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The Call Note

March 2016

Dedicated to creating a greater awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the interrelatedness of all Michigan's wild places and wildlife and the need for stewardship.

President's Corner

Welcome to Spring!

Whether or not the weather cooperates, spring will officially start with the vernal equinox on March 20. March brings the first major wave of migration for the year. While some waterfowl and waders stayed all winter on unfrozen rivers, the recent warm spell has started to open up more ponds and lakes. Flotillas of ducks and geese can't be too far behind.

To welcome spring, we also have a special treat from CAAS member **Ed Merz**, who has kindly donated one of his watercolors of a great blue heron to our club. We will be holding a silent auction of the painting at the March and April meetings. All proceeds will benefit CAAS.

On behalf of the board, I would like to thank Ed wholeheartedly for his generous support of Capital Area Audubon Society. Please be sure to check page 2 in this issue of the *Call Note* for more details so you can get in on the action!

Good birding,
Barb Hosler

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March 3 meeting & program

Birding and Banding in Las Tangaras Reserve, Ecuador

Las Tangaras Reserve is a 50-hectare cloud forest nature reserve located just outside the biodiversity hotspot of Mindo, Ecuador. Learn about cloud forest flora and fauna, and the ongoing bird research and bird banding projects at the reserve.



Golden tanager ©Parks Marion

Alexia Witcombe and **Parks Marion** are avid birders and nature appreciators who will share pictures and stories about the three months they spent managing the reserve in 2014, and about birding in and around Mindo, as well as participating in the Mindo Christmas Bird Count!

The two met while sailing and serving as environmental educators on board tall ships. Currently, Alexia is researching smallholder agricultural systems in Uganda (and enjoying all the amazing East African birds) while pursuing a graduate degree in Crop and Soil Sciences at Michigan State University. Parks splits his time between the classroom as an assistant Montessori teacher, and the boat as a tall ship captain.

Please join us at Fenner on **Thursday, March 3**. Snacks, social time, and silent auction begin at 7:00 followed by brief meeting and program at 7:30. Bring a friend!

Thank you

Many thanks to **Jenny Chung**, **Susan Schuur**, and **Sally Garrod** for the delicious snacks at the February meeting.

Unique artwork auction set for March and April monthly meetings

Donation to benefit CAAS

Club member **Ed Merz** has generously donated his matted and framed watercolor print entitled “The Resting” to the CAAS Board, which has decided (with Ed’s approval) to offer the artwork to the membership via a silent auction.

The auction will take place at both the March 3 and April 7 monthly meetings and be awarded to the highest bidder at the close of the bidding on April 7. The artwork will be on display at both meetings.

The 12x14” print is based on a photo Ed took on August 25, 2014 at the Looking Glass River, one of his favorite haunts. It features a great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) resting on dead tree trunk, one of its favorite haunts. Another print in this series hangs in the headquarters of the Michigan Audubon Society in Okemos.

The watercolor print is beautifully double-matted and custom framed in cedar wood handcrafted by Ed. It will include an envelope on the back which contains a copy of the original photo and background for the scene depicted in his painting:



Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)
“The Resting”

This species can be a year-round resident, weather permitting. The photo taken on August 25, 2014 captured the bird on a favorite bird resting spot. The painting is another in a series I called “The Resting” because I have photographed many different birds lounging on this dead trunk. Notice the white feathers in the water; they are residue of molting birds who have utilized this location. This unique log is situated on the edge of a marsh bordering the main channel of the Looking Glass River. The marsh edges are a favorite location for this long-legged marsh bird to forage. ■

Changes proposed for Federal Duck Stamp art rules

Secondary non-waterfowl bird species considered

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed changes for the rules governing the famed Federal Duck Stamp Contest. Under the proposal, artwork would include not only a traditional waterfowl species but also an appropriate non-waterfowl bird species.



The contest’s winning artwork graces the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (known as the Duck Stamp) issued annually. The proposed change would begin with the 2016 contest.

Since 1934, the Duck Stamp has generated more than \$800 million for the preservation of over 6.5 million acres of wetland and grassland habitat. Since 1958 almost all the proceeds from the approximately 1.8 million stamps sold annually are used to secure such habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).

The stamp is required of most waterfowl hunters but is also purchased by other hunters, anglers, bird watchers, wildlife photographers, stamp collectors, and supportive groups and individuals.

Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp see this proposal as an opportunity to, among other things, expand support for migratory bird conservation. Adding other bird types to the Duck Stamp will help show that the stamp is not just about ducks, thereby encouraging those more broadly interested in birds and wildlife to purchase the stamp.

With last year’s price increase from \$15 to \$25, it is important to devise innovative ways to make the stamp more appealing, especially to potential new buyers. Increased sales will generate more funds to secure vital habitat for the NWRS, thereby providing important recreational opportunities for all Americans.

“The idea to include a ‘secondary bird species,’ in addition to the dominant waterfowl on the stamp, would be a great way to deliver the message that the funds collected from the stamp go to help other species far beyond waterfowl,” explained Paul Baicich, president of the Friends group. “It’s all about habitat.”

Public comment on this proposal is open until noon on March 14, 2016. Submission guidelines may be found at: <http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=FWS-HQ-MB-2015-0161-0001>

Adapted from Friends of the Migratory Bird/Duck Stamp press release dated 12 February 2016

Migratory Bird Treaty marks 100 years

Michigan's Department of Natural Resources is teaming with other conservation agencies in a year-long celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty.

The U.S. signed the treaty with Great Britain (for Canada) on August 16, 1916. Similar agreements were reached shortly thereafter with Japan, Russia, and Mexico.

The treaties were designed to protect birds that migrate across international borders. This was followed in the United States by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, which codified the treaty into U.S. law. Over 800 species are currently listed as migratory under the Act.

The Act was enacted in an era when many bird species were threatened by the commercial trade in birds and bird feathers. It was one of the first federal environmental laws and remains a primary tool for protecting non-endangered species.

The centennial celebration in Michigan will include monthly stories on featured birds in DNR publications and education programs at parks and schools.

Wisdom hatches yet another chick

The Laysan albatross nicknamed Wisdom hatched on February 1 on Midway Atoll N.W.R. to a fluffy chick nicknamed Kūkini, the Hawaiian word for “messenger.”

At 65, Wisdom is the oldest known bird in the wild according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



First banded in 1956, Wisdom has hatched as many as 40 chicks in her lifetime. The typical lifespan of a Laysan albatross is 12-40 years.

Wisdom's mate and Kūkini share a bonding moment (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service photo)

CAAS members' news

We are delighted to welcome new members:

Julie Hupp
Ray Kremsreiter

On a sadder note, it has recently come to our attention that CAAS member **Ann Thompson** of East Lansing passed away last year. Our sincerest condolences to friends and family.

Malheur: a haven for birds

Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is only one of 563 national wildlife refuges but it has unquestionably received the lion's share of publicity lately due to occupation by certain individuals with decidedly non-birding interests.

But did you know that Malheur has also been designated an Important Birding Area (IBA) by the National Audubon Society?



Hand-painted slide of an American white pelican taken at Malheur Lake in 1908 (Wikipedia)

Quite simply, Malheur NWR is a spectacular place for birds and birding. Even at its inception in 1908, when bird conservationists William Finley and Herman Bohlman helped persuade President Theodore Roosevelt to establish the refuge, the area needed dutiful care and attention. It was created “as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds.” The “Lake Malheur Reservation,” as it was originally called, was the 19th of 51 wildlife refuges created by Teddy Roosevelt during his tenure as President. Check <http://tinyurl.com/InspiringMalheur> for a summary of efforts that inspired the refuges's creation.

During the breeding season, this IBA may host up to a fifth of the world's population of white-faced ibis, the highest known densities of willow flycatcher, and one of the highest Breeding Bird Survey counts for the watch-listed Brewer's sparrow. Other breeding birds in jeopardy at Malheur include:

- western snowy plover (200 pairs)
- long-billed curlew
- short-eared owl
- greater sage-grouse
- bobolink
- trumpeter swan

Serious numbers of American white pelicans, cinnamon teal, redheads, and greater Sandhill cranes (20% of Oregon's breeding population) also breed there, along with up to 1,300 pairs of Franklin's gulls and 3,000 pairs of black terns.

Migrant highlights are dominated by waterfowl, with over a third of the world's population of Ross's geese, a significant proportion of green-winged teal, American wigeon, northern shovelers, canvasbacks, and ruddy ducks, and hundreds of thousands of other waterfowl species such as snow geese, mallards, and northern pintails.

(cont. on page 4)

Birds of Malheur (cont. from page 3)

Shorebird concentrations have included 25,000 western sandpipers, 35,000 long-billed dowitchers, 15,000 Wilson's phalaropes, 15,000 American avocets, and hundreds of pectoral sandpipers and black-necked stilts. Golden eagles and prairie falcons are present year round. The refuge headquarters area itself is well known as an important fall and spring migrant trap for land birds. The list could go on.

The acquisition of the refuge itself is a significant story that deserves attention in light of recent events. Claims that the refuge lands were “stolen” from ranchers are false. (If any group has prior claims to the NWR, it is the Paiute Indian Tribe.)

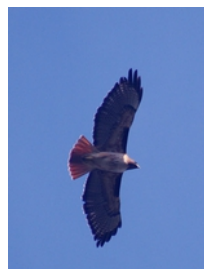
The original core of the refuge dates back to 1908, with other portions added since: 31% from the public domain (“unclaimed federal lands”), 30% transferred from another federal agency, 26% through Duck-Stamp/MBCF dollars, 13% via other means, and less than 1% through land donations. Malheur NWR now covers 187,757 acres of wildlife habitat. For more detail go to: <http://audubonportland.org/local-birding/iba/iba-map/malheur>

Adapted from *Birding Community E-bulletin*, February 2016, Wayne R. Petersen and Paul J. Baicich, editors. Archives at <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

Spring birdwatching opportunities in Michigan

Spring Fling, a celebration of bird migration at Whitefish Point Bird Observatory, is set for April 30-May 1, with optional outings bookended on April 29 and May 2.

Keynote speaker will be **Cameron Cox**, co-author of the *Peterson Reference Guide to Seawatching: Eastern Waterbirds in Flight*. Hawk identification workshops with **Jerry Ligouri**, author of *Hawks at a Distance* and *Hawks from Every Angle*, will be available as well.



The **Tawas Point Birding Festival** takes place on May 19-22 in Iosco county. Join the warblers as they stop here en route to their summer breeding grounds. A change from past festivals: the East Tawas Community Center will serve as festival headquarters this year.

Check www.michiganaudubon.org for details on these festivals and more.

Breakthrough for near-extinct Hawaiian crow

Scientists have recently fully sequenced the genome of the 'alalā, or Hawaiian crow, a crucial step in saving the species from extinction.

Hawaiian crow (*Corvus hawaiiensis*)



The 'alalā was once reduced to a population of about 20 birds. Sequencing its genome will be important in tracking any genetic challenges that may occur due to the reduced genetic diversity now seen in the species.

A map of the 'alalā DNA could prove critical to their long-term recovery. Learning more about the genome of the species helps researchers to better understand how that species will interact with and fit back into its native habitat. The scientists use genetics to determine which birds would pair best, which ones should be released first, and which should be kept in reserve.

The 'alalā has been extinct in the wild since 2002 and exists only in the program run by San Diego Zoo Global at their bird centers in Hawai'i. The program's goal has been to increase the 'alalā flock to 75 or more individuals before releasing them into their native forests.

Conservationists hope to reintroduce the species into prepared habitat on the island of Hawai'i later this year.

New thrush species discovered in India and China

A new species of bird has been discovered in northeastern India and adjacent parts of China by a team of scientists from Sweden, China, the U.S., India, and Russia.

The bird, described in the current issue of the journal *Avian Research*, has been named Himalayan forest thrush (*Zoothera salimalii*), in honor of Indian ornithologist Dr. Salim Ali.

During fieldwork in the mountains, researchers noticed that thrushes in the forests sang much more musically than those on the rocky peaks. Then they discovered physical and genetic differences as well, and now have declared the known “plain-backed thrush” to be two distinct species. The mountain-dwelling variety has been re-named the “alpine thrush.”

Dr. Pamela Rasmussen, coordinator of MSU's global bird sounds website AVoCet, was part of the team, which was led by Per Alström of Uppsala University (Sweden). ■

Journal Review Corner

by Jennifer Olson

Editor's note: This section of the CAAS newsletter is a summary of a journal article about an environmental issue that may be of interest to Capital Area Audubon members. If you have a journal article you would like to share with CAAS members, please contact Jennifer Olson at hawthorn071@hotmail.com

Article title: A Comparison of Bird-Feeding Practices in the United States and Canada

Authors: David J. Horn and Stacy M. Johansen:
Department of Biology, Millikin University, Decatur, IL.
Journal: Wildlife Society Bulletin, Volume 37, Issue 2, June 2013, pp. 293-300.

Introduction: In 2011, more than 52 million Americans over the age of 16 fed wild birds or other wildlife around their homes, spending ~\$5 billion on bird food, feeders, baths, houses, and other accessories (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2012). Over 350 species of birds in the United States and Canada have been observed at bird feeders. Given the number of people participating in bird feeding and the diversity of birds using supplemental foods, one would expect scientifically based recommendations would have been developed for bird feeding. On the contrary, the practice of bird feeding remains one of the *least studied* wildlife-management issues in the United States. Wild-bird feeding can be a serious leisure activity for participants because it can be an active hobby, with participants devoting long periods of time and effort to both feed birds and gain the knowledge, training, and skills to enhance their experiences. The **objectives of this study** were to better understand how and why people feed birds, and whether practices differed based on regional demographics in the United States and Canada. There was also interest in learning what factors would enhance the bird-feeding experience. Collectively, this information could be used to develop conservation messages that promote sustaining and enhancing avian biodiversity in the backyard while minimizing risks associated with bird feeding, such as disease transmission and attracting nuisance species.

Study Area: Individuals who lived in the United States and Canada were able to participate. Participants were recruited through newspaper advertisements; press releases and subsequent articles in print media; announcements on listservs; word-of-mouth; and the study's website (www.projectwildbird.org).

Methods: A survey was primarily administered on the study's website but individuals could also mail a hard copy of the completed questionnaire to Millikin University, where data were entered manually. Surveys were initiated in autumn 2005 and continued through winter 2008-2009. Respondents were placed

into one of 6 geographic regions defined by the Partners in Flight North American Landbird Conservation Plan: (1) Eastern, (2) Intermountain West, (3) Northern Forest, (4) Pacific, (5) Prairie, and (6) Southwest. These regions were selected because they contain different communities of birds and other wildlife, and thus may provide some insight into whether views of bird feeding differ based on the general biological community in which one lives. Because anyone who accessed the website was able to participate in the survey, respondents cannot be considered a true random sample. Rather, the respondents were likely among the more committed hobbyists. To determine differences by gender, age group and region, chi-square tests were performed to determine whether the frequency of response differed. Results were considered significant if $P < 0.05$. Only significant differences in which the range of responses differs by $\geq 10\%$ are reported here.

Results: One thousand two hundred ninety-one (1,291) participants from 48 states and 7 Canadian provinces completed the questionnaire. Almost twice as many questionnaires were received from the Eastern Region than any other. Respondents were largely female (67%) and ≥ 45 years old (77%). Given the few number of respondents in the Pacific and Southwest, and participants in the <15, 15-24, and 25-34 age groups (sample sizes <100), results are reported but no conclusions are provided for these groups.

Respondents indicated they had been feeding wild birds for a mean of 18 years. The majority of respondents indicated they could identify $\geq 81\%$ of the common birds found in the yard. In autumn, older age categories became increasingly likely to feed birds. Respondents regularly provided other alternative bird food to attract birds: suet (82%), nectar (73%), fruit (50%), and mealworms (27%). To attract and enjoy birds, respondents provided water (75%), special plantings (62%), bird houses (61%), and other items (6%). Providing water for birds ranged from 60% in the Northern Forest to 80% in the Intermountain West. Respondents most frequently fill their feeders weekly (57%) compared to daily (38%) or monthly (5%). Bird feeders were cleaned at least: monthly by 37%, yearly by 32%, weekly by 22%, or never by 8% of participants.



The two most commonly cited reasons for feeding birds were: (1) to bring nature and beauty to the area (84%) and, (2) to enjoy the sound of birds in the yard (81%). There were some regional differences in the reason individuals feed wild birds, with the Eastern Region (82%) most frequently feeding birds as a hobby and/or for fun (46%), and to

(cont. on page 6)

Bird feeding practices *(cont. from page 5)*

maintain a list of bird species seen in the yard (49%). When asked “what could make your bird-feeding experience even better,” the majority (69%) answered attracting more species of birds. Many other results are reported in the article but are not highlighted here due to space limitations.

Discussion: McFarlane (1994) found that birders’ motivations changed over time and based on past experience, economic commitment, and centrality-to-lifestyle, birders could be classified into four groups: (1) casual, (2) novice, (3) intermediate, and (4) advanced. McFarlane found that birders were less appreciation-oriented (enjoy nature and the outdoors) and more achievement-oriented (meet a standard of performance) as one went from being a casual to an advanced birder. Given the differences found among age groups, it is likely that older individuals participate in wild-bird feeding as serious leisure in order to establish a stronger tie with wildlife, while younger individuals have the most potential for developing the hobby further or exploring similar hobbies, such as birding.

Because the middle-age groups (25-44) in this study were most likely to feed birds as an educational experience for children, educational messages targeted to youth might be best channeled through groups of middle-aged individuals. Messages should be conservation-oriented, since a large number of people across demographic categories feed birds because they want to bring nature and beauty to their area. Educators also have the opportunity to connect the bird-feeding hobbyists to the protection of wild birds beyond the backyard. Since people who feed birds want to help birds, purchasing a duck stamp, for example, may be an easy way for them to help protect wildlife. Further, because people who feed birds and people who bird can often represent two different groups of birdwatchers, educators might consider ways of encouraging people who feed birds to consider visiting natural areas. Interpretive centers, for instance, could establish community bird-feeding stations as opportunities for people to see birds, and develop programs to view other types of wildlife.

With approximately 25% of the U.S. population over the age of 16 now feeding birds or other wildlife, there is significant opportunity to interest a potentially large number of people in wildlife management issues who may not now be actively engaged, beyond feeding birds.

Citations:

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. 2011 National survey of fishing, hunting, and wildlife-associated recreation. National overview. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C., USA.

McFarlane, B. L. 1994. Specialization and motivations of birdwatchers. *Wildlife Society Bulletin* 22:361-370.

America's most unwanted: Chapter 1

by Ann Hancock

I’m going to change direction for a few months and profile some plants that we should **not** welcome into our gardens and natural areas. Yes, I’m talking about invasive plants.

Full disclosure: Jim and I have had many of these plants in our own gardens, but we inherited them, not chose them. Over the years, we removed truckloads of honeysuckle, winged euonymus, Norway maple, and buckthorn from our yard in East Lansing, yet we had still not finished the job by the time we sold the place and moved to Maine last year!



So over the next few months I’ll be profiling a rogues’ gallery of plants that gardeners and horticulturists have invited to the United States. These plants took a look around, liked what they saw, and commenced reproducing with amazing speed. Today they occupy large swaths of our natural areas,

crowding out native plants that formerly occupied the same niches. Many of these introductions took place long ago, so the plants have had ample time to become entrenched. Controlling these plants consumes a large portion of the time and money needed to manage parks, natural areas, and land trust holdings.

What makes a plant “invasive”? Originating in another country doesn’t automatically mean a plant is invasive, although it increases the chances that it will become a nuisance. A short list of invasive plant characteristics includes:

- (1) production of high numbers of seeds, or having a spreading root system that results in:
- (2) the ability to spread rapidly, and to displace native vegetation
- (3) resistance or immunity to native herbivores/insects, allowing the plant to reproduce freely

Why does this even matter, you ask? The answer is: bird food. And I don’t mean seed, suet, peanuts and cracked corn. I am talking about the diet that songbirds must feed their young, which is made up of insects and their larvae that feed on native plants.

If birds are raising their young in a heavily developed area where few or no native plants grow, those insects and larvae will be absent. That means no nutritious food for nestlings. Whole clutches of babies can starve to death in the midst of apparent plenty. At a recent talk I attended, professor and author Dr. Doug Tallamy illustrated this point with a picture of a nest of dead chickadee nestlings. The chicks were surrounded with a ring of sunflower seeds which the desperate parents had vainly brought to feed them. This discovery was part of an ongoing study Dr. Tallamy and his *(cont. on page 7)*

America's most unwanted (cont. from page 6)

graduate students are conducting on nesting success of birds in natural versus highly altered landscapes.

Many introduced plants were invited to our shores precisely because “Nothing eats them” (read: “eats their leaves”). Some of the most notorious species are garlic mustard, purple loosestrife, common reed, oriental bittersweet, honeysuckle (several species), buckthorn, “burning bush,” and autumn olive. This list represents the tip of the iceberg, literally. I’ll be profiling these species and my hope is that you will do your best to eliminate them from your own landscape.

Many parks, natural areas, land trusts, and conservancies now hold regular work parties to clear away invasive plants. These work events always need helpers, and volunteering is a great way to learn how to recognize unwanted species. Not only will you learn to identify the plants but you will also learn the best control methods for removing them. When I participated in one of these work parties in East Lansing, organizers told me that in other parks where invasives had been removed, many native flowers reappeared in cleared areas the following spring. Encouraging news!

The fight to control invasives will not be won quickly. A primary obstacle to controlling them is the tremendous number of their seeds that remain buried in the soil, the so-called “soil seed bank,” which can remain viable for decades. Whenever the soil is disturbed (by removing the invading plant) those seeds that surface will germinate. Ongoing experiments at MSU’s Beal Botanical Garden have proven that the seeds of one species are still able to germinate 120 years after being buried. To prevent this, the soil must remain undisturbed, although frost action will always bring a percentage of these seeds to the surface where they will germinate, and further complicate the control process.

With that caveat, here is the first candidate for “America’s Most Unwanted” list:

Winged Spindle Tree or Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*)

Euonymus alatus is native to China and northeast Asia. References state that it was introduced to the United States in 1860, so it has been in North America for a long time.

This shrub is a true darling of the nursery trade, which has been promoting it for decades. Hardy, resistant to most insects and diseases, and supremely easy to grow, it is used in countless home landscapes and has escaped widely in the East and Midwest. Few wooded areas near towns or cities are free from it. While it is virtually invisible during the summer, it is easily spotted in the fall when its fiery red color lights up the woods.



Burning bush fall color
(Courtesy photo by David Wagner)

The stems and branches of older plants possess four prominent “wings,” which give it winter interest along with its

natural branching habit. When pruned it recovers quickly, another hallmark of an invasive plant (which is to say that it is idiot-proof). The fluorescent red fall color, its most popular feature, has led to the mistakenly used common name of “burning bush.” (That name more properly belongs to a native euonymus species, *E. atropurpureus*.)

New burning bushes sprout near old (©Ann Hancock)



Once having seen the amazing fall color of *Euonymus alatus*, most people fall in love with it. The flowers are tiny and nondescript, but the fruit is a bright scarlet and quite ornamental. Birds like it and they have spread

it widely. For me one of the worst aspects of this plant besides its promiscuous seeding tendency is the difficulty in removing the seedlings. We used to have a very large burning bush next to our garage, but removed it almost 20 years ago. New seedlings continued to appear every year thereafter. When removing them I had to wear very heavy gloves, for the bark slipped off when pulling them. This left a very thin and incredibly strong stem that would cut through flesh like piano wire. After I once cut myself badly on a stem I had a new respect for (and dislike of) this species. I then used pliers to pull them, and even so, the bark would sometimes slip if I did not get a proper grip.

Recently a research team headed by Dr. Yi Li at the University of Connecticut developed a sterile seedless form of this species by creating a triploid plant. But this begs the question of planting an introduced species in the first place. Every burning bush planted takes the place of a more valuable native plant that could be furnishing food and shelter for birds.

Substitute Plants. If you have “burning bush” in your landscape, consider removing it and replacing it with American Euonymus, Aronia, Fothergilla, blueberry, shining sumac, or a compact cultivar of staghorn sumac.

And protect your hands when pulling those unwanted seedlings!