



# A Plea to Change Traditions at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway

by Danielle Vosburgh, Co-founder of Balloons Blow

Balloons have become one of the most common forms of trash found during beach clean-ups. Although not just a problem at the seashore, balloons are found polluting the most remote & pristine places. Unlike other forms of litter, balloons can easily travel thousands of miles to pollute places otherwise untouched by human activity.

The balloon industry misleadingly markets latex balloons as “biodegradable”. Made with chemical additives, they last years polluting the environment. Latex balloons are particularly deadly because when they burst at high altitudes, they shred, forming a latex lure that mimics the food of many animals. The balloon blocks the digestive tract, causing them to slowly starve to death. Metallic coated foil balloons coming in contact with electrical power lines knock out power and can spark fires. Ribbons or strings that may be attached pose an entanglement risk. Many curious animals become tangled, restricting movement, causing a slow agonizing death.

Birds seem to be affected by balloon pollution more than any other animal. Pelagic birds scoop floating latex balloon fragments from the sea surface. Osprey are known to use balloon garbage as nesting material - proven to be a deadly mistake. It is not uncommon for shorebirds and songbirds to die from an encounter with balloon trash. A new study published in the journal Scientific Reports found balloons and balloon fragments are the deadliest kinds of marine pollution for seabirds.

Helium is also a matter of concern. Experts warn this finite resource should be conserved, yet it is wasted on filling this temporary toy.

Years ago, when we first began finding balloons on our weekly family beach cleanups, we knew we had to do something. Internet searches yielded only lies from the balloon industry, they tried to hide the facts that balloon pollution was a growing problem and they were killing animals. We were driven to create a website and Facebook page to help educate the public. We have educational materials, a photo gallery, and a list of awesome alternatives like ribbon wands, pinwheels, banners & streamers, blowing bubbles, or planting a memorial tree or garden.

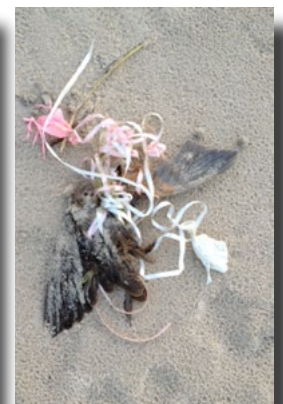
With the help of activists all around the world who add their voices, we have been successful at halting countless balloon releases. Flooding leaders with emails has proven effective in ending these mass littering events. One we have not been successful with is the Indy 500's over 60-year-old race day tradition. We have been pleading with leaders at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway

(IMS) for eight years. Complaints about their aerial littering aren't new, they have heard many since as far back as 20 years ago. In 2019, we had a billboard posted to publicly ask the IMS to stop littering. The billboard company removed it the next day after being contacted by someone from the IMS, which they later denied, and still went ahead with the release. Thankfully, Covid restricted certain activities at the Indy 500 in 2020 and the balloon release was canceled. Leaders at the IMS were quick to make clear it was because of Covid, not outside influence.

This year, we will continue to urge leaders at the IMS to exclude balloons from the race. With the new owner, Roger Penske, making many improvements, and many more voices, we are hopeful the Indy 500 will no longer cause tens of thousands of latex death traps to be sent into the environment. We must not only contact leaders at IMS, but also the leaders, legislators, and wildlife officials of the town of Speedway and the state of Indiana. They should not continue to allow this destructive activity.

If we all commit to educating others, speaking up to protect birds and all animals, we can finally see an end to balloon releases.

We must be mindful of the little actions we take that can have a big impact. While there are many things we humans do that are harmful to the planet & the animals we share it with, this problem is so simple to solve. Don't let them go!



Cattle Egret with Balloon courtesy of Pam Bedsole  
Rusty Blackbird entangled in balloon debris courtesy of David Gurniewicz

# Upcoming Audubon Events and Field Trips

All are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. Due to the coronavirus outbreak, all of these events are subject to cancellation. Please check our website event calendar before attending an event to see if it might have been canceled. Once restrictions are softened, we might also schedule last-minute even

## Virtual Monthly Programs

We are pleased to continue our virtual programs. The first ones were a success and we will continue through May. You must register for the programs through Eventbrite. This will be easiest to link to through the event post on the ABAS calendar. Once registered, you will receive an email with a link to the Zoom meeting prior to the program.

## Ecological Consequences of Climate Change through Phenology

Tuesday, March 9, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Eventbrite: <https://climatechangephenology.eventbrite.com>



*Eastern Redbud*

Join Amanda Cantrell, a Board Member of Indiana Phenology for our March program. Phenology is the study of the timing of recurring plant and animal life cycle stages, such as leafing, flowering, and fruiting in plants and migration and reproduction in animals. These changes are driven by climate and other abiotic factors and govern how living organisms interact with each other and even the cycling of water, carbon, and other elements within local and global ecosystems.

Our climate is warming at an unprecedented rate due to human activities such as the production and burning of fossil fuels. In this presentation, we will explore how changes in phenology, such as earlier Spring leafing and flowering or insect emergence driven by warming temperatures, can be indicators of climate change's impact on ecosystems and help elucidate downstream effects on abundance, diversity, and the interaction of species. You will also learn how you as a citizen scientist can help track these changes through phenology observation to build a local dataset useful to scientists, policymakers, land managers, and conservationists to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

This will be an online program using Zoom. Participants will register using Eventbrite and there will be a limit of 90. To register go to <https://climatechangephenology.eventbrite.com>. Once we are close to the program date, you will receive an email with an invite to a Zoom meeting.

## Lifetime Memberships

All lifetime memberships go to the Permanent Fund. Lifetime individual membership is only \$500 and it is fitting that it goes to the long-run benefit of ABAS. The Permanent Fund can never be spent. Similar to an endowment, the goal is that investment proceeds can be spent as the Board of Directors determines. Any donation throughout the year can be directed towards the Permanent Fund as well.

## An Introduction to Bird and Nature Photography (SOLD OUT)

Tuesday, April 13, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Eventbrite: <https://birdnaturephotography.eventbrite.com>



*Red-headed Barbet*  
photo courtesy of  
Brian Zwiebel

Join Brian Zwiebel of Sabrewing Nature Tours for an informative presentation on beginning and intermediate bird photography. Brian is a business partner of current ABAS President, Rob Ripma, another proprietor of Sabrewing Nature Tours.

This introductory program is great for beginners and will offer a few nuggets for the intermediate shooter as well. Learn what Brian does, and what you should do too, every time you get your hands on a new digital camera. Discover what a histogram is, how to read it, and how to use it to make better exposures. Speaking of exposures, you will learn which exposure modes Brian uses in various situations and why. Learn to improve your images with better compositions and backgrounds, as well as how to improve your action and behavior images. All of this and much more will be included in the program and each talking point supported by Brian's award-winning photography.

This will be an online program using Zoom. Participants will register using Eventbrite and there will be a limit of 90. To register go to <https://birdnaturephotography.eventbrite.com>. Once we are close to the program date, you will receive an email with an invite to a Zoom meeting.

## Support ABAS using AmazonSmile

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support ABAS every time you shop, at no cost to you with the added bonus that Amazon donates a portion of the purchase to ABAS.

To shop at AmazonSmile, simply go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and enter Amos W. Butler Audubon Society in the search bar. You can use your existing Amazon account on AmazonSmile.

Bookmark [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) to make it even easier to return and start your shopping at AmazonSmile. Let your shopping be not just for your family and friends, but also for the birds of Central Indiana, like the Cerulean Warbler.



# ABAS Field Trips

## Masks on Hikes and Limited Numbers

It is anticipated that masks will be required for the majority of all field trips and local hikes. There may be times when we can spread out and get a quick break from the masks. Many hikes will also have a limit to the number of participants and require registration. Please check the details of each hike and register as appropriate. Priority will be given to ABAS members early in the registration process for those hikes with limited numbers.

American Woodcock  
photo courtesy of  
Amy Hodson



## Woodcock Walk – Carmel West Park

**Saturday, March 6, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm**  
3000 West 116th Street, Carmel, IN

Join Chuck Anderson, ABAS Field Trip Chair, for a trip to West Park in Carmel. Listen for the “peenting” sounds of a male woodcock as it attempts to court a female during the mating season. Watch the male perform an aerial display and listen to the sound of its twittering wings as it tries to attract a female. We’ll be stationary with little walking required. Dress appropriately for the weather. We’ll meet at 6:30 pm at the Jill Perelman Pavilion located at 3000 W 116th St, Carmel, IN 46032, 200 yards west of the West Park entrance. The gate to West Park will be closed. We will then walk over to West Park where the American Woodcocks will be displaying.

Registration is not required. Text Chuck at (317) 767-5438 if you have any questions.

## Woodcock Walk – Daubenspeck Community Nature Park

**Saturday, March 14, 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm**  
Daubenspeck Community Nature Park  
8900 Ditch Rd, Indianapolis, IN

Join ABAS Board member Brian Cunningham for an evening walk at Daubenspeck Community Nature Park (DCNP), a great spot to view displaying American Woodcocks.

Woodcocks have a very acrobatic mating display that they perform at dusk known as the sky dance. While waiting for woodcocks, we will check the prairie and nearby woods for birds that may be going to roost in the park for the evening.

We will meet at 6:30 pm in the DCNP parking lot. The main trail of Daubenspeck is mowed, but the ground can be somewhat uneven. Registration is not required. This event is free and open to the public.

## Woodcock Walk – Strawtown Koteewi Park

**Saturday, March 20, 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm**  
Strawtown Koteewi Park, 12308 Strawtown Avenue,  
Noblesville, IN

Unusual, weird, romantic, and unique are all words used to describe the American Woodcock. Come experience this rite of spring for yourself as male woodcocks perform their aerial courtship displays for the females in the prairie at dusk! An indoor presentation will take place inside the Taylor Center at 7:00 pm for those interested in knowing more about the life history of this bird. Those interested in seeing the aerial display should meet the group inside the Taylor Center and will be led by a Naturalist from Hamilton County Park starting at about 7:30

## Newfields Bird Hike

**Saturday, March 27, 8:00 am to 10:00 pm**  
1550 W 38th Street, Indianapolis, IN

Join ABAS at The Virginia B. Fairbanks Art & Nature Park at Newfields for bird hikes on this beautiful property along the White River and Central Canal. The hikes will be led by ABAS President Rob Ripma.

Meet at the free parking at the loop just ¼ mile west of the 38th Street entrance to Newfields. The address given for this event is approximate. You’ll need to be heading west on 38th Street to enter the loop parking area. Take the White River Pkwy East exit.

The hike is free and open to the public. Registration is requested by emailing us at [info@amosbutleraudubon.org](mailto:info@amosbutleraudubon.org).

## Smith’s Longspur Field Trip – Lye Creek Prairie Burn

**Saturday, April 17, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm**  
240 East County Road 650 North, Cherry Grove, IN

Join Indiana birder and photographer Shari McCollough on a field trip to the Lye Creek Prairie Burn, aka “The Burn”, in search of migrating Smith’s Longspurs. The Burn is located in Montgomery County and is the most reliable place for viewing Smith’s Longspurs in Indiana. We may be joined by Clint



Photo of Smith’s  
Longspur  
courtesy of  
Amy Hodson.

Murray who owns the property and manages it specifically for the Longspurs and other birds.

The field trip is limited to 12 participants and registration is required. Local ABAS members can register prior to March 17th after which time, if there are spots available, anyone may register. To register email Chuck Anderson at [chucka1999@aol.com](mailto:chucka1999@aol.com) or text Chuck at (317) 767-5438.

“The Burn” is on County Road 650 N in Montgomery County in the general area of Crawfordsville. To get there from I74 take the US 231 exit and go north just under 3 miles to County Road 550 N. Take a right on County Road 550 N for just over a mile to County Road 150 E. Take a left on County Road 150 E and continue to County Road 650 N. Take a right on County Road 650 N for less than a mile to The Burn which will be on the right. The address given is approximate. These GPS coordinates might be helpful: 40.135048, -86.863575.

## **Spring Migrant Hike at Sargent Road Nature Park**

**Saturday, April 24, 8:00 am to 10:00 pm**  
**8101 Sargent Road, Indianapolis, IN**

Join us as Earl Simon leads us through Sargent Road Nature Park (SRNP). Earl is a member of the board of the Mud Creek Conservancy which is instrumental in the development of SRNP. This will be prime time for viewing warblers and other migrants. The terrain is flat with a mowed trail for easy accessibility. Dress appropriately for the weather conditions and don't forget your binoculars. There are no restrooms available at the park.

The field trip is limited to 12 participants and registration is required. Local ABAS members can register prior to March 17th after which time, if there are spots available, anyone may register. To register email Chuck Anderson at [chucka1999@aol.com](mailto:chucka1999@aol.com) or text Chuck at (317) 767-5438.

SRNP is located at the intersection of 82nd Street and Sargent Road, Indianapolis. The entrance to the park is off Sargent Road just south of 82nd Street. The address given is approximate.



*Photo of Hooded Warbler courtesy of Amy Hodson.*

## **Local Bird Hikes**

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, all of these events are subject to cancellation. Please check our website event calendar before attending an event to see if it might have been canceled. Once restrictions are softened, we might also schedule last-minute events.

### **Masks on Hikes**

It is anticipated that masks will be required for the majority of the local hikes. There may be times when we can spread out and get a quick break from the masks.

- Eagle Creek Park hikes are canceled until further notice.

### **Holliday Park**

6363 Spring Mill Road, Indianapolis, IN

**Third Tuesday of each month**

**Start times vary during the year**

**March 16 from 8:30 am to 10:00 am**

**April 20 from 8:00 am to 9:30 am**

Meet in front of the Nature Center.

### **Cool Creek Park Bird Hikes**

2000 East 151st Street, Carmel, IN

**Every Saturday**

**March 6, 13, 20, 27 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am**

**April 3, 10, 17, 24 from 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

Join expert birder Keith Starling. Meet in the north parking lot past the Nature Center.

### **Cool Creek Park Beginning Bird Hikes**

2000 East 151st Street, Carmel, IN

**Every other Sunday 8:30 am to 10:30 am**

**March 7, 21; April 4, 18**

**2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th Wednesday**

**March 10, 17, 24, 31 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am**

**April 14, 21, 28 from 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

Meet most Sunday and Wednesday mornings in the parking lot at the bottom of the road by Cool Creek, past the Nature Center. This is a great opportunity for birdwatchers of all levels.

### **Fort Harrison State Park**

6000 North Post Road, Indianapolis, IN

**Sundays in April and May from 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

**April 4, 11, 18, 25**

Meet Don Gorney at the northeast corner of the Delaware Lake parking lot.

### **Strawtown Koteewi Park**

12308 Strawtown Avenue, Noblesville, IN

**First Wednesday of each month**

**March 3 from 9:00 am to 11:00 am**

**April 7 from 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

Meet at the Taylor Center of Natural History. For more information, call (317) 774-2574.

### **Garfield Park Urban Bird Walks**

2432 Conservatory Drive, Indianapolis, IN

**March 20 from 8:00 am to 9:30 am**

**April 17 from 8:00 am to 9:30 am**

This Indy Parks event requires registration through their system. Meet at the Conservatory entrance.

### **Nina Mason Pulliam EcoLab**

3200 Cold Spring Road, Indianapolis, IN

**Wednesdays in March and April**

**from 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

**March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31**

**April 7, 14, 21, 28**

Meet at the St. Francis colonnade just west of Allison Mansion on the Marian campus.

### **Greenfield Birders Hikes**

Stay up-to-date via [facebook.com/groups/Greenfield Birders](https://www.facebook.com/groups/Greenfield-Birders). For more information, contact Adam Wilson at [NikonBirdHunter@gmail.com](mailto:NikonBirdHunter@gmail.com).

### **Thornwood Nature Preserve**

1597 South Morristown Pike, Greenfield, IN

**2nd Saturday of the month through October**

**April 10 from 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

Meet in the parking lot.

### **Beckenholdt Park**

2770 North Franklin Street, Greenfield, IN

**4th Saturday of the month through October**

**April 24 at 8:00 am to 10:00 am**

Meet in the parking lot.



# ABAS Field Trip Recaps

## Winter Lakefront Field Trip January 23, 2021

The field trip began at 8:00 am at Washington Park Beach in Michigan City where the participants met up with Scott Enochs, the field trip leader. This was the first of eight locations the group would visit. It was 10 degrees, but sunny with very little wind and spirits were high for a good day of birding. We weren't disappointed. The first targeted species seen was the Spotted Towhee at Beverly Shores. This was followed by a Western Grebe at the Port of Indiana and a Harlequin Duck and Dunlin at Miller Beach. The bird of the day, an Iceland Gull (Thayer's subspecies). It was a close, unexpected sighting at Whihala Beach in Whiting. In addition, many species of ducks and multiple Greater Black-backed Gulls were seen at various stops. The field trip came to an end at 4:00 pm. Thanks to Scott for a great day birding!



*Birders Birding the Lakefront, Lakefront view, and Spotted Towhee photos courtesy of Chuck Anderson*

## GBBC Caravan Field Trip February 13, 2021

Seven birders gathered in the Zionsville High School parking lot to begin the ABAS Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) Caravan Field Trip. The temperature was only 20 degrees, but everyone was bundled up in anticipation of a good day of birding. Our first stop was Turkey Foot Nature Park in Zionsville where we saw 13 species highlighted by 2 Hermit Thrush. From there we drove to Starkey Park, also in Zionsville. The best birds there were 2 Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Winter Wren, and a Brown Creeper. From there we moved on to Central Park in Carmel. We saw several species of birds there including a Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Flicker, and a Hairy Woodpecker. Our last stop was Daubenspeck Community Nature Park in Indy where we added more species to our list including our first and only American Robin of the day. After 5 hours of birding, the group called it a day. In all, we tallied 27 bird species. Lists of all species including the number seen from each park have been submitted to eBird and will be included in the worldwide Great Backyard Bird Count.

# Early Spring Migration in Central Indiana

*By Amy Hodson*

In just eight short weeks, the most anticipated month of the year will have arrived. The wonder and beauty of spring migration in May. We all look forward to it every year, the joy of walking through our favorite park with warblers dancing through the leaves. Those little neotropical migrants may be stunning, though they aren't the first to get the migration party started in central Indiana. Let's take a look at some of the species we can expect to find as migration kicks off THIS MONTH!

March will mark the arrival of some early migrants. Red-winged Blackbirds begin to arrive in the grasslands and prairies around our homes and will start picking out their territories while preparing for the coming nesting season. We can also expect to see Turkey Vultures once again grace the skies above us.

Migration during the month of March also brings the beginning of shorebird migration. Shorebird identification may not be the easiest, but it sure is fun to learn! Keep an eye out for flooded fields in your area. You never know what you might find.

Speaking of shorebirds, another one of our early spring migrants is a fan favorite. The American Woodcock. This unique bird arrives in early March and can be found in prairies across Indiana. Although they are extremely well hidden during the day, they put on quite a show in the evening. This incredible shorebird, has a mating display that includes beautiful "sky dances" by the males. If you are interested in seeing some American Woodcocks in action, be sure to check out one of our three upcoming Woodcock Walk events.

Tree Swallows will be swooping through the skies around your favorite local ponds by mid-March, with Barn Swallows not too far behind. As March comes to a close, we will see many of the waterfowl species move north. Common Loon migration will peak during March, and lingering ducks will continue through April.

April is when things really kick into gear across central Indiana. Hermit Thrush migration will be at its peak, and other songbirds will begin to arrive. Warblers such as Louisiana Waterthrush, Black-and-White Warbler, and Northern Parula will be hunting in their preferred habitats for bugs to fuel their journey north. Our overwintering sparrows will begin to migrate north, with the nesting sparrows for our region taking their place.

It is almost time to trade out your snow boots for your favorite pair of hiking boots. Get out to check your favorite local parks for those early signs of spring, and don't forget to attend an ABAS field trip or featured local hike. I hope to see you on the trails enjoying the spectacle of early spring migration!



*Tree Swallows, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Northern Parula photos courtesy of Amy Hodson*

## Behind The Lens – Adam Wilson

*Note from the Editor: I am excited to feature Adam Wilson as this issue's featured photographer. Adam is an excellent local photographer. He and his wife, Sara, also lead the "Greenfield Birders" on local hikes. Be sure to check out the regularly scheduled hikes section in this and future newsletters to see where they will be next!*

**Editor: How and why did you get into bird photography?**

**Adam:** While in South Carolina for a wedding, we visited the Audubon Swamp near Magnolia Plantation & Gardens. We went to see some gators and left enthralled with birds. The swamp is a rookery for Anhingas and a number of heron and egret species. After that experience, we came home and purchased binoculars and my first point-and-shoot; a Nikon Coolpix P600.

**Editor: Is there a specific species that sparked your interest in trying to photograph birds?**

**Adam:** Anhinga! Hands-down. Final answer. This is my and my wife's spark-bird. Getting to watch two of them courting while in South Carolina blew my mind. Heck, my license plate is "ANHNGA".

**Editor: March and April mark the beginning of spring migration in Indiana. Is there a location you love to take photos at during this time of the year?**

**Adam:** I really enjoy shooting locally around Greenfield and try to get out almost every day during migration. Thornwood Nature Preserve is my favorite corner of my patch. We also have a bird housing project at Beckenholdt Park in Greenfield, so I spend a lot of time there too. However, Eagle Creek has a way of turning up massive amounts of warblers and fun finds, so I certainly visit there a few times.

This year I plan on taking my second trip ever to Shawnee State Forest, in Ohio, to shoot warblers as well. Many of them nest there.

**Editor: What photograph are you proudest of, and why?**

**Adam:** Wow, what a tough question. This is kind of like, 'what's your favorite bird?' My answer is constantly changing. That being said, I think I'm going to answer this question by not answering this question – haha.

**Editor: What is the best tip you have learned about bird photography?**

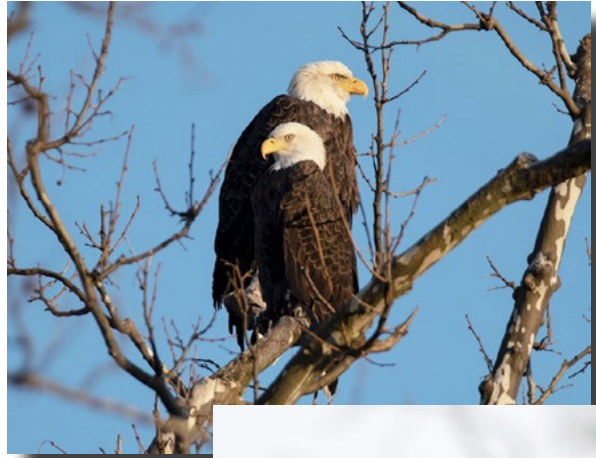
**Adam:** Make your body a steady base, like a tripod. I have learned, over the past year, how much body positioning and balance plays in your photos. It's possible to push the limits of your gear to cleaner-looking captures and shooting at lower shutter-speeds (when needed) by having a solid base.

**Editor: If you could travel anywhere in the world to photograph birds, where would you go?**

**Adam:** I feel like there is a correct answer, but I'm not going to over-think this one. Costa Rica. I can't wait to go there and have my eyes melt-with-amazement at all of the amazing species.

**Editor: Where can we find more of your photography?**

**Adam:** You can find and follow me on Instagram @NikonBirdHunter or just google NikonBirdHunter. I also post monthly on www.RogueBirders.com where I pair beers with birds, if that's your kinda thing.



*Bald Eagles, Cassin's Vireo, Red Crossbill, and Bohemian Waxwings photos courtesy of Adam Wilson*

## *Special Donations*

*In memory of William Steinmetz  
by his daughter, Louise Haskett*

*Wood Warbler Coffee*

*A double corporate match to the  
Permanent Fund by Jo Ann Bule*



# How Birdability Came to Be: An Ongoing Story You Can Be Part of!

By Freya McGregor

Once upon a time, a woman with a spinal cord injury who uses a wheelchair to get around discovered birding. Along with the joy of the actual birds, she discovered the fun of being part of a like-minded community, the perfect kind of exercise (that doesn't really feel like exercise), and the health and wellness benefits of being in nature. She also discovered a huge sense of empowerment and feeling of accomplishment when she could go birding on an accessible trail, by herself, without someone there to help her over roots or up a step... And that empowerment stayed with her off the trail and came with her into her everyday life.

## I can do this. I can do this! I can do this.

She realized that anybody with a mobility challenge, whether because they use a wheelchair, or they have grumpy joints that slow them down, could get the same sense of empowerment out of going birding. So she set about finding those people in her hometown of Austin, Texas, and introducing birding to them.

## Her name is Virginia Rose, and she called her effort "Birdability."



Virginia Rose in her wheelchair photo courtesy of Mike Fernandez, National Audubon Society. Overlook Boardwalk courtesy of Freya McGregor. Freya McGregor courtesy of Patrick Oaks.

That was in 2018. Fast forward two and a half years, and the stars aligned. National Audubon Society had heard about her efforts, birding and disability magazines interviewed her for articles, and she began a network of Birdability Captains all over the country — people who wanted to be actively engaged in this work. Birdability Week happened in October 2020, and as of January 14th 2021, Birdability is now a registered non-profit, with a national (and international!) scope, and a full-time staff member at the helm! (That's me.)

I started out as a Birdability Captain, and Virginia 'promoted' me to Admiral because of my work coordinating Birdability Week... and following up with all the wonderful interest and engagement that came after it. As an Occupational Therapist (OT), my job is to enable people to participate in the activities of everyday life that are meaningful to them, despite any limitations caused by an illness, injury, disability or mental health concern. (A friend recently summarized OTs as professional problem-solvers and professional optimists, and that's it, I think!)

This work with Birdability fits in perfectly. It's not a traditional, clinical role for an OT (in a hospital, or a pediatric therapy clinic, for example), but we're modifying the environment, adapting equipment, and teaching new skills, so it's definitely OT! And what everyday activity could be more meaningful than birding?!

**Birdability** focuses on removing barriers to access for birders with mobility challenges, blindness or low vision, intellectual or developmental disabilities (including autism), mental illness, being deaf or hard of hearing and other health concerns. We do this through educating the birding community about disability (because the social environment must support participation), and how to be welcoming and inclusive birders. We educate, advocate and consult on the physical environment of birding — how accessible is that trail? (Hint: there's a lot more to it than just being paved.) Does the nature center have accessible bathrooms? What about the bird blind? Can wheelchair users get in there too?

We also work to bring the joys and empowerment of birding that Virginia experienced to people who have disabilities or other health concerns. It's not just the fun of seeing or hearing birds, or the social benefits of being part of a like-minded community, or even the health and wellness benefits humans receive from

spending time in nature. But when someone can get out — on their own — and get totally absorbed on a trail or not have to worry about asking someone for help, there is so much empowerment to gain. Especially for folks who oftentimes need some help doing everyday things like showering or dressing — there is so much potential for independence and growing in self-confidence outside, through birding. And we want everybody to have the opportunity to experience that.

Our website is full of resources and information to educate and empower anyone who wishes to join us in this work. There's information on:

- What features make up an actually accessible trail;
- Ideas for you to be a more welcoming and inclusive birder;
- Tips and resources for birders who are blind or have low vision;
- Links to articles and webinars to learn more about birding with a disability;
- Our upcoming events (including monthly virtual accessible field trips, held in partnership with Georgia Audubon);



- The Birdability Map (a crowd-sourced map of accessible birding locations, with details of the accessibility features of them);
- Ways you can get involved and support our work, and much more.

We are so excited to do this work, and have received so much amazing feedback already. "Thank you for starting this conversation; I finally feel seen and cared about," said one birder with a disability. An able-bodied birder said, "I'm so grateful for you sharing all these resources. I want to be inclusive, but I didn't know how. Thank you for showing me how to better serve my community."

So sign up for our monthly newsletter, follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, donate if you're able... And together, let's make sure that birding truly is for everybody and every body!

*Freya McGregor, OTR/L, is the Birdability Coordinator and Occupational Therapist. Birding since childhood, her 'dodgy' knee often creates an accessibility challenge for her, and she is passionate about enabling all birders and potential future birders to enjoy birding and nature as much as she does.*

## Amos Butler Audubon Society Chapter Supporter Membership

### Membership benefits:

- 100% of your dues support local Audubon educational programs and urban conservation projects
- *Audubon LifeLines*, the chapter newsletter
- Workshops and entertaining monthly program meetings

One-year individual membership \$25

Two-year individual membership \$45

One-year household membership \$40

Two-year household membership \$75

Lifetime individual membership \$500

Lifetime membership goes to Permanent Fund

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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**Make checks payable to: Amos Butler Audubon Society**

Mail to: ABAS Membership Chair

P.O. Box 80024

Indianapolis, IN 46280

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## Amos Butler Audubon Society

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**Ted Meyer**, *Treasurer, Past President,  
Executive Committee, Membership Chair,  
Website Coordinator*

**Joanna Woodruff**, *Recording Secretary,  
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### Additional Committee Chairs:

**Donna McCarty**, *Birdathon Chair*



*Our mission: To promote the enjoyment and  
stewardship of the birds of Central Indiana*

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