

# Jack Pine *Warbler*

*THE SUMMER ISSUE:* The Friendly Flyer: Purple Martin ■ Making Life Better for Birds ■  
UPDATE: Duck Lake Fire ■ Keeping Cats Indoors



# Jack Pine Warbler

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Cover Photo ■ Purple Martin

**Photographer: Eric Vogt | ericvogtphoto.com**

Eric took this photo in May 2012 on a one day workshop with Canon Explorer of Light and bird photography teacher, Arthur Morris. He used a Canon 7D with the following settings; lens: Canon 400mm f/5.6 L + 1.4x extender, aperture: f/14, shutter speed: 1/250 sec and ISO: 400.

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## MICHIGAN AUDUBON CONNECTS BIRDS AND PEOPLE FOR THE BENEFIT OF BOTH ...

... through conservation, education, and research efforts in the state of Michigan. Formed and incorporated in 1904, it is Michigan's oldest conservation organization. Michigan Audubon supports bird surveys throughout the state, publishes survey data, provides educational opportunities, and preserves nearly 5,000 acres of land within 19 sanctuaries as habitat for birds and other wildlife. The 41 chapters of Michigan Audubon focus on local conservation issues and provide educational programs within their communities. Contributions to Michigan Audubon are tax-deductible.

# Executive Director's Letter



## SUMMER

"The people in this room have over 500 years of combined birding experience!"

That was Zak Branigan, my counterpart at the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy, reporting the results of a group exercise in Pinconning. About 30 people attended the session, which focused on planning efforts for the soon-to-be-launched Saginaw Bay Birding Trail. In response to Zak's question, I divulged that my first wildlife interests growing up were reptiles, fish, and insects. My newest nature curiosity is the world of moths. The truth is, I've been a devoted birder for only the past 10 years. I wondered how the combined figure changes when we ask a slightly different question, such as:

"How long have you been chasing butterflies or dragonflies?"

"How long have you studied reptiles and amphibians?"

"How long have you been identifying forest floor fungi?"

If your years of study as a naturalist have been largely devoted to birds, I encourage you to explore more this summer. July and August is the time when breeding season is wrapping up and our woods and fields are, generally speaking, less birdy. These same habitats are a visual feast for those who are willing to explore them for other taxa. Visit your local library and check out a field guide for something other than birds. Venture into a habitat and try identifying some of these fascinating plants and animals:

Beetles and Sedges;

Grasshoppers and Conifers;

Snakes, Forbs, or Frogs.

Earlier this year, Michigan Audubon urged nature-lovers throughout the state to voice concern over a piece of legislation that could threaten our state's diversity of flora and fauna. If signed into law, Senate Bill 78 will redefine "conservation" and restrict

or remove the ability of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to consider Michigan's biodiversity when managing nearly 4 million acres of state forests. The Department acknowledges in its 2012 report on forest health that our state "offers unique ecosystems and land uses, and one of the most diverse forests in the United States." Senate Bill 78, which currently resides in the House Committee on Natural Resources, threatens the biological diversity that we all value. Birdwatchers, hunters, wildflower enthusiasts—we should all continue to pay close attention to the status of this bill, and be discussing it with our legislators while they are home for summer recess.

I look forward to replicating Zak's exercise in the coming months, asking members and friends how long they've been into birding, mushroom-hunting, obsessively

identifying plants, and more. I also plan to spend as much time as possible wading streams and walking fields, flipping rocks and sweeping grasses with my insect net. These experiences are not only fulfilling, but help me prepare for future conversations with our state's decision-makers, some of which will be challenging.

Summer is truly a time to discover new worlds, but also to appreciate and share the great wealth of nature that is found here in the Great Lakes State.

Best regards,

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Jonathan E. Lutz, Executive Director



Top-Bottom: Green Tree Frog, Monarch Butterfly, Blue Racer.  
© Michigan Audubon

# Making Life Better for Birds: Peg and Tom Comfort

BY HOWARD MEYERSON

**T**om and Peg Comfort have a lot in common: an appreciation of natural places, a love of Torch Lake where they make their home and a strong dedication to making life better for birds, loons and bluebirds most especially.

The Comforts, now in their 60's, grew up in an era when environmental activism was in its infancy and when Jack Kerouac, the American novelist and poet, assailed the imaginations of young idealists all over the country. Peg Comfort grew up in Chicago. Tom Comfort grew up there, too. Each today is involved in exacting work to help their favorite bird populations.

"I think globally and act locally" said Peg Comfort, president of White Pine Associates, an environmental consulting firm. She is also founder of The Loon Network ([loonnetwork.org](http://loonnetwork.org)), a project of Michigan Audubon and a public forum about loons nesting in the Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed. The network covers a 500-square-mile area in Charlevoix, Antrim, Kalkaska and Grand Traverse counties where nine of 14 lakes now support nesting loons.

"They are beautiful and their calls are haunting; it's the call of the wilderness," Peg Comfort said. She has banded 40 of the watershed's loons in an effort to help researchers track the population, and works to educate the public about how to protect nesting loons since they are sensitive to disturbance on the water.

"One of the biggest problems is that people drive loons off their nests chasing them. People like to see them dive," Peg said.

"Kayakers can get in even closer than fishing boats. What paddlers don't realize is when a loon makes a yodeling call, or flaps its wings, they are saying: 'Stay away. You're too close.'"

Tom Comfort has helped Peg with banding loons, but the retired mechanical engineer and founder of Antrim Consulting Group is primarily a bluebird enthusiast. He has an especially sharp eye for nest-box details and spends hours each week maintaining a 45-mile

bluebird nest-box trail with 23 stops, traveling by scooter. He personally has fledged 167 bluebirds.

"I'm a nest box junkie," Tom Comfort said. He is the Michigan Bluebird Society's Antrim, Charlevoix and Kalkaska county coordinator and a board member for the North American Bluebird Society.

"The feeling I get drinking a cup of coffee and watching a mom and dad



Peg Comfort and Joe Kaplan banding loons in the Elk River Chain of Lakes Watershed. © 2012 The Loon Network.



(bluebird) go out of the box, or watching the young ones grow over 18 days as a result of something I've done, is huge. You just don't get that in real life."

Tom's nest boxes have been lauded as smart, clean designs that improve survival for bluebirds. His plans draw on decades of development by Minnesota bluebirders, including the late Dick Peterson, founder of the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program, and Steve Gilbertson. Gilbertson, he says, will end up in the Smithsonian "as the most influential living human being" to have a positive effect on bluebirds.

"Tom's boxes, bar none, are the best I've ever seen," said Joe Kaplan, a loon researcher and principal in Common Coast Research and Conservation in Hancock, a loon conservation and research organization. Kaplan has worked with Peg Comfort banding loons. He has come to know Tom Comfort over the years.

"I've been putting boxes up for 20 years and never thought twice about it," Kaplan said. "He (Tom) critiqued mine and said I should 'put them in the wood stove.'"

"But he's kind of won me over. He's not into it for recognition. Neither is Peg. They are just in it for the end result and don't have time for nonsense."

Tom Comfort said although Michigan's bluebird population remains stable, there is



[michiganbluebirdsociety.org](http://michiganbluebirdsociety.org)

Tom Comfort is the Michigan Bluebird Society's Antrim, Charlevoix and Kalkaska County coordinator and a board member for the North American Bluebird Society.  
© Tom Comfort.



a need for ongoing conservation effort. The nest boxes are surrogates for a diminishing abundance of cavity trees. The challenge, he suggested, will be finding the next generation of caretakers. Most all that do the work now have gray hair.

The Comforts met as teenagers on the shores of Torch Lake, where they spent summers with their respective families. That led to a few "practice marriages," according to Tom. The couple also spent two years in the 1970's travelling the country in a truck they called "The Mayflower." Their son, Rob, lives in Minnesota. Today they share their home with two Labrador retrievers.

Peg attributes her love of loons to a canoe trip she took to the Minnesota Boundary Waters in 1972. She was 25 years old and became smitten by their calls. But her environmental activism was spurred by meeting the late Sigurd Olson in 1974.

Olson was a canoe guide who spent much of his life working to protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA). He was a gifted writer, college dean, and staunch proponent for designating the area as federal wilderness. Olson later became president of The Wilderness Society and the National Parks Conservation Association. His legacy is carried on today by the Sigurd Olson Environmental Institute at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin.

"He testified at the first public hearing (about BWCA designation) and got involved with political battle for wilderness," Peg Comfort said. "I was

fortunate enough to meet him. That was a life-changer."

That transformation shaped much of who Peg Comfort is today. Environmental matters remain of utmost importance, at least when she's not out gardening.

"She is kind of an idealist gal from the 1960's and we live in a pretty conservative world now," Kaplan said. "In today's political environment doing conservation is not fun. But she has very deep convictions. She's a pretty tough lady and has a real common sense approach to conservation. Her commitment to it and passion are amazing."

Peg describes herself as "an English major naturalist." She got her bachelor's degree in American Studies at Purdue University and her master's degree in Environmental Studies from Bemidji State University. She taught high-school science for years before forming her own environmental consulting firm.

"My real interest is in the natural world," she said. "I am a naturalist by nature and have been one since childhood. I love loons because they are ancient. They have survived climate change, world wars and glaciation and adapted to all kinds of change."

Howard Meyerson is a lifelong outdoor enthusiast, a freelance writer and photographer in Michigan, and the outdoors columnist for MLive Media Group. His work also appears in *Michigan Outdoor News* and other outdoor publications. He can be reached at [howardmeyerson@gmail.com](mailto:howardmeyerson@gmail.com).





A Black-backed Woodpecker using a nest cavity in the burn area.  
©Skye Haas 2013

## UPDATE: Duck Lake Fire of 2012

BY WILLIAM RAPAI

**F**ire is a natural part of Michigan's landscape, from the lightning-generated wildfires that swept across the jack pine barrens prior to European settlement to the prescribed, small-scale burns we humans perform to eliminate control woody plants on restored prairies.

So, at first glance, there should be nothing unusual about the Duck Lake Fire of 2012—other than its size. That fire started May 24 as a result of a lightning strike 14 miles north of Newberry in the Upper Peninsula and burned more than 21,000 acres, which makes it the third largest wildfire in Michigan history. The fire area covered about 34 square miles north from M-123 to Lake Superior, a distance of almost 14 miles, and reached five miles wide in places.

But a closer look shows that the Duck Lake Fire was also one of the most destructive wildfires in Michigan history, burning so hot that it will take years—if not decades—for plants and animals in some areas to recover. That's because the fire burned so hot in some areas that it sterilized the soil, removing all the nutrients and killing off the microorganisms that help seeds to germinate and plants to grow.

Generally speaking, fire dominant ecosystems are built to withstand the stresses of an occasional conflagration; one study showed that the jack pine barrens in the northern Lower Peninsula historically burned every 30 to 40 years. Once a fire removes the crowns of trees and opens the canopy in the jack pine ecosystem, sunlight reaches the ground and plants that may have been dormant for 30 years spring back to life. Eventually the trees grow up to shade out the understory, which goes dormant, and the forest is now ready for its next round of fire.

But Adrienne Bozic, Upper Peninsula regional stewardship organizer for the Michigan Nature Association (MNA), who is studying the effects of the fire on MNA's Swamp Lakes Moose Refuge and the surrounding area in Luce County, said two factors caused the Duck Lake Fire to be more destructive than an average wildfire. First a prolonged drought caused the Upper Peninsula to be drier than usual. Second, because of past fire suppression efforts, there was a buildup of dead wood and leaf litter on the forest floor. The lightning strike may have caused the fire to start in a bog, but once it reached the drier pine forest growing on sandy soil it was off and running.

"Typically fire moves through at a much decreased intensity—fast and quick and doesn't burn as hot and as intensively," Bozic said.



“So much fuel had built up that it burned really hot and really long.”

Usually a ground fire burns only the top quarter inch of soil, Bozic said. But in some places, the Duck Lake Fire destroyed all the organic matter and microorganisms for some depth. Particularly damaging will be the loss of the mycorrhizal fungus that is critical in the lifecycle of many species. The fungus has a symbiotic relationship with plants, helping them to absorb nutrients.

Bozic points to the Kingston Plains area in Alger County, as an example of what might happen to areas of the Duck Lake Fire. Soils on the Kingston Plains were sterilized by slash and burn logging in the early 20th century. “It has been 100 years and nothing is growing there,” Bozic said.

Rick Baetsen, a retired employee of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said the fire burned so hot that it melted the aluminum rims on the car and the aluminum sides of the camper trailer that were parked on his property. (Aluminum melts at 1,220 degrees Fahrenheit.)

Surprisingly, within two weeks of the end of the fire, there were already signs of life. Bracken fern was the first plant to sprout from the blackened soil. Insects returned shortly after that. The fresh crop of tender plants lured in white-tailed deer and black bear despite the lack of cover. By the end of summer, a new generation of pine trees had begun to grow.

Baetsen said he visited his property over the winter, and despite three feet of snow on the ground, he hiked in from where he parked his car on the road. Along the way, he was surprised to see snowshoe hare and wolf tracks.

Even in the areas where the fire burned most intensely there are signs of life. Only days after the fire was brought under control, bark beetles moved in to eat the damaged trees. And where there are insects, there are insect-eating birds—including the Black-backed Woodpecker, a species a special concern in Michigan.

Sherry MacKinnon, a wildlife ecologist in the Michigan Department of Natural Resources’ Newberry office, said her department has hired timber companies to salvage many of the remaining damaged trees, but is leaving some for the Black-backed Woodpecker. That woodpecker species is associated with burned areas because one of its primary foods—the bark beetle—attacks trees damaged by fire.

Besides helping the woodpecker, MacKinnon believes the fire will benefit Spruce Grouse and Kirtland’s Warbler. In the summer, the grouse prefer young transitional forests that have small trees and blueberries growing in a dense understory. As a result, the grouse will have adequate habitat for years to come.

The warbler will also have a vast amount of new habitat, but that that’s a good-news, bad-news situation for the DNR. The



A view of the Two-Hearted River from the burned area in July 2012. © Jonathan E. Lutz.

Kirtland’s Warbler prefers to nest on the ground beneath jack pine trees between 5 and 20 years old. Because of the fire, thousands of acres will become nesting habitat all at once. Twenty years from now, however, those same thousands of acres of jack pine will all be too old for nesting. MacKinnon points out that foresters usually rotate jack pine habitat on a 30 to 40 year basis and cut tracts on a staggered schedule to ensure there is always young jack pine habitat for the warbler. Although it’s possible to cut the jack pines at a younger age to ensure there will be nesting habitat in the future, the state will be forced to do so at a loss since young jack pines have practically no economic value.

There’s also a threat to this newly disturbed ecosystem: invasive species. Many plants that are not native to North America have adaptations that allow them to move into disturbed areas quickly and effectively. If the non-natives are able to enter the area before the native plants, the landscape could be altered forever. Bozic fears that it will be impossible to eliminate spotted knapweed if it gets established.

To help the recovery effort, Baetsen said he has already planted 2,500 trees on his property, with the goal of eventually planting 10,000. However, he admits that he made a mistake last fall, when he planted cedars in a boggy part of his property.

“The DNR told us that the density of white-tailed deer (in the area) was so low that (planting cedars) wouldn’t be a problem,” he said. “But the deer moved back into the area...I might have well put the cedar trees into a pile and said, ‘cedar lunch!’”

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William Rapai is president of Grosse Pointe Audubon and the author of “The Kirtland’s Warbler: The Story of a Bird’s Fight Against Extinction and The People Who Saved It”.

# Fly the Friendly Skies With a Friendly Bird

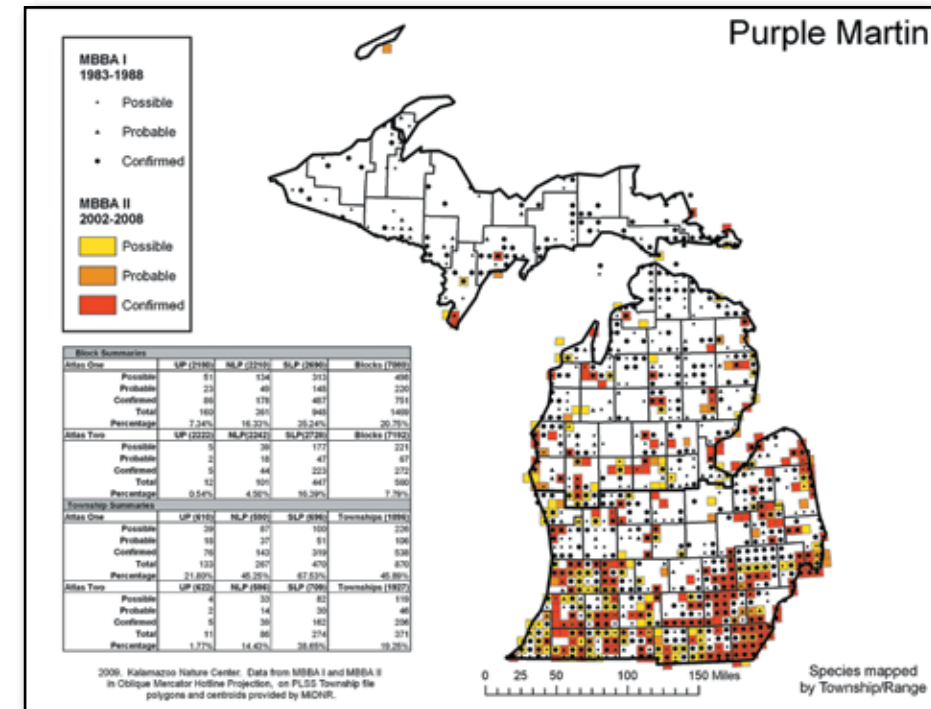
BY TORREY WENGER

Perhaps no other bird in North America is as well loved as the Purple Martin. The bluebird has its supporters, the turkey and ducks have whole societies, but for sheer dedication, Purple Martin landlords have them all beat. Stories abound of landlords trying for years to attract a nesting colony and of people flinging crickets into the air to feed their martins during cold snaps. For their part, Purple Martins are perfectly willing to live in human-made housing in human-dominated landscapes.

The largest of our swallows, weighing in at over twice that of a Barn Swallow, the Purple Martin is a bit of a specialist. It likes fairly open habitat, especially near water, and it requires an existing nesting cavity. While housing manufacturers tout the martin's mosquito-eating prowess, mosquitoes account for a measly 3 percent (or less!) of its diet. Large birds prefer large prey and Purple Martins prefer dragonflies and damselflies, both mosquito predators, rather than the insignificantly sized pest.

As any landlord could tell you, Purple Martins exhibit site fidelity, returning to the same area each year. The oldest birds return first and claim the best nesting sites. As the younger martins arrive, they get the less-preferred sites. Once a colony outgrows its location, the "overflow" birds have to find new cavities somewhere else. This site loyalty can cause problems. If a colony succumbs to bad weather, that location can go unclaimed until excess birds from a different colony discover it.

Unfortunately, Purple Martins are declining in our state, so overflow birds are hard to find. Comparing the two Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas



Purple Martin Comparison of MBBA I and MBBA II.  
© 2012 Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas.

periods (1980s and 2000s), these large and noticeable birds were found in 40 percent fewer townships. The decline is steepest in the north: In the Upper Peninsula, occupied townships fell from 133 to only 11, a drop of more than 90 percent. The Breeding Bird Survey has also documented this species' difficulties, showing an annual decline of 8.2 percent in Michigan. The survey-wide trend is an annual decline of 0.5 percent, so the core population seems to be doing fine. At the edge of the range, the story is different.

There are several theories about why this species is in trouble. The first is, of course, the weather. Martins are aerial insectivores, catching bugs in midair. A prolonged cold snap, especially with rain, means insects aren't flying and so martins aren't eating. (Hence the dedicated landlords flinging crickets.) Cold wet conditions are responsible for more mortality than all the other causes combined. With our erratic weather over the last few decades, the lack of martins in northern Michigan is not surprising.

Other limiting factors include nest competitors (House Sparrows and European Starlings), predators at the nest especially (since one hungry raccoon

can wipe out a whole colony's young), and pesticides (fewer bugs means less food, and poisoned bugs can pass those poisons on to their predators).

Luckily, helping Purple Martins is easy. It begins with using fewer outdoor chemicals and continues with putting up housing (and diligent "landlording"). If you're interested, check out Michigan Purple Martins online at [www.michiganmartins.com](http://www.michiganmartins.com). Penny Briscoe, manager of a successful colony near Vicksburg for over 20 years, has shared her tips at the annual Michigan Bird Conservation Initiative conferences. Once you have the Purple Martin bug, you're never quite the same.

The Purple Martin is just one of over 200 species featured in the two editions of the Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas, available online at [www.mibirdatlas.org](http://www.mibirdatlas.org). Each species has a map showing the results of both atlases, so changes over the intervening two decades can be easily seen.

Torrey Wenger, a volunteer with the Kalamazoo Nature Center's Kalamazoo Valley Bird Observatory, has been a birder since college. Her favorite early migrant is the Prothonotary Warbler. Contact her at [torrey.canyon@gmail.com](mailto:torrey.canyon@gmail.com).



# Book Review

## A Comparison of Eastern Region Field Guides

BY WENDY TATAR

**W**hen I'm working in Michigan Audubon's Nature Bookstore at our Signature Events, I'm often asked which field guide I prefer. My standard reply is something like, "Each person has their own personal favorite, and the one I prefer might not be to your liking."

I know that's not a very good answer, but it's true. That's because the choice of a field guide is like choosing a song for your first dance at your wedding reception or to be played at your funeral—it's intensely personal. So, given that each person has their own personal favorite, I'm going to compare the top five field guides here so you can make your own decision.

The five most popular field guides for eastern North America in no particular order are *Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern and Central North America*, *National Geographic's Field Guide to the Birds of Eastern North America*, *The New Stokes Field Guide to Birds Eastern Region*, *The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds*, and *The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Eastern North America*. All but the Stokes and Crossley guides have illustrations of birds. All but the Sibley guide have been updated in the last five years; the Crossley guide is in its first edition.

The Peterson guide is now in its sixth edition. Many birders grew up with this field guide because it was the only one out there at the time, and they still use it. It has good illustrations and it uses arrows to draw your attention to key identification markings. This edition was published in 2010 and it presents birds in taxonomic order beginning with ducks, geese and swans. Previous editions had range maps in the back of the book, but this edition has them on the pages with bird descriptions and has added enhanced range maps in the back. The edition also provides owners with online educational podcasts. I have not seen the podcasts, but reviewers say that it has fuzzy pictures.

National Geographic's guide was published in 2008, and it also lists birds in taxonomic order. It has a quick find index flap inside the front cover that also acts as a place holder, and thumbtabs to speed your access to bird families. Identification tip boxes help with challenging species, and key identification markings are pointed out on the incredible illustrations.

The newest guide, published this spring, is from Don and Lillian Stokes. Because it's so new, it contains the most recent taxonomic order from the American Ornithologists' Union, which includes major changes to the warbler family. Great photos, with several for each species, accompany the text. This guide also contains identification tip boxes and a quick index inside the cover. It has a helpful color tab index to bird groups. Previous editions included conservation status for each species, but that information has been removed from this edition.

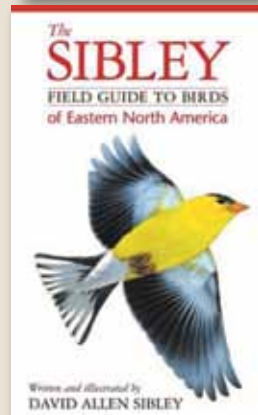
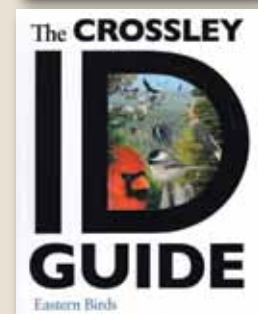
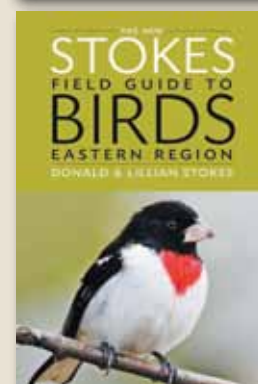
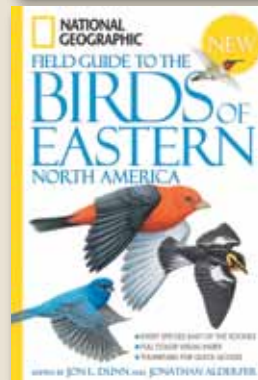
The Crossley ID Guide was reviewed in the *Jack Pine Warbler* in 2011 (Vol. 88, No. 5). This guide has received mixed reviews; some folks love it, others despise it. Author Richard Crossley has taken many photos of each bird species in different poses: flying, at a great distance, and close up. He has then used Photoshop to put the birds into their habitats. It is not a book that you would carry in the field as it is very large (7.5 inches x 10 inches) and heavy. All the other guides would fit well in a field bag or large pocket. When a troublesome identification comes into the office I have used this guide to verify my thoughts. It is a great book to have at home to browse through and can teach us all a little more about birds. The book does not follow taxonomic classification order. Instead of grouping by ducks, geese and swan, the book groups them all together as "swimming waterbirds." The guide also provides Alpha Codes for the individual birds, which is helpful to those that come across the shorthand version of names and need assistance to figure out which bird is being talked about.

The Sibley Guide was published in 2003 and a revision is due to update to the latest taxonomic order. The taxonomic order in this book starts with Loons and Grebes. The book has the wonderful illustrations of author David Sibley with identification comparison pages throughout. It has a flap on the front and back covers that can be used to mark pages.

Now that you have an idea what's in each field guide, I hope you can find the one that's best for you.

Wendy Tatar is Michigan Audubon's Education Coordinator.

All of these field guides are available from the Michigan Audubon Nature Bookstore.



# Chapter Spotlight



## Blue Water Audubon Society

**B**lue Water Audubon Society was formed in 1955 and originally named the Port Huron Audubon Society. The group came together to promote wildlife conservation and preservation, especially in the field of ornithology. Within a month the group had 45 members. The following year members of the society participated in their first Christmas Bird Count, an event they have continued to be involved in every year since.

In 1957, the group had grown to 189 members and was renamed the Blue Water Audubon Society (BWAS). BWAS changed their focus to the community and education by setting up booths at local sportsman's shows and hosting public nature hikes and birding programs. They became prominent in their community and established strong ties with the Michigan Audubon Society, Michigan Nature Association, Lambton Wildlife Club and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Now the BWAS focuses on four activities: bird banding, Cerulean Warbler surveying, the St. Clair County Earth Fair and the Christmas Bird Count.

The BWAS has been involved in bird banding since the 1970s, and it puts on regular bird banding demonstrations for the public. At those events, banders take time to educate the public on which species they have caught and the challenges these birds may face.

In 2010, BWAS started collecting data on the Cerulean Warbler population in the Thumb. Bob Haas, BWAS member and retired DNR biologist, developed a protocol for surveying for the Cerulean Warbler and found surprisingly high numbers of the bird along the Black River. Haas and the BWAS are now working with Caleb Putnam, the program coordinator of the Michigan Important Bird Areas, and the Michigan Natural Features Inventory to get the area certified as an Important Bird Area.

To stay connected with the community, BWAS started participating in the St. Clair County Earth Fair in 2007. At the fair, BWAS members help Earth Fair visitors to build a bird feeder from recycled bottles. The activity is free and so far the group has given away 6,500 bird feeders! BWAS volunteers also educate Earth Fair participants on placement and type of seed to put in the feeder depending on the time of year and birds the new owner would like to attract.

The group regularly goes on field trips to Harsen's Island, Beards Hill's State Game Area and Lakeport State Park. Monthly meetings are held on the first Monday of the month October through May, and usually include a presentation on bird related topics and conservation. The group is always looking for new members of any age and birding experience. The BWAS has had a rich history and continues to add value to its community through research, education and volunteerism.

### Contact information

Janet Fox, President

Email: [janetrfox@icloud.com](mailto:janetrfox@icloud.com)

Connect on Facebook: Blue Water Audubon Society Group

### Meeting Information:

Location: Blue Water Free Methodist Church

1963 Allen Road, Kimball, Mich. 48074

Time: 6:45 p.m.

When: First Monday of every month October through May



Students from the Port Huron School District attend the 2013 Earth Fair filling up bird feeders made from recycled plastic bottles. BWAS members Janet Fox, Bob Haas, Beth Simon and Gail Daugherty Rebert work the assembly line. Over 1300 recycled bird feeders were given away at the two day event.  
© 2013 BWAS

# Keeping Cats Indoors: Biological Litter

BY GRANT SIZEMORE

**D**omestic cats are lovable companions—but they're also efficient predators. According to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, cats are capable of fundamentally altering an ecosystem into which they are introduced. Cats have played a role in the extinction of 33 species worldwide and are estimated by scientists from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to kill between 1.4 billion and 3.7 billion birds in the United States every year.

This avian massacre is perpetrated by both feral and owned cats. Feral cats spend all of their time outdoors and are generally not habituated to people. These cats are the castaways of irresponsible owners who no longer want to care for their pets. Once cast off, the cats are forced to find food however they can, and that's often by killing birds.

It's not just the feral cats that are a problem, though. Even well-fed cats owned by well-meaning people will kill wildlife, and many owners are either unaware of or indifferent to their pet's habits. A study by the University of Georgia found that nearly 80 percent of all kills by owned cats were not brought to the home. The problem is, cats cannot be untaught to hunt as hunger and hunting are not directly associated in a cat's brain. This physiological disconnect results in cats killing far more birds and other wildlife than predators that only kill to eat.

Despite the clear scientific evidence that points toward the necessity of keeping cats indoors or at least restricted from roaming, some people and organizations actively promote the maintenance of outdoor colonies of cats. These people favor a trap-neuter-return (TNR) program as a humane way to reduce the overpopulation of cats, rather than having the cats captured and euthanized. TNR activists perpetuate an ecological tragedy through a program that amounts to biological littering. TNR



Domestic cats, although lovable companions, are efficient non-native predators. © 123RF.

colonies not only hurt local birds and other wildlife, there is also no scientific evidence that the program works to reduce the feral cat population. On the contrary, studies have shown that some colonies have even experienced increased numbers of cats as a result of TNR. In fact, researchers studying a long-term TNR program in Rome went so far as to call TNR a waste of money, time, and energy.

So what can you do to protect birds and other wildlife in your area? Keep your cats indoors.

Restricting cats from roaming not only saves birds and other wildlife, it also protects cats and people. Indoor cats live three-to-five-times longer because they are not at constant risk of traumatic injury, death, or disease. By keeping cats safe indoors, you also reduce the risk of transmitting disease to people and you show that you respect your neighbors' rights to yards free of these predators and their feces.

It is time to support a change. Contact your local and state officials to request that they stop subsidizing trap-neuter-return programs.

Grant Sizemore is the Cats Indoors Program officer for the American Bird Conservancy. More information is available at American Bird Conservancy's website, <http://www.abcbirds.org/>.



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Scan this QR code to visit [MichiganAudubon.org](http://MichiganAudubon.org)







## Young Birders



Young Oakland Owlet learning birds by ear. © 2012 Oakland Owlets

# Introducing The Oakland Owlets

BY LISA MCARTHUR

When Oakland Audubon Society President Don Burlett first joined his organization, he noticed that he was the youngest person in the room—at age 54. He was shocked. Young people and families just didn't get involved. Burlett took it as a personal goal to change this. That is why he pushed to get a young birders group started and to make sure that a new generation of nature appreciators would be developed. Finding the right people to handle it was the first step.

I began helping with the young birders program after reading an article in the OAS newsletter. I felt the same way Don did about bringing in a younger generation. I attended one event that was co-hosted by the OAS and Oakland County Parks; it was a black lighting event looking at the different moths. I was completely surprised at all the families that were there and that when I thought that it was really possible to connect with the younger generations and that many of them are still interested in nature.

The planning process did take some time. We wanted to have enough events to ensure that we could keep the young birders interested and coming back. Working with other groups, including Oakland County

Parks and the Hawkwoods Nature Center in Auburn Hills, got us access to great displays and locations for events.

Next we looked at young birding programs around the country, which gave us basic guidelines on how to run a young birders program, the best age range to target and information on how to plan field trips. We noticed right away that we needed to use social media sites on the Internet, so Janet Hug, a coordinator for the young birder program, created an OAS Facebook page, blog and Twitter account.

We kicked off our young birders group at the Christmas Bird Count of 2012, asking young people to watch feeders at two locations. We had a good turnout at each event. We then started holding events every other month. We thought that Saturday would be the best day to have events because of school and extracurricular activities during the week.

The first event was held at Hawkwoods Nature Center in Auburn Hills with FlyingWILD coordinator Mike Mansour giving a presentation. We picked a name for the young birders group at this time The Oakland Owlets. Then we followed up with an event in March and April. As migration started we decided to have more events in May and June. We also wanted to bring the OAS and The Oakland Owlets together so we are having a combined meeting in October. Eventually we are hoping The Oakland Owlets and OAS will have more events together because of the great knowledge the OAS can offer the young birders as mentors.

Lisa McArthur has been birding for about 10 years and has worked on bird projects with schools and nature centers. She has been a member of Oakland Audubon Society since 2010.



Group shot of the Oakland Owlets with their mentors. © 2012 Oakland Owlets

# Special Thanks

We had another incredible Tawas Point Birding Festival this year. This event continues to grow and flourish because of the cooperative efforts of many people, organizations, and businesses. Michigan Audubon would like to thank all those who helped to support this event. Its success would not be possible without them!

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Au Sable Valley Audubon member and event volunteer, Bill Willis, prepares oranges for the orioles at Tawas Point State Park. © 2013 Wayne Pope Photography.

# We Welcome New Michigan Audubon Members

We thank you – our newest members as well as our renewing members – for your support of Michigan Audubon's bird conservation efforts. Please remember to check your magazine's expiration date and renew early. Members moving or changing to a seasonal residence should contact the office by e-mail, post, or phone so that we can update your address in our database.

Amy Kraus and Hardin Aasand  
Scott Addison  
Barbara Allen  
Barbara Andrews  
Richard Bailhe  
Mary and Steve Bender  
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## Calendar

Continuing through Sept. 22 Bird of Paradise Exhibit Dennon's Museum, Northwestern Michigan College, Traverse City

### July

- 18 **Evening Nature Walk**  
Bengel Wildlife Center, Bath
- 20 **Guided Nature Walk**  
Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary, Hastings
- 20 **Board of Directors Meeting**  
Marquette

### August

- 1 **Evening Nature Walk**  
Bengel Wildlife Center, Bath
- 3-4 **Saginaw Bay Waterfowl Festival**  
Bay City State Recreation Area,  
Bay City
- 10 **Guided Nature Walk**  
Lake Bluff Bird Sanctuary, Manistee
- 15 **Evening Nature Walk**  
Bengel Wildlife Center, Bath
- 17 **Guided Nature Walk**  
Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary, Hastings
- 17 **Birds, Blooms, and Butterflies**  
Dahlem Environmental Center, Jackson
- 29 **Evening Nature Walk**  
Bengel Wildlife Center, Bath

### September

- 7 **Guided Nature Walk**  
Baker Sanctuary, Bellevue
- 14 **Guided Nature Walk**  
Lake Bluff Bird Sanctuary, Manistee
- 19-22 **Midwest Birding Symposium**  
Lakeview, Ohio
- 21 **Guided Nature Walk**  
Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary, Hastings
- 21-22 **Hawkfest**  
Lake Erie Metropark,  
Brownstown Twp.



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# Announcements

## Thursday Evenings at the Bengel Wildlife Center

Summer is here, and Michigan Audubon will again offer evening nature walks at our home office at the Bengel Wildlife Center in Bath. The nature trails at Bengel take you through woods, prairie, and wetland, so there are many things to be seen. Although the nature center's trails are open dawn to dusk, for independent hiking, Michigan Audubon is hosting hikes Thursday evenings if you'd like to have a guide to help you with identification of plants and animals. On July 11 and 18 and Aug. 1, 15, and 29, a staff member or volunteer naturalist will lead hikes around the property at 7 p.m. (The walk on Aug. 29 will start at 6:30.) Bring binoculars and field guides and wear good walking shoes. Hikes will be cancelled in the event of rain.

## Birding Hotspot Tours

Caleb Putnam, Michigan's Important Bird Area coordinator, is leading weekend tours to Michigan birding hotspots that will knock your socks off. Birding destinations include:

- July 27-28—The Two-Hearted River wilderness in the Upper Peninsula, where you will search for Black-backed Woodpecker before heading to the Lake Superior shoreline to view Piping Plover. Alison Vilag will assist.
- Sept. 7-8—Migrating shorebirds and warblers will be the target species on a tour around Saginaw Bay. The tour will begin at Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge and end at Tawas Point State Park and be co-lead by Zak Branigan, director of the Saginaw Basin Land Conservancy.
- Sept. 21-22—A fall color/birding tour along M-22. This leisurely birding tour will begin at the Lake Bluff Bird Sanctuary and end in the Leelanau Peninsula. Brian Allen will be co-leader.
- Sept. 28—A "pelagic" tour of Lake Michigan. This is a unique opportunity to see rare gulls and other waterbirds. We've chartered a boat to take you out into the lake to see rare birds that you need for your Michigan list.
- Nov. 2-3—Birding Berrien Weekend. The tour will look for migratory waterbirds and rarities that show up with the gales of November.

## Birds, Blooms, and Butterflies

The Michigan Audubon Bookstore will again participate in Birds, Blooms, and Butterflies, a great event hosted by the Dahlem Nature Conservancy at the Dahlem Environmental Education Center in Jackson. The event has live birds of prey, hummingbird banding (morning only), butterfly tagging, hikes, workshops, and lots of craft activities for kids. Besides the Michigan Audubon Bookstore, vendors include sellers of native plants, bird seed, and bird houses/feeders. Best of all, the event is free! This year the event is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 17, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. For more information, visit the Dahlem Center's website at [dahlemcenter.org](http://dahlemcenter.org) or call 517-782-3453.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird ©123rf



Mallard ducklings ©Cory Gildersleeve

## Saginaw Bay Waterfowl Festival

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources and the Michigan Duck Hunters Association host this large festival geared toward waterfowl hunters. The event will include the 2014 Michigan Duck Stamp Competition, the Michigan Duck and Goose Calling Championship, a parent-youth canoe race, a wildlife art and craft show, a Wildlife Photography Contest for professionals, amateurs and youth, dog retrieving demonstrations, and puppy alley (breeders of sporting dogs will have puppies for sale), along with clinics and lots of activities for both youth and adults.

The event takes place in the day use area at the Bay City State Recreation Area (BCSRA) on Saturday, August 3 from 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. and Sunday, August 4 from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. A Recreation Passport is required for entry into the Recreation Area. BCSRA is located at 3582 State Park Drive in Bay City. For more event information check out the festival website at [www.friendsofspark.org](http://www.friendsofspark.org) or contact the BCSRA at 989-667-0717 or [saginawbaywaterfowl@gmail.com](mailto:saginawbaywaterfowl@gmail.com).

## Birds of Paradise Exhibit

The Dennon Museum Center at Northwestern Michigan College in Traverse City will host a traveling science exhibition, art show, and natural history display *Birds of Paradise: Amazing Avian Evolution*. The exhibit runs through Sept. 22. The exhibit was developed by the National Geographic Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

This exhibit tells the story of Tim Laman and Edwin Scholes' expeditions to document the lives and biology of all 39 known species of Birds of Paradise. The exhibit is a story of daring expeditions, world culture, and extreme evolution and conservation. The exhibit includes stunning imagery, compelling video, soundscapes, artifacts, and engaging educational activities for all ages.

Museum admission is \$10 for adults, \$5 for children or museum members. Museum hours are 10 a.m.- 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 1-5 p.m. on Sunday. The museum is open until 8 p.m. on Thursdays.

Wings of Wonder will present a free live birds of prey program as a participating partner in the exhibition at 1 p.m. on July 15, Aug. 15, and Sept. 15.

For more information, check the museum's website, [dennosmuseum.org](http://dennosmuseum.org), email them at [dmc@nmc.edu](mailto:dmc@nmc.edu) or call 231-995-1055.

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## Michigan Audubon Bookstore

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Information or phone orders **517-641-4277**



### The Joy of Birding: A Beginner's Guide

by Kate Rowinski

\$14.95

The introduction to this book delves into the difference between a bird-watcher and a birder, which starts the book off on the correct note. A good share of the book is dedicated to the backyard bird-watcher with chapters dedicated to bird feeding and backyard habitat. The author

also addresses learning the behaviors and songs/calls of birds to help with identification.



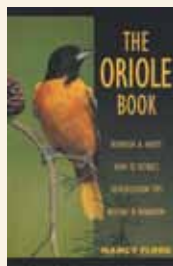
### The Complete Guide to Edible Wild Plants, Mushrooms, Fruits, and Nuts

by Katie Letcher Lyle

\$14.95

This book tells you how to identify and cook the most commonly found wild foods – recipes included! The author includes 15 plant species, nine species of mushrooms, 15 species of fruit,

seven types of flowers or herbs, four kinds of nuts, and 10 selections of “miscellaneous foraging” plants. Illustrations for most species and a few color photographs help with identification.



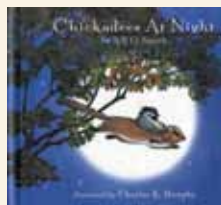
### The Oriole Book

by Nancy Flood

\$19.95

Everything you ever wanted to know about the genus *Icterus* – or New World Orioles. Flood details all the information you need to know about the genus as a whole and then addresses each member within the genus separately, although she does group the non-migratory species of the southwest United States into one small section

of the book named “Resident Orioles.” Beautiful photos and illustrations accompany the text.



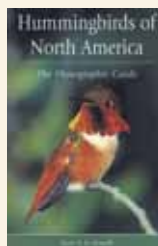
### Chickadees at Night

by Bill O. Smith; illustrated by Charles R. Murphy

\$18.85

Bill O. Smith is a Michigan author who has created a wonderful storybook for young children. The fanciful illustrations help the imagination answer the question – where do

chickadees go at night? End pages provide information “nuggets” on the cute little chickadee.



### Hummingbirds of North America: The Photographic Guide

By Steve N. G. Howell

\$29.95

This book claims to be the first ever to contain comprehensive photographs of all 24 species of hummingbirds seen in North America. The book contains over 200 photographs to help you with

identification. The introduction covers the basics of anatomy and plumage variation of hummers.

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