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Flyway

Summer 2011

Volume 2011, Issue 3

SPEND A DAY ON THE RIVER 2011 ANNUAL PROGRAM IS BIG SUCCESS

On March 26, Detroit Audubon hosted its annual program at the downtown Wayne County Community College. The weather was cold but sunny and the facilities suited our needs to a tee. The day started with a fund-raiser bird walk on Belle Isle led by Kenn Kaufman. A group of about 30 stalwarts, each donating \$25, braved the cold and arrived by 7a.m. to see what avian gems could be seen. We thank Jim Bull for arranging the walk and Kenn for leading it. Also, thanks to Allen Chartier for coming out to help.

While the bird walk was taking place, the auditorium was being set up to get the program started. Andy Howell, auction chair, and his committee of Richard Quick, Rosemarie Fielding, Beth Johnson and volunteer Chris Fielding were setting up the silent and live auction items for everyone to peruse. Rochelle Breitenbach, program co-chair, arrived with coffee and snacks for the guests to enjoy and Bev and Chris Stephenson arrived to get registration rolling. Soon, program co-chair, Jim Bull, arrived with the early morning birders to bring our total to about 70.



Members of the Matrix Theater's dance production of "Ghostwaters" celebrated the return of the Lake Sturgeon to the Detroit River. Photo by Chris Fielding.

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At 10 o'clock, Vice-President Rochelle Breitenbach got the program going with a short report on the condition of DAS and some notes about projects and programs we hope to pursue. She then introduced our first speaker, John Hartig, PhD. As director of the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge (DRIWR), John spoke of the history of the Detroit River and of the remarkable changes beginning to develop as the river has been cleaned up due to environmental regulations and of the dramatic changes being brought about since the IWR has been created. Many pictures and graphics were used during the presentation. Beginning with the saving of Humbug Marsh and nesting Bald Eagles on the island, and then continuing with the addition of several units to the refuge, the refuge continues to grow. The creation of gravel reefs has led to the first evidence of the spawning of the magnificent Lake Sturgeon in the Detroit River in the past year. All of this is evidence of the rebirth of the river and its wildlife. The Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and its many partners will continue to foster this for years into the future.

Caleb Putnam, Michigan Important Bird Area (IBA) director, was introduced by Jim Bull to present the IBA program to our guests. Caleb has been working for over six years to identify IBAs across the state. Caleb explained how the IBA program is a world wide project to establish places where critical numbers of as many species as possible are identified and eventually inventoried. Then they can be monitored and managed if necessary to assure that the species for each IBA is protected. There are currently 105

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Flyway

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: BIRDS AND THE AUDUBON MESSAGE

By Leonard Weber

I attended Earth Day - related events at two area colleges in April 2011. A variety of environmental or "green" organizations were invited to have table displays and to engage students and others in conversations about their mission and activities. Detroit Audubon Society was included in the invitation list and I had the pleasure of representing DAS.

At these sorts of events, the Audubon table is next to a table for the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, the Greening of Detroit, or some other group. The Audubon Society is just one of a number of organizations working to protect the natural environment from degradation and to conserve resources. Each has its own history and primary areas of focus.

Those approaching the Audubon table and looking at Audubon materials can quickly tell that we are about birds:

- The logos of both the national and the local society feature pictures of birds.
- Many of the field trips we sponsor are bird walks.
- The "Safe Passage" project focuses attention on migrating birds.
- The Audubon name denotes "birds."
- Those who had heard of John James Audubon knew of him as a "bird man."

I am quick to inform people that we are about much more than watching birds. Getting to know birds can be a starting point for an appreciation of nature and for an active interest in protecting the health of the environment. I also spend time, perhaps most of my time, talking with them about birds and showing pictures of some of the beautiful birds commonly found in southeast Michigan.

I think that there is much truth in the argument of people like Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, that it is very hard to have an appreciation of nature without experiences of nature. If we are going to achieve essential environmental protection goals, it is important to promote opportunities for learning to love nature.

The second sentence in the Detroit Audubon Society Mission statement says it well: "We feel that the environment is best served by a knowledgeable citizenry and that bird watching is the vehicle for developing an inclusive understanding of natural history."

So I talk a lot about birds with students at Earth Day events, just as DAS offers many bird watching field trips. This is the Audubon approach to protecting the natural world.

I hope to see you on a field trip soon and maybe you can bring someone new to such an experience.

PASSING OF DR. EUGENE PERRIN

As the *Flyway* goes to print, we are saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Eugene Perrin. Gene was truly an icon in the environmental and social justice movements and the Detroit Audubon Society has been honored to have him on our Board for many years. We extend our condolences to Gene's family and many friends.

GETTING THE EARLY BIRDS

Early Spring DAS Field Trips

Leader: Richard Quick

The field trips, to **Magee Marsh** (Crane Creek) on April 16 and to **Pt. Pelee** on April 30, had a good sampling of early spring birds and some surprises as well.

Magee Marsh found a hardy group ready to brave inclement weather but happy to find a good day of birding until the rain chased us away at noon. Of the over 55 species, there were only a few Yellow-rumped Warblers but a good variety of other early migrants. The list included: both Kinglets; Eastern Towhees; Brown Creeper; Rusty Blackbird; Hermit Thrush; Brown Thrasher; Green Heron; Song, White-throated and Tree Sparrows; and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher at the boardwalk. On the lake and in the marsh were: Northern Shoveler; American Coot; Gadwall; Blue-winged Teal; Bald Eagle; Field Sparrow; Bufflehead; Ruddy Duck; and Bonaparte's Gull. Those that went to Ottawa NWR were able to drive the dikes and found Common Moorhen; Pied-billed Grebe; Ring-necked Duck; American Wigeon; and Trumpeter Swan. Those attending included Jim Bull and Jim Koppin.

Pt. Pelee provided a very good early spring day and some good birds for the group to view. Meeting at the Visitor Center, our group of 10 took the tram out to the point to scan the lake for waterfowl. We were rewarded with: Horned Grebes in breeding plumage at the tip; Red-breasted Mergansers; Double-crested Cormorants; and scaup. Walking back the east side of the point, the birding got very busy

with ten species of warblers putting on a good show for all to view including Yellow, Pine, Palm, Black-and-white, Black-throated Green, Cape May, Yellow-throated and Nashville. A Blue-winged Warbler gave some a brief view but sadly not me. Other notables include: Red-bellied Woodpecker; Eastern Kingbird; Northern Rough-winged and Tree Swallows; Purple Martin; Warbling and Red-eyed Vireos; and Chipping Sparrow. The most exciting appearance was the two Red-headed Woodpeckers that flew in among the warblers and put on a good show for a few minutes. All got good views of them.

Catching the tram back to the Visitor Center, the group headed out on the Woodland Trail. We soon were alerted to a sighting of a Yellow-throated Warbler. As quickly as possible we made our way to the spot where it was seen. A vigil produced no bird but Len Weber went further up the trail and was able to see it. Jim Koppin decided to stay and try to add it to his list while the rest continued on back to the center. Both kinglets and the Blue-gray Gnatcatcher were seen on the way. It was noon by then and people decided to part ways for the day. Some stopped on the road out to view the Great Horned Owl nest with two chicks. Len Weber and I went on to Hillman's Marsh and found: Great Blue Heron; Great Egret; Northern Shoveler; American Coot; Dunlin; Black-bellied Plover; yellowlegs; Caspian and Forster's Terns; and Horned Lark. Our list topped 65 for the day.

Including those listed above, our group included Michael Mumford, Terry Hoenle, Linda Sutherland, Gabrielle Pluhar, Ann Difiore, Cindy Dooley and Carol Furtado.



Cindy Dooley, Carol Furtado, Gabrielle Pluhar and Len Weber birding at Pt. Pelee. Photo by Richard Quick.

DAS FIELD TRIPS

Please register for field trips by calling 248-354-5804 and leaving your name, phone number, and email address so we may contact you with any changes in location, time, etc. Registration is not required but strongly encouraged.

Pointe Mouillee SGA, Michigan

August 20, 2011 (Saturday) 8:00 a.m.

Leaders: Jim Fowler and Jim Bull

This is one of the premier shore birding areas in the interior of the continent when water levels are favorable.

Take I-75 to Exit 26 and drive east on South Huron Rd to U.S. Turnpike. Turn south and look for Sigler Road. Turn east and drive to the parking lot at the end.

Point Pelee, Ontario

August 27, 2011 (Saturday) 8:00 a.m.

Leader Richard Quick

August may seem early for fall migration, but for warblers the end of August and the first few days of September are the peak time.

Cross the Ambassador Bridge and follow Rt. 3 to Leamington. Follow signs to Point Pelee National Park (entrance fee required). Meet in the Visitor Center parking area. Remember to bring passport for entry into Canada and back into the U.S.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR FLYWAY NEWSLETTER

If you would like to be involved with production of the *Flyway*, we will soon be in need of people to publish the *Flyway*. This is a good opportunity to exercise your editing and writing skills. We are always in need of mailing committee members as well.

Contact our Office Manager, Beverly Stevenson, at (248) 354-5804 by July 31 if possible. The winter *Flyway* will be the first issue under new staff. We hope to hear from you.

Two volunteers are needed to help produce the *Flyway* that Detroit Audubon depends upon to communicate with its membership.

#1 / Editor – This person would assess articles submitted and make any necessary changes. Text editing skills, word processing and file organizing skills are useful.

#2 / Lay-Out Designer – This person uses the articles forwarded by the editor and compiles them on the page in a design that enhances the reader's experience

For information on either of these positions, contact Rob Duchene at 248-549-6328.



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NIGHTHAWKS IN THE LATE SUMMER EVENINGS

By Leonard Weber

I do it every year and as often as I can from the second week of August through the second week of September – take a chair out into the backyard in the evening an hour or two before dark, turn the radio on if the Tigers have a game that night, sit down and search the sky for Common Nighthawks. Watching fall bird migration doesn't get much easier, nor a whole lot more enjoyable, than observing nighthawks from the backyard.

The name “Common Nighthawk” is not a literal description of the bird. Nighthawks are not in the hawk family and are not birds of prey. They eat insects. The “night” part of the name is less misleading as nighthawks are most likely to be seen at dusk and dawn. Though they are “common” enough to be seen regularly in migration season, their numbers are declining, probably seriously.

Common Nighthawks are long distance migrants, starting their trip south in August on a route that takes them many, many miles to their destination in South America. Thousands of them fly right over our heads in southeast Michigan on the way.

In my backyard in the city of Detroit, I usually see the first migrating nighthawks near August 15. The peak migration period, again in my backyard experience, is from about August 22 through September 7.

Common Nighthawks are birds a little smaller than pigeons, with long, pointed, somewhat bent wings. The best identification mark when they are in flight is a white patch toward the tip of each wing. This mark, together with the flight pattern, makes them easily identifiable.

One of the reasons that watching nighthawks in migration is fascinating is that they do not fly across in a straight line, as if they are in a hurry to get to South America. They are constantly changing direction, sometimes circling above a particular area for ten minutes or more, giving the impression that there is no hurry and that it is no big deal to migrate that far.

The nighthawk flight looks erratic or, as I think of it, acrobatic. It reminds me of the flight of a swallow or a swift, looking like a bird that is catching insects on the wing. And that is often exactly what is happening. When they pause in migration to hang around an area for a period of time, it is often because they are

refueling in flight. Insects such as winged ants often fly in large numbers and nighthawks take advantage of the opportunity when they encounter such insect clusters. The bird's large mouth is perfectly designed to scoop up insects in flight.

In many years I do not see a single Common Nighthawk until that August evening when they first appear over the neighborhood. Though southeast Michigan is part of their breeding area, I usually do not encounter them in the locations I regularly visit on birding walks. They nest in open areas and lay their eggs right on the bare ground or on gravel. They sometimes use gravel rooftops for nesting locations.

Male Common Nighthawks engage in distinctive courtship behavior involving aerial displays. They circle above the potential nesting site, calling (“peent”), and from time to time, swoop down to within several yards of the surface. Then they turn quickly upwards and the air whistling through their stiff wing feathers results in a loud “booming” sound. Native Americans often based their names for the bird on the sounds that it makes.

I was hiking in a field in Minnesota some years ago when I was startled by this boom. At that point in time I knew nothing about this aspect of nighthawk behavior and did not know what I would find when I looked for the source of the sound. Seeing that it was a nighthawk that caused the boom was a major surprise and learning experience.

There is much more that I do not know and could learn about the Common Nighthawk. It would be great to have an opportunity to observe it in different settings and at other times during its annual three months in Michigan.

If I do not have such an opportunity, however, I will not be discontent – as long as they fly over the ‘hood in the late summer every year and do so in numbers large enough to suggest that the species is not becoming seriously threatened.

It's time to put a reminder on my August calendar.

DAS Contributions Up

The number of DAS donors increased and the endowment continues to grow. For the period 4/1/2010 to 3/31/2011, 501 members and friends of DAS contributed over \$25,500. This is a big increase over last year of 157 donors and \$8,500 in gifts. This year, \$8,345 was contributed to our endowment fund. Please consider giving to help DAS continue to develop programs and events for bird education. We deeply appreciate your support for DAS.

* denotes more than onetime donors per amount. Please let us know if your name is missing.

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IBAs in Michigan identified through the work of a scientific committee. Support groups will be set up to begin the management and program for several of the IBAs. Detroit Audubon Society will be involved with the Detroit River IBA which runs virtually the entire length of the Detroit River and overlaps much of the DRIWR.

Lunch time allowed everyone to take a break and spend some time bidding on our array of over 30 items donated by businesses and individuals. The silent auction is a big help with the Annual Program expenses.

Kenn Kaufman's keynote presentation continued the "river" theme of our program by using the metaphor to describe how birds behave and how they are perceived. Using photos and graphics, Kenn noted how bird migration flyways are often thought of as rivers in the way they are depicted as flowing from point to point. Kenn pointed out that in reality most flyways are generalized depictions of how birds migrate. Ducks, he agreed, do stick to regular routes during migration, but that most birds follow a rather branched route that can vary a great deal. Kenn also used the river as more than a physical part of nature - as a force throughout our world shaping and changing life as we know it. The members of the audience showed their appreciation for Kenn's presentation with enthusiastic applause.

To complete our program, the Matrix Theatre Company's presentation captured the attention of everyone. They used dance, song, colors, lots of puppets and a narration that brought us all into the spirit of the Detroit River over millennia.

The story of the river was conveyed by depicting the interactions of fish in the river from the giant Lake Sturgeon to pike, walleye and sunfish. Appropriately the story of the sturgeon from once abundant to near extinction to hope for the future flowed through the play as did John Hartig's lead off presentation in the morning. The Matrix Company was warmly received as our audience really enjoyed their efforts.

As our guests collected their silent auction items, we all said goodbye and thanks for a great program. We hope to see everyone and more next year.

FEATHERED TALES



By Bev
Stevenson

A pair of Cooper's Hawks was seen by **Karen Tonso** in downtown Detroit, near Joliet and Rivard - 1/2 mile north of Milliken State Park, the last two weeks in March. They were bringing sticks to build their nest.

Steve Malaney was surprised by a deer in his Berkley neighborhood. It was seen April 7th in the middle of Princeton Street between 11 Mile and Catalpa.

For two weeks at the end of April, **Christina Louzon** has been watching a leucistic (partial albino) robin eating worms next to her driveway. She lives on Pleasant Street in St. Clair Shores.



Detroit Audubon Society
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