

Caribbean Biological Corridor, Guatemala

By Mary Ellen Gadski, International Project Coordinator

The international component of Birdathon has always been a major reason why our donors continue to give so generously. Our dollars go far to protect habitat in Latin America, where many of the migratory birds we see in Indiana spend their winters. With the winding down of new land purchases and easements in the Cerulean Warbler Corridor in Colombia, the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) proposed a new project in Guatemala near its Caribbean coastline. We were quite impressed with the conservation work accomplished in this area over the past 20 years by its local partner, Fundación Ecológica (FUNDAECO).

To give you the big picture here, the land rises from sea level to isolated, forested massifs at a height of 3,800 feet. It is an extremely important migratory flyway that provides high-quality habitat for wintering migratory birds as well as stopover habitat for at least 40 species of neotropical migrants. Wood Thrush, Kentucky Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, and Black-throated Green Warbler are present here in large numbers in the winter. The region's wealth of biodiversity also includes four globally threatened species and over 30 species of endemic plants. Since tropical rainforests in the Caribbean region of Guatemala have almost disappeared, replaced by agro-industrial plantations for bananas, oil palm, and cattle ranches, ABC and FUNDAECO are moving fast to protect what remains.

An area called the Sierra Santa Cruz—close to 160,000 acres—is in the process of becoming the eighth protected area of the biological corridor, but a “clear and present danger” existed in the form of a recently built illegal road, which allowed poachers and loggers to enter. FUNDAECO took immediate action to buy a 556-acre parcel and stop the threat. Now ABC has a two-year period to fund the purchase, which costs less than \$300 per acre.

Amos Butler Audubon Society contributed \$15,000 to ABC from Birdathon 2016 funds. This sum was a match for the Southern Wings program, whereby state natural resources agencies contribute to migratory bird projects. It is interesting to know that the State of Missouri matched our funds. Given the Guatemalan government's recent, overwhelming pro-conservation vote to establish the Sierra Caral as a National Protected Area in this corridor, conservationists are optimistic that, building on this success, the larger Sierra Santa Cruz will achieve this status in coming years.



Caribbean biological corridor in Guatemala. Photo courtesy of Fundación Ecológica. Wood Thrush photo by Mike Parr, courtesy of the American Bird Conservancy



A Great Outing to Goose Pond

by Mark Welter

On Saturday, December 10, Scott Enochs led me and nine other Amos Butler Audubon members on a field trip to Goose Pond FWA in search of raptors. I had left Indianapolis early, birding my way down to GP, arriving about two hours before the group, to do some scouting. I encountered a number of raptor species right off the bat, making me feel good about the trip's prospects later in the afternoon.

Just as the group arrived at our meeting point, a few more raptor species made their appearance — American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, and Rough-legged Hawk. We then headed out to our first stop, a farm field elsewhere in Greene County, where ABAS member Barb Jablonski had reported a large number of swans and Whooping Cranes. We set up our scopes and, to our amazement, counted 20 Whoopers, fully 20% of the Eastern population, in a single flock! Also with them were a couple of Sandhill Cranes and approximately 15 Tundra or Trumpeter Swans.

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Upcoming Audubon Programs and Field Trips

All programs are held at the Holliday Park Nature Center, 6363 Spring Mill Road, Indianapolis, at 7:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month unless otherwise noted. They are free and open to the public. Time and place of field trips as noted.

January 10: Birding and Safari in Uganda—The Pearl of Africa

Presenter: Rob Ripma

Many birders from the United States are very familiar with traveling to the American Tropics to go birding, but have you ever considered Africa as a birding destination? In this presentation, Amos Butler Audubon Society President Rob Ripma will show you why you might want to consider Uganda the next time you are planning a trip.

Uganda offers the largest number of bird species of any country in Africa, with over 1,000 recorded. Combine that figure with incredible safari drives to see elephants, giraffes, hippos, lions, and many other animals as well as the opportunity to see Mountain Gorillas and Chimpanzees and you've got quite an amazing vacation!

Rob is one of the owner-operators of Sabrewing Nature Tours, leading birding and photography trips around the world. He is currently President of Amos Butler Audubon, a member of the board of Ohio's Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO), the primary bird blogger for *Birds & Blooms* magazine, and is on the planning committee and is the field trip coordinator for BSBO's "Biggest Week in American Birding," the largest birding festival in the United States.

February 14: The Secret Love Life of Birds

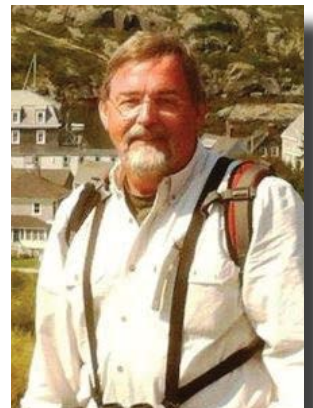
Presenters: Will & John Schaust

Deception? Fidelity? Promiscuity? These words are not ones typically associated with the mating behavior of birds. But the amorous avian world is much more complex than our naturalist forefathers would have ever believed. Join Team Schaust (father and son) as they share recent research about the pair-bonding strategies of birds through some fascinating facts and humorous analogies to our own crazy courtship behaviors.



Will Schaust has always had a love of the outdoors. He grew up going camping with his family and graduated from Indiana University with a degree in Outdoor Recreation. After working for at McCormick's Creek State Park for four years, he accepted a position as Assistant Manager at the Ornithology Center at Eagle Creek Park, where he continues his study into the wonderful world of birds.

As Chief Naturalist for Wild Birds Unlimited, Inc., John Schaust has spent the past 12 years supporting over 300 WBU stores in helping their customers to be active backyard birdwatchers and thoughtful stewards of nature. Prior to joining WBU in 2004, John had spent 26 years as a professional Interpretive Naturalist with various federal, state and local park agencies. He is an avid birder and has been a licensed bird bander for over 30 years.



Winter Lakefront Trip

Saturday, February, 11, 6:30 a.m.

Join Scott Enochs as he leads you to Indiana's Lake Michigan lakeshore in search of wintering gulls, waterfowl, and any vagrants that may be in the area. We will meet at the Dick's Sporting Goods at 6030 West 86th Street in Indianapolis at 6:30 a.m. and carpool to the lakefront, where we will spend the morning and early afternoon visiting various sites around the Indiana lakeshore. We will visit as many sites as possible to scan the lake and spend a little time doing some moderate to rugged hiking. Depending on weather conditions, we might add an evening stop at Kankakee Sands; in that event, we would break for lunch in the Gary/Chesterton area. This event is free and open to the public. Registration is not required, but it would be appreciated. Questions? Call Scott at (317) 850-4801 or email him at msenochs@comcast.net.



Weekly Bird Hike

Eagle Creek Park

6519 Delong Road
Every Sunday, 9 a.m.
Meet at the Ornithology Center
For more information call (317) 327-2473

*Donations in Memory and Honor of
Chris Lynch in honor of Leslie Krom Seldon
Meredith & Kathleen Hull
in honor of Barbara Jablonski
Louise Haskett
In memory of William F Steinmetz*

Christmas Bird Count for Kids

January 14, 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. (Volunteers 8 a.m.-1:30)
Zion Nature Center (Across from the Zionsville Library)

By Jessica Helmbold

On January 14, Amos Butler Audubon and Zion Nature Center in Zionsville will host a Christmas Bird Count for Kids (CBCK). Recommended for kids ages 6-15, the event will run from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. and will include learning how to bird and to use binoculars, 1.5 hours of birding, lunch (brown bag), and an awards session. This half-day event will be a fun way to introduce kids to birding. If you know any young people who you would like to introduce to birding, bring them out to the park on January 14. This event is free but requires preregistration at the Zionsville Library web site at www.zionsvillelibrary.org

As your Education Chair, this is my first CBCK with Amos Butler Audubon and my fifth CBCK overall. It's one of my favorite programs, as you can see because I keep coming back to it. Everywhere I go I love to see the spark I have ignited in first-time birders or the sheer joy of a seasoned birder out in the field. I like knowing that the program encourages kids to be active participants by allowing them to share their results at the end of the program and to be recognized, that I am fostering the next generation of official Christmas Bird Counters, and that this is basically their show! Adults help the kids in identification and use of binoculars, but the kids have to be the ultimate decision makers and counters.

So how did this program get started? It was the brainchild of the Sonoma Valley (California) Birding Group. In 2006, 14 kids had shown up at a local Christmas Bird Count only to be turned away but with the promise that next year they would have their own event. As promised, in 2007 the first CBCK was held. I learned about the CBCK in 2010 from a birding friend, and I decided I wanted in. Four events and six years later, I still love it. So help me establish a new tradition of CBCKs with Amos Butler Audubon by volunteering or bringing your kids to participate. I am looking forward to your help to make this program a success!

Volunteers Needed

If you like sharing your love of birding with children and if this sounds interesting to you, we could use you as a volunteer. Volunteers will be needed to show kids how to use binoculars and identify birds and to take kids out birding on the park trails, or help with event logistics if you like being a more behind-the-scenes person. For full details please contact Jessica Helmbold: jh_beagle@hotmail.com.

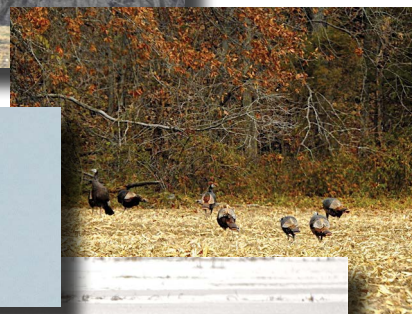
(Goose Pond continued from page 1)

Heading back to Goose Pond, we stopped at the south end of Main Pool West to view a large flock of geese. Despite the extreme distance, we could identify Snow Geese, both white and “blue” morphs, as well as smaller numbers of Greater White-fronted Geese. We also observed Northern Harriers, which would occasionally interrupt their hunting flights to alight on muskrat mounds, as well as one of Goose Pond’s resident pairs of Bald Eagles, and a number of duck species, including a flock of late-migrating Blue-winged Teal.

From Main Pool West we headed over to the new Goose Pond Visitors’ Center. We were treated to good scope views of perched Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks, as well as a close flyby from a group of Sandhill Cranes. The Visitors’ Center is a neat building, and its hilltop location provides a commanding view of a large portion of Goose Pond and its airspace.

In the Bear Run mine area, our target birds were Northern Shrike and Merlin, both of which Scott had located during his scouting trip the weekend before. We encountered a Northern Shrike almost immediately upon arriving at the south end of the mine; it was initially perched right next to the road, allowing everyone in the group to get good looks, before it dropped down into the thickets and out of sight. We continued to drive the county roads through the southern and northern sections of the mine, picking up Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, a relatively cooperative American Kestrel and another Bald Eagle, but Merlin eluded us.

We ended the trip at Beehunter Marsh, along the “farmhouse road” which is one of the historically good spots for Short-eared Owl in the Goose Pond area. As the sun dipped below the horizon, Song and American Tree Sparrows could be heard calling and foraging in the brush at the side of the road, more waterfowl and Sandhill Cranes flew over in search of night roosts, and a final Northern Harrier drifted by in search of a bedtime snack. After 20 minutes or so and no owls, I decided to walk down farmhouse road, looking and listening. I was about halfway down the road when I caught



Whooping Cranes, Wild turkeys, juvenile Northern Harrier, Redhead with American Coots photos by Barbara Jablonski.

a glimpse in my binoculars of a bird gliding in the distance. It made a couple of passes over the road, and its tawny color and floppy, mothlike flight made its identity clear even in the failing light — Short-eared Owl! I ran back to tell the group and we all jumped in our cars and drove down the road, but never did relocate the bird. Meanwhile, back in Goose Pond proper, Lee and Kathy’s group was looking at 8 of them; apparently we were just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Many participants on the trip were either new to birding, new to Indiana, or both, so this trip served as a great first exposure to one of the best birding locations in the state. Goose Pond is one of my favorite places to bird, and raptors are my favorite birds to watch, so I thought this trip was a fun time with a great group of folks. I look forward to the next one!



Pair of Least Sandpipers photo by Jonathan Bontrager. Inset photo of single sandpiper by Aidan Rominger.

Least Expected Sandpipers in December

A group of Eagle Creek Sunday morning birders was astounded to see two Least Sandpipers at the north end of the park on Sunday, December 11. Two other birders had observed the duo the previous day. Further investigation revealed that December sightings are not unheard of in Indiana, but they are certainly rare.

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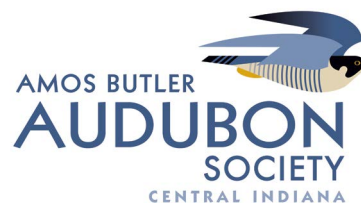
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