



capitalareaaudubon.org

The Call Note

November 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

Who will YOU meet?

One of the things I enjoy about birding is serendipitously meeting other birders while out birding. This happened to me recently when I pulled over to the side of the road to check a local spot for late shorebirds. Another birder was there already, and he and I proceeded to scope the field until we found our target bird. If your idea of a good time is methodically scanning through corn stubble for that lone bird that's not a killdeer, you must be a fellow member of the birding tribe.

Capital Area Audubon meetings and field trips are also good venues for meeting others who share a passion for all things avian. I encourage everyone to attend this month's meeting, which will feature our own **Jim Hewitt** talking about the birds of Cuba. As travel restrictions to this country ease, Cuba could be on the cusp of a seeing a wave of traveling birders.

Slightly closer to home than Cuba, **Rick Brigham** is kindly offering to guide us around the Allegan area again this year (see info on page 2). If you've never gone on this field trip before, I highly recommend it. Besides, you never know who you might meet out there!

Good birding,

Barb Hosler



November 3 meeting & program

Take a Cuban getaway right here at Fenner

Cuba is one of our closest neighbors, yet one of the least visited. This is changing due to recent political developments and birders are among those now flocking to this Caribbean gem.

Cuban trogon (Wikipedia)



Join us on **Thursday, November 3** when longtime CAAS member and current chapter historian **Jim Hewitt** will share his recent travel experiences in Cuba with a program entitled "**Cuba: The Land, the People, the Birds.**"

It promises to be an eye-opening presentation. Snacks and social time begin at 7pm, with a brief meeting and program at 7:30. Bring a friend and introduce them to CAAS!

Thank you to **Liz Febba** and **Debbie Wolf** for supplying the snacks at our October meeting.

If you missed the snack sign-up sheet at the last meeting and would like to help fill in the blanks, please email **Madeline Mertz** at mrmerz@comcast.net. Thank you!

Dues, please!

Our treasurer **Mike Caterino** reports that membership dues for 2016-17 are trickling in very slowly this year. If you have not renewed yet, PLEASE do so at your earliest convenience. We rely on you to keep our club going. Every renewal is critical. A renewal form is included with this issue. Mail it in, or renew in person at the November meeting. Thank you.



Allegan county field trip a November adventure

Rick Brigham will once again be leading the fall field trip in Allegan county. **Meet at Douglas Beach at 8:00 a.m. on Sunday, November 13** to spend some time along the Lake Michigan shore watching for late shorebirds, ducks, scoters, loons, grebes, gulls, and more.

Birders will next visit Allegan State Game Area and other nearby locations to seek out more shorebirds, ducks, geese, hawks, eagles, and other inland birds.



Bring binoculars of course and a scope, if you have one. Remember that it can be much colder along the lake than inland, so bundle up.

Sightings can be varied and unpredictable. Three years ago, the trip highlight was a very unexpected Sabine's gull. With climate change ongoing and rare sightings occurring with increased frequency, rare birds here are not impossible. Rick lives in Allegan county so he will have the latest information on any hotspots and potentially productive areas.

As always there will be a stop for lunch at the ever popular Crane's Orchard Pie Pantry in Fennville, in itself worth the trip.

Directions to Douglas Beach: take I-196 to Saugatuck/Douglas exit 41. Go right on the Blue Star Highway for about 3 miles to the stoplight at Center Street in Douglas. Turn right on Center Street and go about one mile until the road ends. Turn right for about 100 yards to the small parking lot on the left for Douglas Beach.

In normal traffic, the drive from Lansing to Douglas Beach takes a little over an hour and a half, so plan accordingly to arrive there by 8:00 a.m.

Project Feeder Watch begins November 12

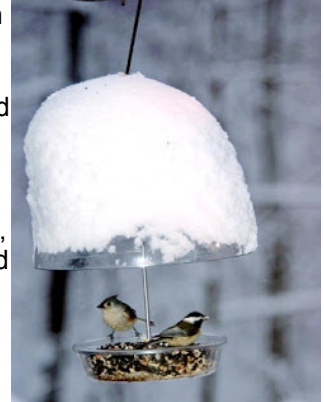
Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Participants periodically count the birds they see at their feeders from November through early April and send their counts to Project FeederWatch. The project is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. ▶

▶ Project FeederWatch (cont)

This year's watch begins on November 12, 2016 and ends on April 7, 2017.

Scientists are able to use the data supplied by citizen scientists (ordinary birdwatchers like you) to monitor more than 100 bird species that winter in North America. This data helps scientists track broad-scale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. It also enables them to piece together more accurate population maps.

Anyone interested in birds can participate. All skill levels and monitoring intervals are welcome. All you need is a bird feeder, bird bath, or plantings that attract birds. There is an \$18 participation fee, which covers materials, staff support, web design, data analysis, and the year-end report. The project is supported almost entirely by participation fees. Participants will receive a research kit in the mail.



Count days come in pairs. You pick the days that will maximize the time you have to count birds, and then count them on those days at whatever intervals you are able. If you are unable to count during a particular week or count period, that's okay. Your data is valuable even if you were only able to count on a few occasions.

Join at any time at www.feederwatch.org or by calling 800-843-2473.

Call Note

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Rattlers win threatened status under ESA

Good news for Michigan's only venomous snake – the massasauga rattlesnake is now listed as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act, which means it is vulnerable to dying out, but not in such peril that it is considered “endangered.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's listing means you can't hunt the snake or kill it, and that officials will develop a plan in the coming months to help the non-aggressive rattler to survive.

Eastern massasauga rattlesnake (MSU Extension Service photo)



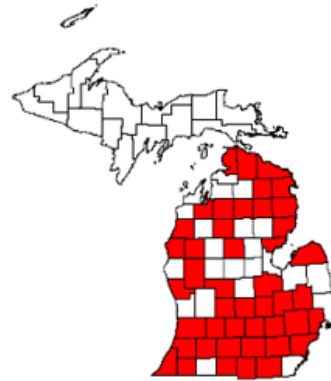
The eastern massasauga is seldom seen. A timid, sluggish snake, about 2-3 feet in length, it is colored with a pattern of dark brown slightly rectangular patches set against a light gray-to-brown background. Occasionally, this coloration can be so dark as to appear almost black. The belly is mostly black.



It lives in wetland areas and adjacent upland habitats from Missouri to New York and parts of the Canadian province of Ontario. Its numbers have fallen as wetlands have been drained for

farming and urban development. Persecution from fearful humans, as well as illegal collection, has also hurt their population.

Black mamba snakes, native to southern Africa, are considered to be the world's deadliest snake. They measure up to 14 ft long and can slither at speeds of up to 12.5 mph. Fortunately, they are shy and avoid confrontation. Avoid cornering one, though, as they will strike, and strike repeatedly, with large amounts of potent neuro- and cardiotoxin.



The snakes were once common across the Lower Peninsula, but absent from the Upper Peninsula. Michigan appears to be the last stronghold for this species. There are currently more massasauga populations here than in any other state or province within the species' range: 187 identified populations concentrated mainly in the southern portion of the Lower Peninsula.

The rattlesnake eats mostly small rodents such as voles and mice, and serves as prey for herons, eagles, and other large birds.

One or two people are bitten by the snakes each year, but there has not been a fatality in decades.

What makes a plant native, or not?

Q: How long does a plant or animal species have to live in a region before it is considered native? And are all nonnative species considered invasive?

A: The distinction between native and nonnative species does not disappear over time; if a plant or animal was introduced with human help, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it is nonnative. There's also a crucial distinction between nonnative species and invasive ones, notes Vicki Funk, senior research botanist and curator at the Museum of Natural History. To be considered invasive, a nonnative animal or plant species has to displace one or more natives. Chicory, introduced from Europe as a flavoring agent in the 19th century, grows wild in the United States but does not displace native plants; but kudzu, introduced from Asia for erosion control in the mid-20th-century South, does, and is considered therefore invasive.



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Bird-watching opportunities increase due to habitat purchases

Early in September, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission (MBCC) met and approved expenditure of \$11.7 million from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund (MBCF) to preserve more than 13,000 additional acres at four National Wildlife Refuges: McFaddin in **Texas**, Felsenthal in **Arkansas**, Lower Hatchie in **Tennessee**, and Turnbull in **Washington**.



The lion's share of newly acquired habitat, 12,376 acres, was for McFaddin NWR, located about three miles east of High Island, Tex., one of the premier stop-over sites for migrating birds in spring. The three other acquisitions are much smaller (less than 300 acres) but nonetheless significant.

As a result of this purchase, McFaddin's area increased by over 20 percent, including a large portion of the Willow Slough Marsh, the largest remaining freshwater marsh on the Texas coast. The property will be especially significant for mottled ducks, wood ducks, black-bellied whistling-ducks, fulvous whistling-ducks, and blue-winged teal. Many other species, of course, will benefit; this is presumed wintering area for both the black rail and the yellow rail.

McFaddin NWR, along with neighboring Texas Point NWR, was recognized early on as one of the 500 crucial Important Birding Areas (IBAs) in the U.S. by the American Bird Conservancy.

Funds for these acquisitions were raised largely through the sale of federal "Duck Stamps," which go to provide habitat for wildlife and more opportunities for refuge visitors who bird watch, hunt, photograph, and view wildlife. Plans are now under way to expand access for users at each of these NWRs, affirming that purchasing a \$25-Duck Stamp actually does contribute toward increasing access for birding.

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

Canadians await outcome of their vote for a national bird

This election news is a welcome change of pace from our own political preoccupation of the moment.

Since the beginning of last year, Canadians have been invited to vote for the bird species they would like to see become the national bird of Canada. The National Bird Project was undertaken by the Royal

National bird of Canada (cont)

Canadian Geographical Society, in partnership with Bird Studies Canada.

When public voting ended on August 31, nearly 50,000 votes had been cast. The top five choices were, in order: common loon, snowy owl, gray jay, Canada goose, and black-capped chickadee.

Although the loon was the top vote-getter with 14,000 votes, it is uncertain that it will emerge as the winner.

On September 19 a debate by a panel of experts was held at the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa to argue the merits of each of the top five birds. The discussion was lively, cordial, and humorous, with some passionate advocates for each species.



One aptly named ornithologist, David Bird, advocated for the third-ranked gray jay, sometimes called a whiskey jack. According to Bird, this forest-dwelling species is smart and hardy, is found

throughout Canada (and isn't found in large numbers elsewhere), and isn't claimed as an official bird by any province. He suggested that gray jays are most like Canadians as a whole because they are known for their friendly and trusting nature.

The Society's official recommendation for Canada's national bird will be announced on November 21 and will appear in the December 2016 issue of Canadian Geographic magazine.

The effort has yet to fully address an official designation through the Canadian Parliament, but that may yet come to pass, with a possible official bird for Canada being selected in 2017, the country's sesquicentennial.

Adapted from Birding Community E-bulletin – October 2016, Wayne R. Petersen and Paul J. Baicich, eds., archives at <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

New Zealand aims to be rat-free by 2050

New Zealand plans to spend billions of dollars to make itself free of rodents and other invasive species that threaten its natural species by 2050.

Rats, possums, and stoats are said to kill 25 million native birds every year, many of which are land-dwellers, which makes them particularly vulnerable. The kiwi, for example, now numbers fewer than 70,000.

The aggressive control program was announced this summer.

IN MEMORIAM:

Alan Wormington: Ontario's naturalist extraordinaire dies at 62



Alan Wormington (1954-2016) photo by Josh Vandermeulen

Alan Wormington, highly skilled birder, general naturalist, and Ontario wonder, was in the words of one colleague, “possibly ...the most influential birder in Ontario over the last 100 years.”

He passed away on September 3 at the age of 62, from cancer.

Affectionately known to his birdwatching buddies as “The Worm,” he was single-minded in his pursuit of uncommon species. Wormington found seven species of birds that were new to birding in Ontario, the most discoveries in the province by anyone in almost a century.

In 1982, Wormington became a founding member of the Ontario Birds Records Committee, a group that verifies bird sightings with strict and rigorous criteria. The official list of species seen in Ontario now stands at 494. Before his death, Wormington had spotted 447 of them, more than any other birder.

A more difficult record to challenge is the number of sightings he recorded within the boundaries of Point Pelee National Park in southwestern Ontario. In 1980, Wormington moved to nearby Leamington to have easy access to this birdwatching mecca. He edited a newsletter about the park and maintained a list of 368 of the 393 bird species ever recorded there. “That record may never be broken,” said Glenn Coady, a fellow naturalist.

Wormington, also an expert on butterflies, wrote columns for *The Globe and Mail* and three books: *The Birds of Point Pelee*, *The Butterflies of Point Pelee*, and *The Rare Birds of Ontario*. They were ongoing projects, as he kept adding new information. A group of fellow naturalists are working to complete the books – his life's work – and hope to have them published soon.

Astonishingly, Wormington was largely a self-taught scientist, having dropped out of high school in the eleventh grade.

In 2002 Wormington was part of a team sponsored by Zeiss, the optics manufacturer, to search for the ivory-billed woodpecker in Louisiana, without luck.■

What is Nyjer®?

Nyjer® (pronounced NYE-ger) is a trademarked name for a little black seed used by the wild bird feeding industry that is heavily favored by finches. It is also known as thistle seed by backyard birdwatchers because it looks so similar to the seeds Canada thistle and bull thistle. However,



Nyjer is unrelated to thistle plants or seeds. It is actually the seed of the African yellow daisy *Guizotia abyssinica*, which is raised commercially abroad.

Scattered Nyjer® does not sprout into weeds. It has been heat treated to render it sterile.

However, it does leave a lot of shell waste below the feeder. At an active feeder, all those shells accumulate quickly into a little black pile. You can rake up the pile, or cover it with mulch or a ground cover plant. Birds will not eat these shells.

Nyjer's high oil content makes it an excellent energy source for active birds, especially in winter, and is best offered in a feeder especially designed for finches. Nutritionally, the seed is 25-35 percent fat, 16-18 percent protein, 18-20 percent fiber, and no more than 12 percent moisture. Just what a hungry finch needs on a brisk day!

Hummers revealed



A recent showing on PBS's *Nature* series is worth a mention. *Super Hummingbirds* captures the wonder of these little dynamos who inhabit the New World's ecosystems exclusively, ranging from deserts to mountains.

With high-speed camerawork and breakthrough new science, this remarkable production takes us into the fast-paced world of hummingbirds as never before.

Hummers can move faster than the eye can see, but thanks to amazing slow-speed photography we are able to see every beat of their wings, watch them hover, fly backward and upside down, and much more.

Recent scientific studies reveal how they are able to thrive in low-oxygen environments, and consume prodigious amounts of nectar in the blink of an eye. They are filmed mating, laying eggs, and raising families.

For 60 minutes of nonstop beauty and wonder, catch a rerun of this outstanding show, or purchase the DVD from www.pbs.org

America's Most Unwanted

Japanese knotweed's tenacity would challenge a hazmat team

You may not believe in zombies, but this plant comes frighteningly close to behaving like one.

This month's "Most Unwanted" invasive plant species features Japanese knotweed, *Fallopia japonica*, formerly known as *Polygonatum cuspidatum*. It has now become established in Michigan and is officially listed as an invasive plant. Conservationists and biologists are trying to get the word out to gardeners and natural area managers to watch for and eradicate this plant when it appears, before the problem becomes even larger and more dire.

Japanese knotweed's beauty belies its perniciousness (photo by MdE, Wikimedia)



Japanese knotweed is a beguilingly attractive plant with large heart-shaped leaves and beautiful silvery flower tassels. The stems resemble those of bamboo,

with prominent joints and long internodes, but it is actually a member of the buckwheat family and not related to bamboo at all.

This plant's introduction is a repeat of a sad, familiar story: this plant was brought to U.S. shores by well-meaning gardeners because of its highly attractive flowers and rapid growth. It quickly forms a dense thicket that serves as a screen or soil-stabilizing grove. This would be great if the plant stayed where it was planted. Unfortunately this is not the case. Wherever it is planted, it forms stands up to 7 feet tall that crowd out all other vegetation. Its extensive root system grows vigorously, tolerating adverse conditions and spreading even more rapidly in favorable sites. Once established Japanese knotweed spreads and will keep growing indefinitely unless some sort of control is attempted. Repeated mowing is said to weaken the plant, but I have not seen evidence of this.

This species' history in the United Kingdom is illustrative of its disruptive power.

Native to Japan and east Asia, as the name implies, Japanese knotweed was originally collected in Japan in 1850 by a German botanist, Philipp von Siebold. Von Siebold sent a specimen to the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew (England) and unwittingly set in motion an invasion that is causing massive repercussions in the U.K. 166 years later.

The plant has become a terrible problem in the natural environment and a nightmare for homeowners as well. Homeowners who wish to sell their property learn quickly that their home is unsaleable *unless all knotweed is removed from the property*. Home sales in the U.K. require a legal document disclosing the presence of knotweed (or its absence). If it is present on the property, lenders require that removal be initiated, or they may legally refuse to finance the buyer's loan.

It's a sad story that Michiganders can learn from. Education, vigilance, and swift action are key to thwarting this species.

At present the best control methods for knotweed are chemical, and even that involves a lengthy period of repeated application. Specialty knotweed removal companies have sprung up to help owners deal with eradication of this weed. It's not a question of simple digging up and disposal, either. In the U.K. all parts of knotweed are treated as hazardous waste; knotweed removal firms must be licensed for knotweed control, and debris from clearing the plant must be sent to specially designated landfills. An offense is punishable by a fine or imprisonment, according to the U.K.'s Wildlife and Countryside act of 1981. On the site of the most recent London Olympic Games, knotweed removal and disposal fees cost some 70 million pounds (\$120 million). Clearly, it is an enormous problem.

Live knotweed arising from the dead (photo by Ann Hancock)



Herbicides are effective for control of this plant, but only if the homeowner or property manager is committed to a multi-year effort of repeat applications. The plant will ultimately re-sprout from even the smallest piece of root. Experts estimate that it takes an average of five years to eliminate an established patch.

Near our home in Maine, one of our neighbors is trying to eliminate a large patch of knotweed. A pile of roots was left heaped up after bulldozing the area. This hummock of roots and shredded leaves, which has been heaped up in the sun during our long dry summer, has rooted, and the surrounding area is still putting out sprouts after repeated mowings. This is why plant debris disposal is so strictly controlled and must be sent to a special landfill in the U.K.

Knotweed is definitely not a plant that anyone should tolerate on their property. Its relentless spread and suppression of native species as well as the difficulty of controlling it makes it a nightmare in the landscape. It should be removed as soon as possible and all parts burned lest pieces of root contaminate the landfill you send it to.