

Spring Banquet Set for March 29

We are looking forward to the largest attendance ever at our annual spring banquet, to be held at Chapman's Banquet Center at 5:30 p.m. on Sunday, March 29. The cost will be \$25. A social "half-hour" will begin at 5:30 followed by dinner at 6 p.m. Dinner will be followed by presentation of the Barbara Restle Award (for long-term service to SAS) and Don Whitehead Award (for outstanding contribution to conservation). The evening will conclude with a presentation by a special speaker. Please send the completed form on page 4 with your check to the SAS P.O. box for reservations. 🐦

CAN YOU NAME THAT BIRD

This fellow is one of the most frequent visitors to southern Indiana suet feeders. His name is confusing to beginning birders who are more impressed by the color of his head than his belly. The answer is on page 7.

Photo by Jeff Hammond



SAS Reaches Fairview Chimney Swift Tower Goal!

by Dawn Hewitt

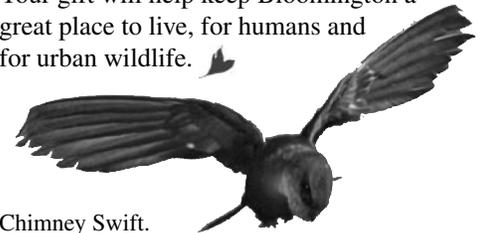
We did it! We met and exceeded our goal of funding one-third of the cost of a replacement tower to house Chimney Swifts when the Fairview School chimney is demolished.

The deal was that the Bloomington Urban Enterprise Association, the Foundation for Monroe County Schools, and the public — private donations — would split the cost of the new brick roost: about \$3,500 each. Sassafras Audubon Society agreed to collect funds from donors for the public share. Response has been amazing, with personal checks ranging from \$5 to \$500, from school neighbors to contributors across the country! Each one was important to making this a community project, since the human residents of Bloomington will benefit from providing summertime habitat for the mosquito-eating birds.

Private donations totaled \$3,040. Add to that SAS's gift of \$500 from their treasury, and we beat our goal by \$40!

The BUEA is good for their share, but the school foundation was struggling to come up with theirs. But late in December, Bloomington Mayor Mark Krusan said the city had a few year-end dollars they'd like to invest in this project, and they're kicking in \$3,500 also! So if the school foundation can't come up with their share, no big deal. We have enough to build the tower. Any surplus funds beyond building expenses can go toward landscaping, an interpretive plaque, a swift-cam, educational materials for local classrooms ... the educational opportunities are vast.

If you contributed to this project, thank you! Your gift will help keep Bloomington a great place to live, for humans and for urban wildlife. 🐦



Chimney Swift.
Photo by Dan Kaiser

Friends of Goose Pond — Spring Update

by Grace Chapman

Friends of Goose Pond would like to thank the many individuals who supported our first photo calendar. More than 350 copies were sold, and we plan to produce a new calendar for 2010. The 2008 calendar year saw much accomplished with the cooperation of groups such as SAS. Many events are planned for 2009, including a "How to Know the Wildflowers" workshop to be held on Saturday, June 20. This workshop is for people who have more than just a casual interest in wild plants and would like to be able to identify wildflowers on their own. *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide* will be used. On Saturday, July 18, FoGP will be sponsoring a "Community Wildflower Walk" at Goose Pond and Beehunter Prairies. A short presentation of the most abundant prairie plants and grasses we expect to see will be followed by a walk in selected sections of the Goose Pond and Beehunter prairies.

Details for both of these events and sign-up information will be posted in the April FoGP newsletter. The newsletter is available to everyone on the FoGP e-mail list. If you would like to receive the newsletter via e-mail, contact us at friendsofgoosepond@yahoo.com. The FoGP newsletter includes a property manager's report, bird sightings, volunteer opportunities, and a regularly updated calendar of events. We invite you to join us! 🐦

Editor's Note: Conservation, Green Jobs, and You!

by Bob Dodd

We are pleased to have a multi-member Conservation Committee in action with SAS. The bylaws have made provisions for the committee all along, and at one time it probably was a functioning group. In recent years the committee has consisted of the chair, Jess Gwinn, but no other members. Jess did an admirable job of bringing conservation issues to our attention, but with a full committee, we hope to bring added emphasis to conservation causes.

The first cause the committee has espoused is support for a measure in the Indiana State Legislature this winter called the Green Jobs Development Act (HB 1349 and SB 283). The act calls for establishing renewable electric standards (RES), which require utility companies to generate a portion of their electricity from a combination of renewable energy resources and energy efficiency. The phased-in goal is 20 percent by 2020 (a very modest goal). The act

gets its name from the fact that RES will encourage investment in renewable energy and produce new jobs, i.e., it is good for the economy as well as the environment.

The law will provide for an expansion of net metering, which enables businesses and homeowners to generate their own electricity and roll their meters back when they return any excess power to the grid. Manufacturing and installing these small solar and wind generating systems is another job creator. It is of interest to note that Indiana is the only state in the upper Midwest without an RES.

SAS asks you to write your state senator and representative urging them to co-sponsor and vote in favor of these bills. Our president will also be contacting legislators in our area indicating support by SAS for these bills. The Senate bill is co-authored by Republican and Democratic senators. We hope that the bills will receive bi-partisan support in both houses.

Sassafras Audubon Society

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The board normally meets on the first Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. All SAS members are welcome to attend. Contact the president or another board member to learn more details and meeting locations, or e-mail SAS@sassafrasaudubon.org.

SAS Web Site

www.sassafrasaudubon.org

Webmaster

Susan Hengeveld (shengeve@indiana.edu)

Leaflet Staff

Editor Bob Dodd

Contributing Editor..... Bob Kissel

Editorial Assistant Joann Dodd

Designer Julie Dales

Mailing Maureen Forrest

Direct address changes and requests for single issues to: Ann Maxwell, Database Manager; P.O. Box 85; Bloomington, IN 47402.

We invite readers to submit material for consideration for publication. Contact the editor at dodd@indiana.edu or (812) 339-2976.

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JOIN SAS

Support Sassafras Audubon Society local educational programs, outings, and conservation projects by being a Friend of SAS. Friends receive membership in SAS, the Leaflet bimonthly newsletter, and a 10 percent discount on selected items at the Bloomington Wild Birds Unlimited and Bloomington Hardware stores. Support national conservation efforts through the National Audubon Society and receive Audubon magazine along with automatic chapter membership in SAS. But, because NAS dues primarily support national projects, we encourage you to also become a Friend of SAS. As a Friend, you will have the satisfaction of supporting your local chapter and its local projects!

Sassafras Audubon Society Membership Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

E-Mail Address: _____

- Friend of the Sassafras Audubon Society \$20/year x ____ year(s) \$ _____
Includes chapter membership in SAS
- National Audubon Society Membership \$20 for first year \$ _____
Special introductory offer (regularly \$35/year)
(Renewals go through National Audubon Society)
- Additional Contribution to SAS \$ _____

Total enclosed \$ _____

Mail your completed application along with your check to: Sassafras Audubon Society, Attention Membership Coordinator, P.O. Box 85, Bloomington, IN 47402.

Thank you for supporting Sassafras Audubon Society!

For more information about membership, e-mail us at SAS@sassafrasaudubon.org.





SAS Calendar

March/April/May 2009

With the exception of the annual banquet, all SAS-sponsored outings and programs are free and open to nonmembers. Watch our Web site (www.sassafrasaudubon.org) and the Bloomington Birds e-mail list for announcements about other upcoming events. For more information about the outings, contact Jim Mitchell at jl Mitchell33@comcast.net (812-824-8198).

Saturday, March 14, 8 a.m.: Early Migrants

Join SAS President Jeff Riegel as he leads us to local hot spots in search of early migrating waterfowl and other birds. Meet in the northeast corner of the K-Mart parking lot (near Bloomingfoods) on East Third Street in Bloomington at 8 a.m. We will carpool to the lake areas and return before midday.

Saturday, March 21, 7 a.m.: Muscatatuck NWR

David Crouch, volunteer at Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge and SAS member, will lead us through the refuge to seek out migrating waterfowl, raptors, and other birds. Maybe we will see an otter or two. Meet in the northeast corner of the K-Mart parking lot (near Bloomingfoods) on East Third Street in Bloomington at 7 a.m. We will carpool to Muscatatuck where we join David. We will return in the afternoon.

Sunday, March 29, 5:30 p.m.: SAS Spring Banquet

See article on page 1 of this issue of the *Leaflet*.

Friday–Sunday, April 3–5: Spring Nature Expo

For details check the Web at www.BirdCountry.US.

Saturday, April 11, 8 a.m.–noon: Greene County Pride Day

Help pick up trash around the Goose Pond FWA. Volunteers should report to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources barn south of Linton on Hwy 59 at 8 a.m.

Saturday–Sunday, April 18–19: Northwest Indiana

Join Don Whitehead for a one-day trip to Willow Slough and Jasper-Pulaski FWA with a possible option to do the lake front on Sunday. We will leave very early on Saturday morning and carpool to WS and then JP with an intermediate stop at Kankakee Sands. Plans for Sunday include participating in the Lake Michigan Hawk Watch at Johnson Beach. For info and reservations contact Whitehead at (812) 339-1782 or whitehea@indiana.edu.

Saturday, April 18, 10 a.m.: Early Spring Butterflies

Join Sandy and Jeff Belth as they lead us to local hot spots for early spring butterflies. Meet in the northeast corner of the K-Mart parking lot (near Bloomingfoods) on East Third Street in Bloomington at 10 a.m. Contact Jeff Belth at jeffreylbelth@aol.com or (812) 825-8353 for further information.

Friday–Sunday, April 24–26: Brown County Wild Flower Foray

Check the Web site at www.fs.fed.us/r9/hoosier/docs/events/wildflower or www.tcsteele.org.

Graduate-Student Presentations

by Stephen Friesen

Thank you to the approximately 35 people who attended the first graduate-student research program at the Monroe County Public Library. Everyone I spoke with was entertained and edified! We especially want to thank Jonathan Atwell and Danielle Whittaker for a terrific presentation on the divergence of Dark-eyed Juncos on the UCSD campus. Please join us again on Tuesday, March 10, at 7 p.m. (MCPL, room 1C), for Kristal Cain's presentation on the Dark-eyed Junco breeding systems. It promises to be sexy! 

Wednesday, April 29, 7 p.m.: Brown County Hills Project

Dan Shaver, project director for The Nature Conservancy, Brown County Hills Project Office, will give a presentation about on-the-ground management practices that help TNC preserve the Brown County Hills forests. These practices, which include management of invasive plant species, can be applied to any similar properties with similar habitats. The presentation will take place in Room 1B of the Monroe County Public Library on Wednesday, April 29, at 7 p.m.

Saturday, May 2: Monroe County Bird-a-Thon

The annual Monroe County Bird-a-Thon will be held from midnight to midnight. Teams of three to six birders will compete for prizes by finding as many species as possible within the county and earn money for their favorite charity by soliciting pledges before the event. Teams must register by April 15. The \$15 per person fee includes a T-shirt, information, and awards. SAS will host a potluck dinner the following day to turn in tallies. Pick up applications at Monroe County Parks and Recreation or Wild Birds Unlimited, sponsors of the event. For further information, call (812) 349-2805 or e-mail cmeyer@co.monroe.in.us.

Saturday, May 9: Greene County Big May Day Count

Volunteers are needed to help count birds in Greene County. The May Day Count is part of the North American Migration Count. You don't need to be an expert birdwatcher to help. Volunteers are needed to help man teams that will roam the county or to count birds at their Greene County homes, feeders, and yards. To volunteer or for more information, contact the count coordinator, Jess Gwinn, at (812) 876-8623 or jagmo@bluemarble.net.

Saturday, May 9: IMBD “Wings Over Muscatatuck”

Muscatatuck, NWR, just east of Seymour, Ind., is celebrating International Migratory Bird Day with a full day of events. Lots of booths, exhibits and displays, and the bookstore are open all day. For details, contact Jackson County Visitor Center at (888) 524-1914.

Saturday, May 16, 9 a.m.–2 p.m.: Feeder Cleaning

The Spring Feeder Cleaning will take place at Bloomington Hardware on South College Mall Road. Drop off your feeders between 9 a.m. and 2 p.m., and pick them up between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. Sorry, but we can't take hummingbird feeders or suet feeders. Proceeds will go toward SAS conservation and educational programs. Volunteers are needed. If you would like to help, contact David Daniels at (812) 333-2121. 

Third Annual Goose Pond CBC a Resounding Success

by Lee Sterrenburg, compiler, Goose Pond CBC

The third annual Goose Pond Christmas Bird Count, sponsored by SAS, took place on Dec. 17, 2008. We started the Goose Pond CBC partly in order to monitor the avian response to the extensive wetland and prairie grassland restorations at Goose Pond FWA. The count enjoyed great success once again this year. Despite very adverse weather, we had 34 participants actually make it to the count. Three feeder-watchers also took part. We recorded 105 species on count day plus one more Count Week species (Brewer's Blackbird). Participants also enjoyed seeing the six non-countable Whooping Cranes still lingering on the property. The tally of 105 species is a remarkable total considering the overnight ice storm that blanketed central and southwestern Indiana and made driving treacherous all day. Many roads and parking places looked and felt like ice-skating rinks. Some participants could not make it at all because of hazardous roads. Several parties got off to delayed starts. Birders rapidly made up for the delays once they hit the field. By lunchtime, we had recorded 87 species. Participants working assiduously after lunch turned up 18 more species for an overcall count total of 105 species.

The Goose Pond count already ranks among the state leaders in species diversity on Christmas Bird Counts. For the second straight year, the Goose Pond CBC recorded the highest species total among all the CBCs in Indiana. This year's count of 105 species stands as one of the three highest species totals ever recorded on Indiana CBCs dating back to the start of count records in the year 1900. There have been two prior tallies of 106 species on the Lake Monroe CBC; our species total this year ranks right behind those all-time highs.

Birds on the Goose Pond CBC this year included 21 species of waterfowl, 12 species of diurnal raptors, four species of owls, all seven species of woodpeckers, and 13 species of sparrows. The surprise bird



Two Greater White-fronted Geese (in front of Canada Geese).

Photo by Scott Evans

was Black Scoter on the Greene County side of Hawthorn Mine. Other good birds for the southern tier of Indiana in winter included Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Goose, Cackling Goose, Tundra Swan, Greater Scaup, American Bittern, Turkey Vulture, Golden Eagle, Merlin, Prairie Falcon, Sandhill Crane, Wilson's Snipe, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Short-eared Owl, Eastern Phoebe, Northern Shrike, Brown Thrasher, American Pipit, Vesper Sparrow, Le Conte's Sparrow, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, Rusty Blackbird, and Pine Siskin. We give a huge thanks to all the participants who braved the ice storm and made the count such a grand success. 🐦



McCormick's Creek Christmas Bird Count Results

by Sandy Belth

A total of 61 species were counted on the 20th annual McCormick's Creek Christmas Bird Count held on Jan. 3. The temps were high 46 low 30 degrees. Winds ESE at 8-12 mph. The skies were overcast. Due to prolonged temperatures below freezing, all standing water was frozen. We had 16 people in five parties. Our count total was 61 species with 5,359 individuals. This year we had count highs of the following species: Red-shouldered Hawk 23, previous high 14; Yellow-bellied Sapsucker nine, previous high seven; Eastern Towhee 59, previous high 42; White-throated Sparrow 62, previous high 48. Noticeably absent were waterfowl because of the ice. Notable species include a Savannah Sparrow found by the Parks' team, only the second time one has been observed in the count circle area on count day. The Rattlesnake Road team had a Sharp-shinned Hawk for the first time in their area. This is the first year we did not locate any Bald Eagles. A potluck and tally at the Belths' house rounded out the day. Thank you to all participants who came out for a day of birding. 🐦

Sassafras Audubon Society Spring Meeting & Dinner Sunday, March 29, at 5:30 p.m. Chapman's Banquet Center

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Guest(s) name(s): _____

Number of seats ____ x \$25/seat \$ _____ enclosed

Please complete this reservation form and mail along with your check (made out to Sassafras Audubon Society) to: Sassafras Audubon Society, P.O. Box 85, Bloomington, IN 47402. The deadline for reservations is March 25.



Annual Lake Monroe CBC: Another Successful Venture

by Don Whitehead, compiler, Lake Monroe CBC

On Saturday, Dec. 20, Sassafras Audubon held the 33rd consecutive edition of the annual Lake Monroe Christmas Bird Count. A cloudy day in the low to mid 30s with only light winds — and low expectations, as recent waterfowl counts had been low and scouting teams reported very low numbers of passerines. However, the results were gratifying — much better than we expected. Fifty-seven people working in 11 teams recorded 102 species and 9,700 individuals. In addition, there were two “count week” birds (species seen within three days of the count, but not recorded on count day. This is the seventh time in the 33-year history of the count that we have tallied 100 or more species (our high was 109 in 1997). The Lake Monroe CBC was the first Indiana CBC to record 100 species (the first time was in 1991); and until the Goose Pond CBC was started, our count was the only one to record 100.

There were three notable species for the count, two of them first ever for the count. The obvious highlight was a Wood Thrush found by Jess Gwinn in a small flock of

Hermit Thrushes on the hike up Will Hay Branch, an outstanding find and the first time ever for our CBC — and, amazingly, only the second December record for the state! The second great bird was a first-cycle Great Black-backed Gull discovered by Dave Crouch and Wes Homoya just off of the launch ramp at Cutright. Roger Beckman and I were just driving by and Dave waved frantically to get us to look at it and verify the identification. This was a first for our CBC



Wood Thrush. Photo by Scott Evans

and only the second record of the species on Lake Monroe! The third fine bird was a female Indigo Bunting on the bait pile at the end of the Campground at Paynetown. It was observed by Julie Dales and Joni Beatrice. This bird had been visiting the seeds I put out for about two weeks. It represents the second record of this species for our CBC and only the 17th winter record for the state.

Other especially noteworthy birds included Surf Scoter (two), Golden Eagle (three), Northern Saw-whet Owl (four), Ruffed Grouse (one), Ruby-crowned Kinglet (one), Lapland Longspur (one), and Snow Bunting (one).

Other gratifying finds included Wood Duck (13), Canvasback (35), Redhead (55), Greater Scaup (two), Ruddy Duck (two), Black Vulture (16), Bald Eagle (38), Sandhill Crane (two), Wilson’s Snipe (three), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (nine), Eastern Phoebe (two), Horned Lark (60), Red-breasted Nuthatch (three), Winter Wren (four), Golden-crowned Kinglet (91), Hermit Thrush (19), and Yellow-rumped Warbler (120). The two “count week” species were Merlin and Cackling Goose.

Notable “misses” for the count included American Wigeon, Northern Bobwhite, Rough-legged Hawk (getting harder and harder to find as the fields southwest of the lake are developed and turned into row crops and houses), and Brown-headed Cowbird.

An almost unanimous feeling was that passerines, especially sparrows, were hard to find — in far lower numbers than in previous years.

The “sweepstakes” winner was European Starling (982), second was Dark-eyed Junco (663), and third was Mallard (625). A remarkable high was Cedar Waxwing (442) — a species that we miss entirely in some years. Also notable was the very low number of House Finch (21).

All in all, a remarkably satisfying count — far better than anticipated. My sincere thanks to all of the team leaders and participants who made this count so successful. And thanks from all of us to the Sycamore Land Trust who hosted the potluck — it was a wonderful place to hold it and the food was first rate, although it brought some sad feelings, as this was the first time in the 33 years of the CBC that it was not hosted by Henry Wahl, who died last year.

Of a Feather: A Review

by Bob Dodd

Depending on how you define birdwatcher, there are now as many as 67.8 million of them in the U.S. That makes birdwatching one of the most popular pastimes in the nation. How did it all start? Is birdwatching something that just comes naturally or were forces at work through the years that have made it so popular? Well, probably a bit of both. People enjoy observing beautiful and interesting things of all sorts, and who can deny that birds are beautiful and interesting? But a number of events have occurred during our history that have encouraged development of birdwatching as a hobby. In his book *Of a Feather*, Scott Weidensaul has done a masterful job of tracing the history of bird study in the U.S., both as a scientific profession and as a hobby.

Several early accounts of natural history of North America mention birds, but perhaps the first person to make a scientific effort to illustrate and describe them was Englishman Mark Catsby. The first important American-born contributor was a Pennsylvania Quaker, William Bartram. Scotsman Alexander Wilson made the first effort to publish descriptions and illustrations of all North American birds. His work preceded that of James Audubon, who may have taken the liberty to copy a few of Wilson’s illustrations of birds that he had not seen. James Audubon was certainly the most prominent, as well as most controversial, early ornithologist in the young United States. As well as being a great artist, he was a great self-promoter.

The work of Wilson and Audubon concentrated on eastern birds. The west was just opening up and was difficult to reach by the normal person. Much of the early study of birds of the west was done in connection with military expeditions, beginning with that of Lewis and Clark, who described and collected many birds. They even shipped four live Black-billed Magpies to President Jefferson.

continued on page 6

Big Green Big Year — 2008 Summary of Four Experiences

by Bernie Sloan (bgsloan2@yahoo.com)

The Big Green Big Year (BIGBY) movement started with a group of Montreal birders taking up the challenge of doing a “big year” around their homes. The birders kept track of birds they encountered while avoiding the use of the internal combustion engine. As word spread via the Internet, BIGBYing grew into an international pastime. By the end of 2008 BIGBY boasted some 500 participants in 14 countries.

Two energetic Californians tied for most BIGBY species in 2008 at 295 species each. Both men are avid cyclists as well as birders, and rode their bicycles for hundreds of miles throughout northern California. More than 200 American BIGBYers, hailing from 40 states plus the District of Columbia, tallied a combined 475 bird species for the year.

Locally, at least four Bloomington-area birders went the BIGBY route during 2008.

Jim Hengeveld recorded 202 BIGBY species. Susan Hengeveld was close behind with 193. The Hengevelds birded near their Lake Lemon home, as well as the Yellowwood State Forest. Among other sightings, Jim reported 26 waterfowl species, 14 raptors (including vultures), and 32 warbler species. In discussing BIGBY 2008 highlights, Jim said: “One very memorable walk was a time when we had 10+ Worm-eating Warblers along Yellowwood Lake Rd. Another highlight was seeing several Canvasback after walking close to two miles to the west end of the lake on a brutally cold, windy morning in mid-November. Some of the notable species on our lists included Greater White-fronted, Snow, and Cackling Geese; Yellow-crowned Night-Heron; White-rumped Sandpiper, Sanderling, and American Avocet; Lesser Black-backed and Franklin’s Gulls; Alder and Willow Flycatchers; and Orange-crowned and Mourning Warblers.”

On a personal level, I recorded 161 BIGBY species. I was surprised to log so many! My original goal was 100, which I thought was unrealistic. I birded my neighborhood, plus the IU cross country course (which is only about 200 yards from home), plus the wooded ravines bordering the cross country course. My personal highlights included Bald Eagle, Black Vulture, Northern Shrike, Osprey,

Sandhill Crane, 30 warbler species, 17 sparrow species, and 14 “raptor” species (vultures, eagles, hawks, and falcons). My favorite memory was watching and hearing several American Woodcocks displaying on a warm night in the spring.

Don Wiesler was the fourth BIGBYer in the Bloomington area. Wiesler covered his neighborhood in the area around Ballantine and Sheridan in Bloomington, with occasional walks to downtown and along the Bloomington Rail Trail. Wiesler recorded 82 BIGBY species in 2008. While Wiesler didn’t record as many species as the other local BIGBYers, his total is still notable since his observations took place in a largely urban setting.

Local BIGBYers are working on their 2009 lists. Other area birders are encouraged to join the fun! It’s a good way to get in tune with your local surroundings. For more information about the BIGBY experience, see www.sparrowworks.ca/greenbirding/index.html. A report on the 2008 BIGBY experience is available at www.sparrowworks.ca/greenbirding/downloads/2008_finalreport.pdf. 🐦

Of a Feather *continued from page 5*

Early study of birds depended on collecting dead specimens; so all ornithologists carried shotguns on their expeditions. Not until late in the 19th century was there a concerted move to study and enjoy birds in the field without sacrificing them. This was a time of expansion of interest in bird study. It was also the time when women first entered the ranks of important bird students. Early bird study by non-specialists was inhibited by lack of useful guidebooks that would allow identification without having a specimen in hand. Although earlier guides, especially that by Chester Reed, were a step in the right direction, Roger Tory Peterson should be credited with the first widely used and convenient guidebook. Birdwatching as a hobby has exploded since the 1934 publication of his guide.

Weidensaul traces the development of the “sport” of bird listing from its early days with the Bronx County Bird Club to more recent efforts to top Big Day and Big Year records. While listing has proven to be a wonderful form of recreation, it can go too far and become a mere collection of names. Weidensaul applauds the recent efforts by such renowned birders as Ken Kauffmann, David Sibley, and Pete Dunn to bring back the emphasis of studying birds and their habitat and not just listing them.

Meanwhile, back to those 67.8 million birders. You need a very liberal definition of birdwatcher to have a number that high. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a slightly more conservative estimate of 46 million with 24 million actually making trips away from home to see birds. If you define birder as someone who can identify at least 20 bird species the number drops to 6 million. Probably a few hundred thousand can identify more than 100 species. Over 57,000 people participated in Christmas Bird Counts in 2005, a good measure of the really serious birders. By whatever measure you use, birding/birdwatching are becoming increasingly popular activities. The pioneers of bird study, so effectively documented by Weidensaul, would be proud of what they helped to accomplish. 🐦



American Woodcock. Photo by Justine Evans

President's Note: *Even Birders Head South*

by Jeff Riegel

Many people take winter vacations. Some occur during the holidays when families cross the country, and even the world, to spend time with relatives and friends. Others just want to take a vacation during the winter, while others find a lull in their hectic work schedules during the winter months. Ann and I are in that group, and by the time you read this, we'll have returned from our annual winter sojourn south.

Why south, you might ask? Why not? A lot of people head south during winter, presumably to take a break from winter itself. People get tired of cold, of snow, of cold winds, chilling rains, and everything else associated with winter. We probably fall into those categories as well. (In fact, I keep threatening to start a petition to have gray named as Indiana's official winter color.) But we fall into another category as well: the serious birding category. (You too may be afflicted with this disease if you notice yourself buying eight kinds of suet and only one brand of breakfast cereal.)

Symptoms of serious birding withdrawal begin to appear in late November and won't abate until mid- to late March. But, thankfully, those feelings of coughs, sniffles, and nausea are abated by Christmas Bird Counts. Along about mid-January, however, they return and seem to get worse and worse with each passing day until Eagle Watch Weekend comes along and, once again, the symptoms are eased in much the same way that an aspirin or two alleviates headaches. But, once that weekend is gone, what's a serious birder to do?

You guessed it — head south!

Sanibel Island on the Gulf Coast of Florida is our favorite. I should say that Sanibel Island is the central location. From there we might head up the coast to the Venice Rookery or — I'll admit it — the Sarasota landfill. Or maybe we'll head southeast to Corkscrew Swamp or the Everglades. But, you can bet we'll start out nearly every day with the birds in the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island.

It's not that we see birds there that we won't find here, but there will be a few. Reddish Egrets, Purple Gallinules, Anhingas, Magnificent Frigatebirds, Swallow-tailed Kites, Northern Gannets, Roseate Spoonbills — all generally strangers to Indiana skies. But there will be a lot of other birds that we do find in Indiana either nesting or passing through during migration. The bottom line is there are bound to be birds — lots of birds. A successful winter vacation means an absolute minimum of 100 species with at least one of them being a life bird for Ann. Last year was considerably higher on both counts.

I do have one major problem with our winter birding vacation and it's getting worse. No, it's not the price of gas or hotels or meals, although those can be quite taxing at times. The problem is I can always find plenty of birds, but it's getting harder and harder to find lifers for Ann. Oh well ... I guess I'll just have to try harder, or maybe stay a little longer. Hey — I might be on to something here. 🐦



Answer to Name That Bird:
Red-bellied Woodpecker

Conservation Corner: *Beyond Our Binoculars*

by Stephen Friesen

Since the publication of the last *Leaflet*, the Board of Directors has approved the creation of a conservation committee, consisting of board and non-board members alike, and myself as chair. The newly formed conservation committee manifests our organization's commitment to be more than a birding club; to look past the plumage, as it were. While conservation is many things, it necessarily requires a deeper understanding of the species I may identify: conservation requires that we attend to the larger systems of which individual birds and species are only a part. I have to confess that I possess little such knowledge. It's one thing for me to recognize a particular Dark-eyed Junco. It's very much another thing to understand its place in the larger population or species, and still another thing to understand its species' place in the larger ecosystem. I suppose it's comforting to know that understanding this complexity ranks among the most difficult tasks a natural scientist can confront. On the other hand, this is the kind of understanding required to protect biodiversity: to know what kinds of things to conserve and how to intervene accordingly.

Perhaps these reflections are largely autobiographical: I don't feel adequately equipped for the task at hand and don't know where to start. Perhaps some of you feel the same way. But I think a step in the right direction involves a change in the way I go about birding. I need to begin observing birds within an ecosystem perspective. I need to take more time to think about behaviors and habitats, look up information about a species' sources of food and shelter and how the habitat is structured to provide them. I should begin caring about, and looking for, things a bird cares about. For this kind of understanding, the field guide can no longer be sufficient. Along the way, I'll surely miss a couple of species on my count. But over the long run, I hope such a shift in attention can make me a better conservationist and overcome the space between observation and activism. 🐦

Thank You, SAS Members

by Kenneth J. Brock

This is to thank members of the Sassafras Audubon Society for their most generous support of the Indiana Dunes State Park observation tower construction. The current economic uncertainties render it quite difficult to part with precious financial resources; consequently, your support is greatly appreciated. In addition to providing a spectacular site for observing migrating birds, I envision the tower as a destination for school children and all park visitors interested in nature studies. The unprecedented view will provide a wide vista of Lake Michigan, the lake's beaches, wooded dunes, and woodlands to the south.

At this time, the Troyer Engineering firm is drawing up engineering plans for the tower. Upon completion of the plans, construction is expected to commence. It is our hope and expectation that the tower will be completed by next summer.

(Note: SAS contributed \$100 for tower construction.) 🐦

In My Backyard: Winter Provides Backdrop for Birds

by Bob Dodd

If you were like us, you had lots of birds at your feeders after the big snowstorms and cold temperatures we had in late January and early February. That is one of the few “up” sides to winter weather for birdwatchers. At our feeder we saw many White-throated Sparrows, Song Sparrows, Eastern Towhees, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Purple Finches, and even had one visit by a couple of Pine Siskins. We see a few of these birds during normal times, but not in the numbers we had with all of the snow cover.

We also had lots of birds on our heated birdbath. If you do not have one of these handy devices, we would strongly suggest you buy one for next winter. The birds will appreciate it and you will enjoy seeing the birds come in for a drink when all natural watering holes are frozen. Recently on the Indiana Bird list a poster said she had not had any visitors at her heated birdbath. She had it setting on the ground where she said it was available to cats as well as birds. In fact she indicated that once she saw a cat lying in the dry bath. The empty bowl must have made a nice warm bed for the cat! But you can probably imagine the birds would be a bit leery of a birdbath that was so accessible to a predator. Our bath is on our deck about 10 feet above ground level. We also have it setting on a stand that was made for flower pots. The only mammalian visitors we have to our birdbath are squirrels. Unfortunately they sometimes tip it and dump part of



Purple Finch. Photo by Scott Evans

the water. Why is it we have to battle these bushy-tailed nuisances in everything we try to do for the birds?

Also on the Web there was a series of postings about cardinals showing carnivorous habits. One poster reported seeing a cardinal eating a dead mouse (too bad it wasn't a squirrel). One person reported cardinals eating ground beef. Others reported cardinals eating crumbs from their suet feeders. We have never seen this behavior around our feeders. What about you? 

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