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# The Call Note

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October 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

### Sandhill cranes cast a spell on viewers

Fall migration is now well underway. Shorebirds and many of the warblers have passed through already while numbers of others, such as sandhill cranes, are still building.

I remember the first time I experienced sandhill crane migration. After spending an afternoon watching large flocks of cranes in the fields and rafts of waterfowl on the nearby waterbodies, I stood on a wooden platform and marveled at the sandhill cranes coming into the marsh to roost for the evening. Their raucous calls sounded off from every angle. I have to confess to taking a certain amount of amusement from watching sandhill cranes land. With their long feet and legs extended in front of them in preparation for contact with the ground and outstretched wings teetering their bodies back and forth, they look like feathered rocking chairs coming in for a landing.

All these years later, I still never tire of the fall crane migration. Fortunately, sandhill crane populations are doing well, and they can be seen across many areas of the state. Michigan Audubon's **Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary** is a great nearby place to observe large gatherings of cranes as they prepare for migration.

Good birding (and good craning),

**Barb Hosler**

*Editor's Note: Haehnle Sanctuary is located at 9066 Seymour Rd, Pleasant Lake, MI 49272. See related story on CraneFest on page 2.*

## October 6 meeting & program

### Why are there so many species in the tropics?

The richness and diversity of the world's tropics as compared with its temperate regions is well documented, but *why* is this so? Learn what current research tells us about this phenomenon from **Gary Mittelbach**, MSU professor of integrative biology who works at MSU's W.K. Kellogg Biological Station. Last year he was named a 2015 fellow of the Ecological Society of America.



Join us at Fenner on **Thursday, October 6** for snacks and social time at 7:00 p.m. A brief meeting and the program begin at 7:30. Bring a friend!

## Thank you!

A big thank-you to **Madeline Merz** for single-handedly supplying the delicious snacks at the September meeting.

## November field trip reminder

**Sunday, November 13** is the annual trip to Allegan State Game Area and Lake Michigan. Probe these prime birding hotspots with Allegan county resident and experienced guide, **Rick Brigham**. Mark your calendar now – you won't want to miss it. Details in the November *Call Note*.

## CraneFest viewing a spectacular fall sight

If you enjoy spotting the occasional pair of sandhill cranes in your local fields, you will be thrilled with the thousands of cranes you'll see at CraneFest, the annual crane-centered event sponsored jointly by Michigan Audubon and the Kiwanis Club of Battle Creek. This year's festival is set for October 8 and 9.

*Cranes in flight (photo: Wikipedia Commons)*



Events run from noon to dusk, and feature activities, vendors, and of course the cranes. The major attraction will be watching thousands of Sandhill cranes return to the adjoining

Baker Sanctuary. The fly-in begins slowly throughout the afternoon, with the best viewing of large numbers of cranes between 5:00 p.m and dusk on the property owned by the Kiwanis. Admission is free but there is a minimal parking fee.

## Get ready for apple butter at Fenner

### October 8 and 9 marks Fenner's 43<sup>rd</sup> festival

Fenner Nature Center celebrates its 43<sup>rd</sup> year of the annual Apple Butter Festival this October 8 and 9.



Since its inception, Fenner staff and volunteers coordinate the annual preparation of apple butter, which involves picking, peeling, mixing, and simmering apples and spices in the huge copper kettle for several hours over an open

fire. Of course this also involves stirring – lots and lots of stirring.

The festival also features live music, old-time games, pumpkin carving, sweet treats, and demonstration of artisan crafts for all ages.

Savor the fall color and the smells of apple butter as you wander through the activities or the trails, including an accessible paved trail near the pond.

Come on out and enjoy a local fall tradition!

## Eaton county plans purchase for massive new park

Eaton county is acquiring a 432-acre gravel pit between Charlotte and Eaton Rapids with the goal of turning it into the county's largest park.

The property, known as **Crandell Lake**, is located near the corner of M-50 and Stewart Road. The \$3.9 million parcel will be funded by a state grant that covers 75 percent of the price. Property owner Randy Crandell plans to donate the remaining 25 percent.

At 160 acres in area and up to 35 feet deep, Crandell Lake is the largest body of water in Eaton county.

The next step will likely involve establishing a committee to address how the park's development will be funded. The final terms of the property acquisition will be negotiated and then voted on by the county's board of commissioners at a later date.

Avid local birder **Marc North** is excited at the prospect of the new Crandall Lake park. He has spotted most species of duck there, cackling goose, Ross's goose, snow goose, all three swans, and common loons. Surrounding fields have yielded bobolinks, Eastern meadowlarks, and more.

## Fenner morning bird walks end on high note

The first fall bird walk on September 3 had few migrants and hordes of mosquitoes, but the last one on September 24 had the birds.

Leader **Bob Kingsbury** reported that the great weather matched the birding. Several first-of-season migrants there included orange-crowned warbler, ruby-crowned kinglet, hermit thrush, and white-throated sparrow. Other warblers sighted were:

- Black-and-white
- Blackpoll
- Black-throated blue
- Black-throated green
- Chestnut-sided
- Magnolia
- Nashville
- Northern parula
- Pine (still singing!)
- American redstart
- Tennessee

Another good group of warblers were flitting about the parking lot as the walk ended, which made leaving difficult.

"Thanks to everyone who came out this year. I enjoyed it," said Bob.

As did the birders! Thank YOU, Bob.

## Lansing library now offers birdwatching kits on loan

The Capital Area District Library system now offers a birdwatching kit as part of its Library of Things, a special service that supports lifelong learning and creativity.

Each kit features binoculars (Eagle Optics Kingbird 6.5x32), a Birds of Michigan Field Guide, a Lowepro birdwatcher field station (a special backpack to carry your gear), and a CAAS program flier.



Adult library cardholders can borrow this kit, and other practical, hands-on items to learn new skills, explore areas of interest, or help with everyday tasks.

The loan period is three weeks, with an option to renew for an additional week.

The birdwatching kit is a popular item, according to Jim Mac Lean, Head of Community Outreach for the library's downtown Lansing branch.

Other items in the Library of Things includes an air quality monitor, graphing calculator, sewing machine, microscope kit for children, a telescope, and other electronic gadgets.

More information at <http://www.cadl.org/find-books-and-more/lot-heading/browse/bird-watching-kit/>

## New National Monument in Maine owing to Burt's Bees cofounder

Roxanne Quimby, the cofounder of Burt's Bees, began buying large parcels of land in Maine in the 1990s. Using the earnings derived from the company's line of natural care products, she went public with her plan in 2011, a plan to make tens of thousands of acquired acres into a National Park. She wanted this to occur during 2016, the centennial year of the National Park Service (NPS). Since the National Park designation would have required Congressional action, Quimby promoted National Monument designation instead, which requires only a presidential proclamation.

On 12 August, she signed paperwork to transfer land from her nonprofit Elliottsville Plantation, Inc, to the U.S. Department of the Interior. This amounted to 87,500 acres in Maine's Katahdin region, just east of Baxter State Park (209,401 acres). Quimby's foundation package included a \$40 million

## Maine National Monument (cont)

endowment to fund park operations, with \$20 million at launch and another \$20 million to be raised within three years. The land-value of this 87,500-acre gift to the public has been estimated at \$60 million.

There is disagreement in Maine over this action, between critics opposed to federal government presence and those who view the move as an economic lifeline that will protect the land. The region has been struggling with double-digit unemployment, especially since the closing of two regional paper mills.

Despite this controversy, the White House moved quickly, with President Obama announcing National Monument status for the land on 24 August, exactly one day before the centennial of the NPS.

In lauding the action, the National Parks Conservation Association said that the designation is likely to create hundreds of jobs in the Katahdin region, "giving an economic boost to the entire state while permanently protecting a landscape that inspired American conservationists from poet Henry David Thoreau to President Theodore Roosevelt."

Together with neighboring Baxter State Park, the new Katahdin Woods and Waters Monument should ensure that this large landscape remains intact. **Notable birds of the region** include spruce grouse, Northern goshawk, American three-toed woodpecker, black-backed woodpecker, merlin, yellow-bellied flycatcher, solitary vireo, Philadelphia vireo, gray jay, boreal chickadee, and a very long list of breeding warblers, including mourning, Cape May, pine, bay-breasted, and blackpoll.

This promises to be a win-win situation, with new jobs, protection for birds and other wildlife, and public access. That access means securing opportunities for visitors to hike, canoe, hunt, fish, snowmobile, snowshoe, cross-country ski, photograph, and go birding.

Adapted from Birding Community E-Bulletin – Sept 2016, Wayne R. Petersen & Paul J. Baicich, eds. Archives at <http://refugeassociationl.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

## DUES – DUES – DUES

Fall means it's time to renew your membership to Capital Area Audubon. A membership form was included with last month's *Call Note*, or you may pick one up at the next meeting.

Dues may be paid in person at the meeting, or mailed to CAAS, PO Box 22065, Lansing MI 48909-2206.

Our membership coordinator **Ed Merz** would be happy to answer any questions or assist you in renewing.

Your prompt attention to this is very much appreciated!

MEMBER  
DUES



America's least wanted

Black swallow-wort is one nasty invasive

by Ann Hancock

Note: This month's invasive is a plant not yet common in Michigan, though its spread could explode if ignored. Here's a chance to nip an invasive "in the bud," so to speak. The sneaky invader is black swallow-wort.

I first met this plant when I was weeding in the shrub bed around the Food Toxicology Building at MSU. It had probably hitched a ride with the nursery stock used to plant the beds. It stood out to me because it was a twining vine with shiny, deep green leaves. It was very handsome with its deep purple-brown flowers, and I didn't have a clue as to what it was.

After consulting some plant guides I found the answer: it was black swallow-wort, an invasive plant that forms large colonies and spreads by an aggressive rhizomatous root system, as well as wind-borne seeds. As a member of the milkweed family, it forms pods bearing silky parachuted seeds which disperse the plants far and wide. As the summer progressed I learned just how aggressive its root system is; no matter how hard I tried, I was not able to control the plant by manual weeding.

Black swallow-wort, *Cynanchium louiseae*, is not a recent addition to the U.S. flora. It was introduced from Europe where it is native to Spain, Portugal, France, and Italy. It was first noted as an escape from a botanical garden in Essex County, Ipswich, Massachusetts in the year 1864, but had been found a decade earlier in the same area. Since then it has been spreading steadily and is now considered invasive in California, Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, and Maine.



Flowering black swallow-wort has spread across the Northeast U.S. and Southeast Canada and is now appearing further west (USDA photo)

As with most invasives, it is tolerant of a wide variety of soils and habitats, except for wet conditions.

Here in Maine it is very tolerant of salt and can grow next to the ocean. In a nearby state park it has completely covered the native stands of bayberry, juniper, and serviceberry. While it is not a strangling vine (it dies back to the soil every winter), it shades out and weakens the host plants it climbs on. In upland fields it can completely displace native stands of grasses and forbs, which seriously affects grassland birds, already beleaguered by shrinking habitat.

Another problem with black swallow-wort that is particularly troublesome is that monarch butterflies, which depend on milkweeds as host larval plants, are attracted to the plant and will sometimes lay eggs on it. However those larvae will not survive on black swallow-wort. Already stressed monarch populations do not need yet another deadly challenge.

A dense stand of black swallow-wort can produce up to 2,000 seeds *per square meter*, so it is very important to try to prevent the plant from reaching maturity and setting seed. The recommended method of control is with herbicide; at present there are no known biological controls. Directions and recommendations for herbicide type, timing, and methods can be found at the Plant Conservation Alliance Alien Plant Working Group website: <https://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/cylo1.htm>

Follow treatment directions carefully, and hopefully we can prevent a full-fledged infestation of black swallow-wort in Michigan.

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## Winter finch forecast for 2016-17

Each year **Ron Pittaway** of the Ontario Field Ornithologists prepares a forecast of winter finch movement. Full forecast at <http://www.jeaniron.ca/2016/finchforecast16.htm>

**GENERAL FORECAST:** Cone crops average poor in Southern Ontario, Quebec, Atlantic Canada, New York, Vermont and New Hampshire, but crops are generally good to bumper in Northern Ontario, Western Canada and Alaska. The dividing line is roughly James Bay south along the Ontario-Quebec border. White-winged Crossbills and often Pine Siskins prefer to move east or west rather than go south in search of cone crops. Many crossbills and some siskins may have already relocated to northern Ontario and across the boreal forest to Yukon where spruce cone crops are abundant. Purple Finches in the East are currently moving south in numbers. See individual forecasts (below) for further details.

**NOTE:** Many birds will have a difficult time finding natural food sources this winter in Southern Ontario and the Northeast.

**INDIVIDUAL FORECASTS:** Forecasts apply mainly to Ontario and adjacent provinces and states. Three irruptive non-finch passerines whose movements are often linked to finches are also discussed. Follow finch wanderings this fall and winter on eBird.

**PINE GROSBEEK:** Most should stay in the north because native Mountain-ash berry crops are good to bumper (some poor areas) across the boreal forest. A few may wander to southern Ontario where they like European Mountain-ash berries and small ornamental crabapples. At feeders they prefer black oil sunflower seeds.

**PURPLE FINCH:** Eastern Purple Finches were moving in early September at the Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac in Quebec. The poor seed crops on most coniferous and deciduous trees indicate that Purple Finches will leave northern breeding areas. Purples prefer black oil sunflower seeds at feeders.

**RED CROSSBILL:** A scattering of Red Crossbills will likely wander widely in the Northeast this winter. Listen and watch for them on large-coned ornamental pines and spruces. Red Crossbills comprise at least 10 "call types" in North America. Most types are impossible to identify without analyzing recordings of their flight calls. Matt Young (may6@cornell.edu) at The Cornell Lab of Ornithology will identify types if you email him recordings.

**WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL:** This crossbill irrupts south only in years of widespread cone crop failures. Many eastern crossbills have probably moved to northern Ontario and to abundant spruce cone crops in western Canada. However, expect some White-winged Crossbills to be scattered across southern Canada and the northeastern USA. Both crossbill species increasingly use feeders with black oil sunflower seeds when conifer seeds are scarce.

**COMMON REDPOLL:** Last fall and winter's large irruptive southward flight was unexpectedly halted north of latitude 45 degrees by a bumper seed crop on Balsam Fir. If redpolls move south this year, they will likely continue to southern Canada and the northern states because birch seed crops are generally low across the Northeast. In redpoll flocks, check for larger and darker "Greater" Common Redpolls (subspecies *rostrata*) from Baffin Island (Nunavut) and Greenland. Redpolls prefer nyger seeds in silo feeders with or without perches.

**HOARY REDPOLL:** Watch for Hoaries in flocks of Common Redpolls. The "Southern" Hoary Redpoll (nominote subspecies *exilipes*) breeds south to northern Ontario and is the subspecies usually seen in southern Canada and northern USA. However, "Hornemann's" Hoary Redpoll (nominote *hornemanni*) which was formerly considered a great rarity south of the tundra is now reported more often likely because its ID features are better known.

**PINE SISKIN:** Some will irrupt south because cone crops in the Northeast are generally poor. Siskins were moving south in mid-September at the Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac in Quebec. However, some eastern siskins have likely relocated to abundant spruce crops in western Canada. Siskins prefer nyger seeds in silo feeders.

**EVENING GROSBEEK:** The Evening Grosbeak is the world's most spectacular winter finch. Its breeding populations continue to increase in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick due to increasing outbreaks of spruce budworm. Watch for them in Algonquin Park, Adirondacks and northern New England. A few are likely at feeders in southern Ontario. They prefer black oil sunflower seeds.

**THREE IRRUPTIVE PASSERINES:** Movements of these three passerines are often linked to the boreal finches:

**BLUE JAY:** Expect a much larger than usual flight of jays from mid-September to mid-October along the north shorelines of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The acorn, beechnut, hazelnut crops were generally poor but variable in central and southern Ontario. Drought has damaged many seed crops.

**RED-BREADED NUTHATCH:** An early southward movement began in early summer and continues as this forecast is posted (22 Sept. 2016). This widespread movement is evidence of poor cone crops in the Northeast. It indicates that Purple Finches, White-winged Crossbills and Pine Siskins are on the move too.

**BOHEMIAN WAXWING:** Very few Bohemians breed east of James Bay in Canada. Most Bohemians will likely stay in northern Ontario and western Canada because native Mountain-ash berry crops are good to bumper (some poor areas) across the boreal forest. In recent winters, however, Bohemians have been coming south regularly every winter possibly due to reliable annual crops of abundant Buckthorn (*Rhamnus*) berries. Watch for Pine Grosbeaks eating their favorite European Mountain-ash berries and small ornamental crabapples.