving us a spectacular aerial show. It landed back with the Canadas, but quickly took off again and did not come back. Sadly, our second field trip group did not get to see it.*

*Snow Geese nest in huge numbers on the Arctic tundra, including in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In Michigan they are reported most years, but uncommon in some areas. But in southeast Michigan they are uncommon to rare both in migration and in winter, and often, as in this case, they are seen as single individuals feeding with Canada Geese. The Blue Goose and Snow Goose were combined into one species in 1983.*



## GREAT BLUE HERON CATCHES A FISH AT REFUGE POND, PHOTOGRAPHER CATCHES AMAZING SEQUENCE.

*This Great Blue Heron was captured photographically by Bruce Szczechowski at the newly excavated pond at the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Gateway, the site of the new but as yet unopened visitor center. The pond was formed by daylighting part of Monguagon Creek which had been buried in a culvert underground for years while this property housed the old Chrysler Paint Plant. It was a polluted brownfield site that to be cleaned up before the area was opened for the public. The pond is still mostly bare mud as wetland and terrestrial plants have not had time to take hold.*

*Although migratory, Great Blue Herons will stay around for part or all of the winter as long as there is open water.*







## Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Gateway Now Open

*Text and photos by Jim Bull*

Detroit Audubon was all set to help celebrate the grand opening of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Visitor Center at the "Refuge Gateway" in early May, but COVID-19 put a stop to that. We will participate in that celebration when the pandemic subsides. Meanwhile, the Refuge Gateway and nearby trails at Humbug Marsh are now open Thursday through Sunday from dawn to sundown with no entry fees. Previously it had only been open once a month at a scheduled open house. It then closed for a couple of years during construction.

Detroit Audubon was at the forefront of the eight-year fight to save Humbug Marsh from development and the subsequent campaign to realize our friend Rep. John Dingell's dream of creating an international wildlife refuge on the Detroit River. The two ideas came together when Humbug became the first unit of the refuge.

The visitor center is located on a brownfield that was formerly the site of the Chrysler Paint Plant. It overlooks Humbug Island and part of the submerged portion of Humbug Marsh that lies in between. The water is often so shallow that a deer walking across to



the island will get wet only up to its knees. The fishing pier and school ship dock jut way out into the river and recently were the site where a fisherman caught a 34-inch Walleye. It can also be great for waterfowl viewing.

Soon Detroit Audubon will resume field trips to this gem on the lower Detroit River; keep your eyes open and register early as we know this trip will be very popular!





# Volunteers and Partners Who Made Our Work Possible in 2020

*Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?"—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

A huge THANK YOU to our amazing and dedicated volunteers and partners!

Detroit Audubon was founded by volunteers in 1939, and although now the organization boasts a small staff, we continue to rely on the energy, time, and talents of our many volunteers and partners every year to sustain and expand our outreach and conservation efforts. Especially in this most challenging year, we could not have accomplished nearly as much for birds and the environment we share without the dedication and creativity of our many volunteers and partners. Volunteers and partners are listed below by the project or projects they assisted with.

## BLACK TERN RESEARCH

Detroit Audubon has partnered with Audubon Great Lakes and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (St. Clair Flats State Wildlife Area) to monitor the St. Clair Flats Black Tern colony since 2013. Although we know that Black Terns nest on floating mats of vegetation, that they winter in the open ocean, and that their population is in steep decline, much of their natural history is not

well understood. Only with continued research can we determine the causes of their dwindling numbers in Michigan and across North America and then use that information to take action to help them thrive.

Black Tern research volunteers and partners during 2020 include:

David Fuller  
Rachel Gumpfer  
Indiana University - Alex Jahn  
Audubon Great Lakes - Stephanie Beilke, Erin Rowan  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources (St. Clair Flats State Wildlife Area) - John Darling and Terry McFadden  
University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) - Jenni Fuller

## GREAT LAKES SAFE PASSAGE

Each year, six hundred million to one billion birds die due to city lights and window collisions in North America. Each migration season, Safe Passage volunteers survey specific buildings around Southeast Michigan in order to determine which buildings are most problematic and most critical for remediation, and have helped with remediation projects.

Safe Passage volunteers and partners for 2020 include:

Erica Briggs  
Jorrie Davis  
Sabrina Good  
Gerald Hasspacher  
Danielle Hawkins  
Divia Kallattil  
Jac Kyle  
Aimee Liu  
Melissa McLeod  
Rory Nickle  
Sally Oey  
Michelle Patton  
Kami Pothukuchi, Wayne State University  
Kyle Schanta  
Michelle Serryn  
Heidi Trudell  
Bird Center of Washtenaw County  
Detroit Zoological Society

## DETROIT BIRD CITY

Detroit Bird City is a program that Detroit Audubon's Conservation Committee started in partnership with the City of Detroit, local community members, and others to restore native bird habitat in under-utilized city parks.

Detroit Bird City volunteers and partners in 2020 include:

Rev. Dr. Ventra Asana  
Monica Breen  
Barry Burton, City of Detroit  
Tiffany Carey  
Diane Cheklich, Chair of Conservation Committee and Detroit Bird City Project Manager  
Chet Clover  
David Clover  
Wallee Clover  
Jessica Egerer  
Juliana Fulton, City of Detroit  
Danielle Hawkins  
Jim Hazelman, USFWS  
Meredith Holm, USFWS  
Jerry Jung  
Divia Kallattil  
Andrew "Birch" Kemp  
Debbie Mattson  
Jacob Mattson  
Robbie Moore  
Kinga Osz-Kemp  
Lisa Rodriguez  
Kyle Schanta



*continued*

## **Volunteers and Partners** *continued*

Derek Sederlund  
Paul Weertz  
Detroit Arboretum  
Detroit Future City  
East Ferry—Warren Community Association  
Michigan State University  
National Audubon Society  
National Geographic Society  
North Corktown Neighborhood Association  
Urban Neighborhood Initiatives  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Woodbridge Neighborhood Development



### **BIRD WATCHER'S GARDEN**

This summer, we were approached by the Jefferson Chalmers community in Detroit with a dream to create a Bird Watcher's Garden. This neighborhood already boasts many gardens, including a Healing Garden and a greenhouse, and it has plans for a Community Treehouse Center, all projects initiated or encouraged by community leader Tammy Black. Preparations for the Bird Watcher's Garden began in October with volunteers from the neighborhood and beyond, including:

Gregory Alexander  
Rev. Dr. Ventra Asana  
Patrick Barber  
Derek Jauss  
Divia Kallattil  
Aimee Liu  
Grace Pynnonen  
Sarah Stalker  
Jeff Warneck  
Manistique Community Treehouse Center -  
Tammy Black

### **OUTREACH AT COMMUNITY EVENTS**

Most years, there are numerous opportunities for Detroit Audubon to attend festivals and events in order to introduce ourselves and our services to members of the Metro Detroit community. We rely on volunteers to staff the Detroit Audubon tables at these events to dispense information, lead activities, and sell books and gifts from our mobile nature store. This year, the only event we attended was Shiver on the River, but we couldn't have

done it without these amazing volunteers:

Deborah Hardison-Hill  
Rosemary Morbitzer  
Candace Zann

### **FIELD TRIPS**

Detroit Audubon field trips offer fantastic year-round birding and nature immersion opportunities! Although field trips were on hiatus from March to August, we began offering selected field trips to small groups at regional hotspots to explore both interesting resident and migratory birds, wildflowers, insects, and other aspects of nature. Almost all of our field trips have been led by our fantastic volunteer leaders who keep our participants coming back to learn more from these birding and nature experts.

Volunteers in 2020:

Jim Bull  
Jessica Decker  
Julie Decker  
Frank Ford  
Ruth Hart  
Travis Kaye  
Bailey Lininger  
Dorothy McLeer  
Kevin Murphy  
Jill Noll  
Joanna Pease  
Bruce Szczecowski  
Larry Urbanski  
Leonard Weber  
Detroit Riverfront Conservancy - Elayne Elliott and Rachel Bush  
Elmwood Cemetery - Joannie Capuano  
Huron Clinton Metroparks - Kevin Arnold



### **WEBINARS AND OTHER VIRTUAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS**

In-person lecture-style presentations by Detroit Audubon have not been as popular in recent years, but 2020 brought a new opportunity that has proven to be extremely popular, engaging, and fun—webinars! Since April, we have offered 20 webinars with a variety of topics from Birding 101 to Native Plants for Birds and Michigan Owls and Kestrels, with a total of 1126 attending during this period, several becoming new members, and others

making significant donations in gratitude for these programs. Many of our most popular webinars have been presented by volunteers and partners, for which we are truly grateful:

Tom Allenson  
Rev. Dr. Ventra Asana  
Jim Bull  
Diane Cheklich  
Jenni Fuller  
Dr. Catherine Lindell  
Belle Isle Nature Center - Erin Parker and Amy Greene  
Bird Center of Washtenaw County - Andrea Aiuto  
City of Detroit General Services Dept. - Barry Burton  
Detroit Riverfront Conservancy - Elayne Elliott and Rachel Bush  
Huron Clinton Metroparks - Paul Cypher  
Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) - Holly Vaughn  
Michigan DNR Outdoor Adventure Center - Natalie Cypher  
National Wildlife Federation - Tiffany Carey  
Michelle Serryn  
University of Michigan School of Environment and Sustainability (SEAS) - Jenni Fuller

### **FLYWAY MAGAZINE**

While staff do contribute articles, we could not put out this beautiful publication without the talents of our partners, volunteer layout person, editor, writers, photographers, and proofreaders! This year that cadre included:

Rev. Dr. Ventra Asana—writer  
Kelli Barrett—writer  
Jim Bull—writer and editor  
Diane Cheklich—writer  
Dongfan Chen—photographer  
Owalabi William Copeland—writer  
Paul Cypher, Huron Clinton Metroparks—writer  
Barbara Winter Gommi—contributed  
How Hawk Thermals work  
Robert Irwin—photographer  
Sharon Korte—photographer  
J. Drew Lanham—interviewee  
Rebecca Minardi—contributing writer and proofreader  
Tana Moore—layout  
Jill Noll—writer  
Kami Pohukuchi—writer  
Purbita Saha—writer  
Sabrina Salome—writer  
Emily Simon—contributing writer and proofreader  
Bruce Szczecowski—photographer  
Paul Stenquist—photographer  
Heidi Trudell—writer  
Grace Vatal, Mulberry Hill Wildlife Center—writer  
Leonard Weber—writer and photographer  
Margaret Weber—photographer  
Birding magazine for permission to reprint excerpts from



an article by Rebecca Minardi

National Audubon for permission to reprint a photo and  
an article from Audubon magazine website.

### **CITIZEN SCIENCE BIRD SURVEYS (CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNTS, BIRDS CANADA WATERFOWL SURVEY)**

Detroit River Important Bird Area Waterfowl Counters  
(assisting with Birds Studies Canada count):

Jim Bull  
Rachel Darling  
Nikki Diroff  
Rachel Gumpfer  
Brittany Leick  
Anne MacNeil  
Erin Rowan  
Emily Simon  
Bruce Szczechowski  
Larry Urbanski

### **CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT 2020**

Detroit Audubon Christmas Bird Count (Oakland County)  
Volunteers include:

Sean Bachman  
Roger Becker  
Lee Burton  
Amy Fedyk  
Anthony Fedyk  
John Fedyk  
Theo Fedyk  
Dan Frohardt  
Lane Frohardt  
Jean Gramlich  
Kathleen Hansen  
Chris Hull  
Holly Joswick  
Jeremy Joswick  
Kurt Jung  
Mzaura Jung  
Travis Kaye  
Donald Kessler  
Christopher Klimchalk  
Duane Lanyon  
Justin Lanyon  
Gisela Lendle-King  
Elisah Mikols  
Jairus Mikols  
Jordan Mikols  
Ken Mikols  
Jill Noll  
Susan Norton  
Timothy Nowicki  
Rick Rotramal  
Emmanuel Salas  
Aubrey Steward  
Elizabeth Stewart  
Robert Stewart

Chris Summers  
Leonard Weber  
Mike Wells  
Jeff Wilhite  
Wayne Wilson

### **ROCKWOOD CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

Brandon Aho  
Therese Barraco  
Pete Blank  
Robert Bochenek  
Jim Bull  
Tom Carpenter  
Natalie Cypher  
Nicolette Diroff  
Richard Ebenhoe  
Tina Fitzgerald  
Jim Fowler  
Dan Gertiser  
Rachel Gumpfer  
Lyle Hamilton  
Carl Hendricks Family  
Jenny Husted  
Robert Irwin  
Vikki Jones  
Beth Jorgensen  
Jerry Jourdan  
John Leon  
Mike Mencotti  
Judy Montoe  
Rosemary Morbitzer  
Anne Muir  
Ron Muir  
Karl Overman  
Tom Pavlik

Ken Pilon  
Manny Salas  
Don Sherwood  
Emily Simon  
Anne Smith  
Jeff Stacey  
Christine Suave  
Jim Sunstrum  
Cris Sunstrum  
Mary Trombley  
Roberta Urbani  
Larry Urbanski

### **MEMBER DATABASE MANAGEMENT AND FUND-RAISING AND WEBSITE ASSISTANCE**

Becky Mattson—who puts in hundreds of hours beyond  
her paid duties as our bookkeeper

Jim Bull—Fund Development Coordinator

### **BOARD MEMBERS**

Rochelle Breitenbach, President  
Amy Greene, Vice-President  
Jill Noll, Secretary  
Tom McKarns, Treasurer and Finance Chair  
Eric Stempien, Legal Counsel  
Jim Bull  
Diane Cheklich, Chair of Conservation Committee  
Sara Cole Srinivasan  
Rosann Kovalcik  
Gisela Lendle-King  
Margaret Lourdes  
Rebecca Minardi  
Jack Smiley  
Heidi Trudell  
Terra Weiland



# BIRDS AND NATURE IN WINTER

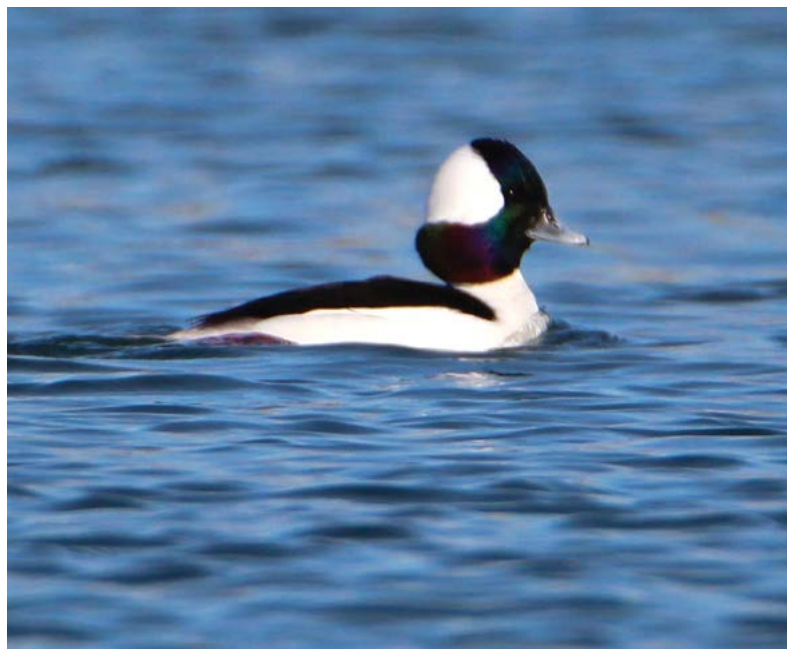
*All photos by Bruce Szczechowski and at Belle Isle unless otherwise noted.*



**AMERICAN KESTREL IN FLIGHT**, Belle Isle. Once called the Sparrow Hawk, this member of the falcon family is brightly colored with what looks like a helmet on its head. American Kestrels are 9.5 to 10.5 inches long and feed on mice, insects, birds, snakes, and frogs. They are year-round residents in this part of the state.

**Below left: BONAPARTE'S GULL** feeding off Belle Isle. We only see these gulls in migration. If water remains open they may spend the winter here, but if the lakes freeze up they head to the south Atlantic coast. This small gull, which flies a lot like a tern, has a black dot behind its eye in the fall and winter. They are mostly silent. They feed on fish, insects, and other aquatic invertebrates.

**Below right: BUFFLEHEAD**, Blue Heron Lagoon, Belle Isle. The male has a large white crest with no black border (the Hooded Merganser's white crest is trimmed in black). Buffleheads are probably our smallest duck, seen in migration and all winter as long as there is open water. They nest on lakes and ponds within coniferous forests of Canada. Females have a white patch below their eyes.





*CANVASBACKS, Blue Heron Lagoon on Belle Isle. These oceangoing ducks are declining in population over most of North America, but you wouldn't know it from observing the Detroit River or Lake St. Clair, where 250,000–500,000 spend the winter feeding on the abundant water celery (eel grass) beds. They are large, with characteristic sloping beaks. The male has a reddish head and a bright white back (looking like a painter's canvas). The females are all brown. They nest in the western United States and in Canada north to the edge of the tundra.*

*Below left, SHORT-EARED OWL, Pointe Mouillee, by Dongfan Chen. Short-eared Owls are not late-night denizens of the woods, nor do they "hoot" like most of the rest of their owl cousins. Instead, these owls patrol grasslands and marshes in the twilight hours of dusk and dawn, flying low to the ground and almost moth-like as they search for their small mammal prey. They are year-round residents in southeast Michigan but not commonly seen—they are good at hiding from humans! Winter is often a good time to see them and Pointe Mouillee a great place to look for them. Recently there has been one observed at the Grosse Ile Municipal Airport—we are hoping it stays around for the Rockwood Christmas Bird Count.*

*Below right, REDHEAD, by Jim Bull. This duck is just a little smaller than the Canvasback. The male has a reddish head like the male Canvasback, but it has a rounder head, normal duck bill, and a dark back. Its nesting range is similar to that of the Canvasback, and the female sometimes lays eggs in Canvasback nests.*





**COMMON REDPOLL**, Pointe Mouillee. These birds of the far north of Canada and Alaska are irruptive migrants and winter residents in areas further south including Michigan and even down to the central United States. This is an irruptive year. Over 100 were seen at the Grosse Ile Municipal Airport. Because of their small size and large surface area to volume ratio, they have to eat almost constantly to keep warm, making them fearless of humans according to Black and Kennedy (Birds of Michigan 2003). Hoary Redpolls may be mixed in with flocks of Common Redpolls, but can be identified by their white rumps and almost clear breasts with only light streaking on the sides compared to the heavily streaked breasts of the Commons. During irruption years Common Redpolls often show up at feeders. Enjoy them this year because they might not be back for a while.



Above, **SNOW BUNTING** in grassland near Blue Heron Lagoon, Belle Isle. Snow Buntings nest on the ground in the Arctic tundra. Michigan is part of their winter range. They can be found in flocks of a dozen or more in open fields and on beaches, where they feed on seeds, often with Horned Larks. Males are pure white with black backs in breeding plumage; both sexes are mostly white in winter but have some brown mottling.

At right, **CANVASBACKS** close-up.





**WINTER WREN, Humbug Marsh.** At only 4 inches long, our tiniest wren has a stubbier tail, stronger white eyebrow, and darker streaked belly than the House Wren. Its explosive long bubbly song is most distinctive. Ted Black writes, "Few other singers in Michigan can sustain their songs for up to 10 music-packed seconds" (Birds of Michigan, Lone Pine Publishing 2003). They nest in moist coniferous forests of the northern Lower Peninsula and the Upper Peninsula. Although they often go further south, in some years they stay in southern Michigan for all or part of the winter. It is uncommon in this state in all seasons.

**Below left, CAROLINA WREN, Humbug Marsh.** This is a large wren with a thick white eyeline. Its song is a loud and cardinal-like "tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle." They have expanded northward into southern Michigan and are now common year-round residents. Insect eaters most of the year, they switch to berries in the winter.

**Below right, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH, Humbug Marsh.** Sometimes known as the "upside-down bird," these birds often work their way down tree trunks headfirst, looking for insects under the bark. They also feed on seeds, wedging them into crevices in bark and then hacking them open. Like woodpeckers, they also are attracted to suet. Their loud call is a nasal "yank, ank, ank."





## KING-CRAYFISHER?

Bruce Szczechowski took this series of photos of a Belted Kingfisher around the newly excavated pond at the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge Gateway, which features the new refuge visitor center that is yet to open due to the pandemic.

This is a female, easily distinguished by the second belly band that is rufous in color. The Belted Kingfisher is one of the few species in which the female is more colorful than the male. Both male and female make a loud cackling sound that would seem more likely heard in a haunted house or from a witch stirring her cauldron brew, than around a pond, lake, or stream.

The call can be given from a perch or on the wing.

*This female has an unusual catch: not a fish, but a crayfish! It finally flew out of sight with its prey, so Bruce did not see whether she really ate it. If she did, would she somehow crack through its hard chitinous exoskeleton (similar to breaking into a lobster at seafood restaurant) before swallowing, or would she swallow it exoskeleton, claws, and all? Restaurants give patrons those metal nutcrackers to do the job of getting to the edible insides. What would the kingfisher use?*

Kingfishers will stay around all or part of the winter if there is open water where they can fish.

*In the spring they excavate a long cavity—almost a tunnel—up to six feet long, into a stream bank or other nearby hill, using their beak and talons. Back at the end of that tunnel, their young are way out of view and beyond easy access of potential predators.*



## MYSTERY BIRD REVEALED

If you said Red-bellied Woodpecker, you were right. The photo on page 1 doesn't show much, but with the wings obscuring many of its other field marks, the red belly stands out. This photo is of a male (actually the same individual) also photographed by Bruce Szczechowski.

This very common woodpecker's most obvious characteristic is the red hood that covers the top and back of the neck of the male. The female has red only on the back of her head, while the top of her head is grey. Since there is another species called the Red-headed Woodpecker, this one had to be named for another trait—the red on its belly (which is between the legs on a bird) that is hardly ever seen in the field. That's why these photos are so special—because they both show the red belly. It was named at a time when birds were identified mostly from study skins in museum collections using huge books of "dichotomous keys." The

Red-bellied Woodpecker in the woods is often heard before it is seen, its loud rolling, almost guttural churr call giving it away. Originally more southern in distribution, it is a frequent visitor to backyard feeding stations, especially if there is suet offered. Like other woodpeckers, the Red-bellied excavates a hole in a dead tree, lays eggs, and raises its young in the resulting cavity. Studies have found that they can live up to 20 years in the wild.





# WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A BIRD: From flying to nesting, eating to singing—what birds are doing, and why (Alfred A. Knopf, 2020)

By David Allen Sibley • Book Review by Jim Bull

From David Allen Sibley, author and illustrator of the famous **Sibley Guide to Birds**, the bible of bird identification for advanced birders, comes this treasure trove of information about birds and a celebration of all things avian. In the introduction Sibley tells us that the book started out as a bird guide for kids, then all beginners, but with his attention to detail in his signature work, that concept just didn't gel. He decided to add essays on some of the more interesting things birds do, and that particular birds do, until those grew to become the book.

Each essay is so engaging, it just draws you in and leads to another and another. Some are quite short—a quarter of a page or less—and some cover a full two pages. The wonderful thing about them is that, although there are interconnections, each essay can be read and is meant to be read on its own. This is not a book you read start to finish but dip in and out of constantly.

Some essays are about general topics common to all birds, like the two pages early on about every aspect of feathers you could imagine, presented in an easy-to-read format with lots of bullet points. Other essays focus on interesting facets of the lives of particular species and groups of birds. I did sometimes wish for an index to look up topics of interest, but this lack invites you to wander through its pages and explore new dimensions of our avian friends.

At almost 9 inches wide and 11.5 inches long, it is a coffee table book that reminds you of all the wonder about birds that pulls you outside to actually observe them, but it is not a volume to carry into the field. The essays will deepen your understanding of birds by helping you notice the amazing things they are doing, but that's not the best part of this book.

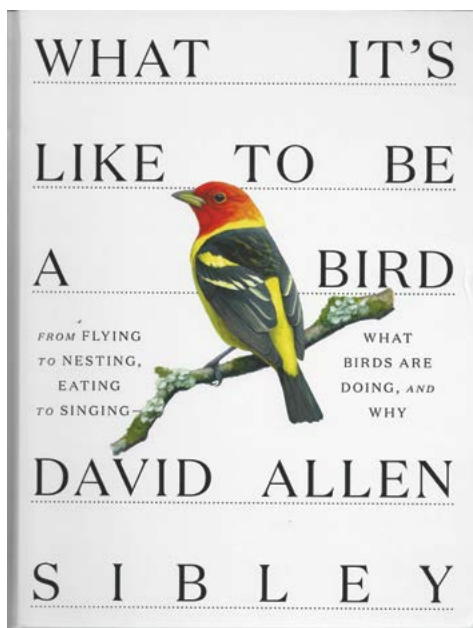
Its best feature is the large paintings of a plethora of

species doing amazing things. By stepping outside the finer points of identification, Sibley has given us fine art: birds that almost jump off the page in front of you, birds that are not static but animated, with fire in

their eyes and consumed with various aspects of being a bird (the Bald Eagle page gives you an idea of what I mean). This book gave me a greater appreciation not only for some familiar, and a few not so familiar birds, but also of what an artistic master, or maybe more accurately, an artistic genius, Sibley truly is! It is a veritable feast of avian eye candy that will keep drawing you back in. It is hard to put down.

If you are looking for a gift for a friend, even a very young child, who is interested in birds or who you think is ripe for developing such an interest, you can't go wrong with this book. I would think that parents and children could spend hours exploring its pages together. But it would be a gift that keeps on giving to old codgers like me, too. This is not a book you will

read once and put away, but one you will want to return to again and again and again, engaging with it like a well-loved friend.



# Flyway

A publication of Detroit Audubon

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**Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)**



*LONG-TAILED DUCK at Elizabeth Park, Trenton, by Robert Irwin. Long-tailed Ducks nest in the Arctic but winter in large numbers in the Great Lakes. Rafts of 10,000 or more are common in the middle of Lake Michigan when there is open water. Flocks of a dozen or more are sometimes seen in the Port Huron-Sarnia areas, but in southeast Michigan solitary individuals are reported most years but are uncommon sights.*