

Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

May, 2020, Volume 19, Number 1

The Power of One: In this Case, One Couple Doug and Cindy Tallamy



Doug at the Discovery Center



Pandora Sphinx caterpillar



Eastern Kingbird



Cindy, birding

In the third chapter of his first book (*Bringing Nature Home*), Doug Tallamy writes of his distress as a nine-year old boy at watching a bulldozer push piles of dirt into a pollywog pond where he had watched tiny tadpoles develop into frogs. He says of that experience that he “had witnessed the local extinction of a thriving community of animals, sacrificed so that my neighbors-to-be could have an expansive lawn.” The boy that had grieved over the loss of the tiny amphibians grew up to be one of the most important and influential conservation voices in our country. If you doubt that, you have not read his books or attended one of his presentations. And you definitely have not attended to the impressive increase in the use of native plants in landscapes all over the country. To be sure, we can’t trace all of that increase to Doug, but without his efforts, the interest

in native plants, and the insects they support, would not be what it is.

For more than 30 years, Doug has served as Professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He has not only taught during that time, he has authored eighty research articles and three books – the most recent being *Nature’s Best Hope* (see review in this edition). And he has presented fifty to one hundred programs annually across the country.



Cindy, pulling Oriental Bittersweet

Twenty years ago, Doug and his wife Cindy purchased a 10-acre tract of agricultural wasteland that had been under the plow for three hundred years. When the Tallamys took title to their land, it had been fallow for a while and was largely covered with invasive species like multiflora rose, Japanese honeysuckle, autumn olive and oriental bittersweet. But the Tallamys had a vision for their land: They would convert it to native plants, thus creating a place welcoming to wildlife of all kinds, particularly birds and insects.

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In 2012



Early results.



From ecological trash to environmental treasure.

Cindy, also an entomologist, provided the lion's share of muscle for the task of removing alien plants while her husband attended to his teaching, his research, his writing and his busy travel schedule. In just three years, she had virtually cleared their land of aliens, allowing the natives to return. Additional native trees, shrubs, forbs and grasses were also added. It was a Herculean task, which – Doug said – his wife accomplished by doing “a little each day.” Invasives still sneak in here and there, but Cindy is vigilant, and continues her attack on plants that don't belong.

To date, the Tallamys have documented 55 species of nesting birds on their restored land. Doug, an excellent photographer, has photographed some of the birds, as well as a remarkable 932 species



Eastern Bluebird

of moths on the property.

In the images of Cindy's work shown on these pages we find evidence that any – or, indeed, all of us can create a landscape that is welcoming to wildlife we care about. All the while she has carried out her efforts, Doug made his way around the country, educating and inspiring us to do the same.

Every one of us who has even a small tract of land can do the same. You will be pleasantly surprised at the result. 🦋



Cindy in invasives



White-eyed Vireo



Cecropia caterpillar



Paddle caterpillar

From the Executive Director's Desk

by Kay Charter

When I left for my annual train trip west on Feb. 15, Covid-19 was barely on anyone's radar. My first stop was in Alpine, Texas where I presented a program for about 45 conservation minded people. From there it was on to Tucson to visit with family and then to San Diego. By the time I left San Diego on March 9, the virus was on everyone's mind. Adding to my own concern was that my next stop was Portland, which had reported several cases.

My niece Rachel joined me in Portland, to ride along through the spectacular scenery of Glacier National Park. It was a trip we had planned for months, and we did it in spite of the fact that we were both experiencing some anxiety.

Hours after we left the Portland station, our train connected with another from Seattle. Because we were in the Portland sleeper, we were pretty safe from exposure – except during mealtimes, where community seating is the rule. That meant we were in close quarters of passengers from Seattle in the diner. For that reason, we self-quarantined at the end of our trip.

As it has been for other individuals, organizations and businesses, the effects of this new virus has upended planned events for Saving Birds. The greatest personal disappointment was the cancellation of another trip to DC to lobby again for birds.

Shortly after my return home, we cancelled everything through Memorial weekend. It is now clear that we may have to go much further than that. Although we have included a shortened calendar for the rest of the year, we will be carefully tracking the situation and see how it looks before going forward with anything we have planned. Check our website before traveling to our nature center for any event or presentation.

But we are not sitting around waiting for whatever may, or may not happen. We are still working to promote our message by producing a series of brochures that feature issues affecting our birds. They are free for the asking; simply go on our website (savingbirds.org) and fill out the form by checking those you would like to have, along with your name and address. We will send them to you immediately.

In the meantime, let's all do what we can to help "bend the curve." Stay safe.



Letter From Our Board President

by Bert Thomas

Hello everyone. We're just coming out of this slog of a winter in Leelanau only to be bogged down in the novel virus pandemic, unable to meet and vague about the viability of the excellent programs Kay has slotted for the summer. It's going to be touch and go until we know we can gather in ways that are safe for everyone. But we'll get through this, and with your generous support we'll emerge even stronger than ever.

You have helped us make a huge difference in the prospects for bird populations not only in our county or this region but pretty much everywhere. If you think back over the nearly 20 years Saving Birds Thru Habitat has been advocating for preserving and restoring environments absolutely necessary to slow – and eventually reverse – the decline of song birds, which cannot advocate on their own behalf, our successes have been significant. We cannot point to a particular species we have helped, but we have certainly had a positive impact on people's understanding of the simple things they can do to improve habitat for birds. Our training and education programs have hammered home the importance of planting native trees and shrubs. You can stop in several plant nurseries now and find a section of plants native to the area. That's new. Kay has taken our message to the southwest U.S. and even to Washington, D.C. and continues her outreach program locally. Everyone who matters in this field seems to know Kay.

On behalf of the board, I thank each and every one of you for helping make all this possible. I hope you are all well and that we will get to see many of you this summer again. Bright spots for me this winter are my first sighting of snowy owls nearby and getting to photograph them, and seeing in April my first American Kestrel, perched on a wire along the road. Luckily, I had my camera.

The best news is that we're all in this together, working for a better world for birds, insects, animals and surely for us as well. The air seems cleaner and soon hummingbirds will descend and the woods will come alive with birdsong. Let's enjoy the simple pleasures all around us.

Sincerely,



Bert Thomas

SBTH Board of Directors President



Phyllis Haehnle Memorial Sanctuary

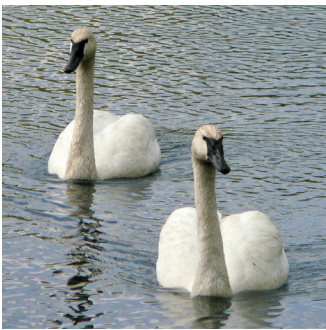
by Gary Siegrist



Eagle Lake - part of Haehnle Sanctuary. Photo by Gary Siegrist.

I became involved with Haehnle in the early 1970's as a student at Jackson Community College studying field biology and local ecology. As the years passed, I have had more opportunities and responsibilities at Haehnle, most recently in the daily supervision of the sanctuary. Throughout the years, I have solidified my belief in restoration management, largely by spending time with Kay Charter and reading the works of Dr. Douglas W. Tallamy.

Haehnle Sanctuary is located in northeast Jackson County bordering the Waterloo Recreation Area. On January 22, 1955 Casper "Cap" Haehnle gave 497 acres including Mud Lake Marsh to Michigan Audubon in the name of Phyllis Haehnle, his daughter who died in 1950. Since then, Haehnle Sanctuary has grown to over 1000 acres and is a place of refuge for over 250 native plant and 200 bird species.



This pair of Trumpeter Swans represents just one of the many bird species to nest on Haehnle. Photo by Gary Siegrist.

In the early years, and up until the 1990's, the idea of managing the sanctuary was one of "let nature take its course" and included no invasive plant species removal. Large colonies of non-native invasive plant species including autumn olive, glossy and common buckthorn, and varieties of honeysuckle were present on our landscape and allowed to flourish. Cutting and mowing was limited to one trail. We now understand this approach was ineffective and harmful and by not interceding, we

most certainly would have lost our native ecosystems.

Armed with knowledge and continuing education, what started as a few volunteers armed with loppers and chainsaws impacting small areas twice a year, has evolved into weekly work crews restoring many acres. Our use of prescribed burns to maintain an evolving landscape has been essential in bringing back a healthy plant environment.

Partnering with United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), we began a new phase of battling non-native plants using mechanized equipment. We now use hydro hoes with large cutting units (over 6 foot) and spraying the glossy buckthorn with helicopters. This has allowed us to move from affecting a half an acre a year to twenty or more acres at a time. To date, we have reclaimed almost 90 acres in our varied habitats, which includes grasslands, woodlands, wetlands, wet meadows, a large fen complex, and black oak barrens.

So why all the hard work? The phrase "they will come if you build it" works here at the sanctuary.

Haehnle has always been a preserve for sandhill cranes and waterfowl. Now, an influx of birds that had been absent for many years includes Black Terns, Least Bittern and American Bittern calling from the edges of the cattails, Trumpeter Swans nesting, and Marsh and Sedge Wrens chattering up a storm. From our observation hill, raptor viewing in the fall includes Merlin, American Kestrel, Sharp-shinned, Cooper's, Red-tail, Red Shoulder, Northern Harriers, and Rough-legged hawks later in the fall. Bald Eagles nest just north of the sanctuary and can be seen most days. Broad-Winged Hawk kettles and Peregrine Falcons are present a few times each fall.



Fringed Gentian is one of the beautiful native wildflowers on the Sanctuary. Photo by Gary Siegrist.

Managed by a volunteer committee for Michigan Audubon, the sanctuary continues to enhance the property by expanding the biodiversity of our natural communities with the use of native plants. Haehnle Sanctuary continues to serve its intended purpose as a sanctuary for wildlife in an increasingly developed world.

My appreciation to Kay Charter. Our chance encounter evolved into a life-changing education for me on environmental preservation and, as importantly, a deep and lasting friendship. 🐦



Observation Hill at Haehnle. Photo by Gary Siegrist.

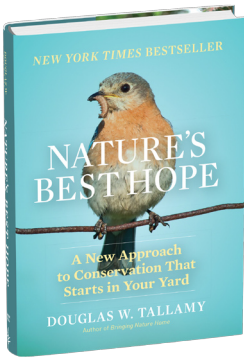
Haehnle Sanctuary recently received our Certified Bird Habitat Designation. The application was the most impressive we have ever received with 230 bird species and 448 native plant species.

Gary Siegrist is Manager of Phyllis Haehnle Sanctuary. He served as a Board Member for Saving Birds for a number of years. He and his wife, Nancy have remained supporters since.

Nature's Best Hope

A Review of Doug Tallamy's Newest Book

by Brian Allen




Spring is here and the birds are back. To me, this is the most exciting time of the year, and needed especially now as we all get through this pandemic together. How timely then the arrival of Doug Tallamy's *Nature's Best Hope*, a guidebook for helping us enthusiastically improve our yards, and through that, our nation and world to keep and make springtime better.

Unfortunately we are a minority, those of us including most members of Saving Birds Thru Habitat, who have enough care in our hearts to make significant efforts to conserve our world, to protect our environment, to save our birds. I imagine many of you are like me, carrying around a touch of frustration that we are not doing enough. Our efforts seem diminished by the crushing news of climate change, crashing bird populations, indifferent politicians. Doug Tallamy's first books, including *Bringing Nature Home*, changed many of our lives. His illustrations of the important pyramid of life connecting native plants to healthy ecosystems and bird populations were a revelation and a significant change in perspective. They have given us what we need, a positive and encouraging outlook.

Nature's Best Hope is a guide for us on how, despite the seeming overwhelming difficulties and challenges facing us, we can make a

difference from our homes through our entire world. As in his previous books, Tallamy has presented new ideas and novel approaches for solving ecological problems. He mentions that there are currently over twenty million acres of lawn in this country - more than the acreage of all the national parks combined. Although the scenery of our home and lawn probably does not rival that of the national parks, we alone can be the nature stewards of this immense area. The Homegrown National Park concept in this book is an idea that bridges the appeal, carrying it from those of us who care through to those who are indifferent. It's a delight to read his firsthand accounts of neighbors protective and defensive of their sterile acreage of lawn who became avid birders and wildlife watchers once they converted their property to oases for butterflies and birds.

In addition to these conversations, Tallamy includes a fascinating illustration of the history and science showing the rich diversity of life, from the moth that depends on a small leaf pile to survive, to the brilliant Scarlet Tanager gleaning caterpillars from your oak tree. Having these things in your yard depends on your own landscaping decisions.

With a prescient book like this, arriving during these troubling times, Tallamy has given us a guide how to love, adventure into, and care for our land. Even if we just have a small lot, creating our own Homegrown National Park has benefits that - along with others - can spread across the country and create that hoped for significant improvement in our world. 

Brian Allen is one of Michigan's most accomplished birders. He is a member of our Board of Directors.

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Saving Birds 2020 Calendar of Events

Due to conditions regarding COVID-19, any or all of these events or programs may have to be cancelled or postponed. Please check our website before making plans to attend.

**Note: All programs will take place at Saving Birds' Habitat Discovery Center, 5020 North Putnam Road, Omena (2 miles due west of Omena). Call 231-271-3738 for more details.

Saturday, June 6, 10AM: POSTPONED UNTIL 2021
Presentation by Lisa Wozniak.

Lisa Wozniak is Executive Director of the Michigan League of Conservation Voters. This statewide organization works to elect pro-conservation candidates and to hold decision makers accountable for protecting Michigan's land, air and water. Join us to learn more about her work.



Saturday, July 11, 10AM:
"Improve Your Land for Wildlife"
with Eric Ellis

The Leelanau Conservancy joins saving Birds in continuing education for the Conservancy's easement donors. Eric Ellis, Fish and Wildlife Project Manager for the DNR Great Lakes Commission will lead this event to share additional actions easement property owners can take to improve their lands. A hike on Charter Sanctuary follows.

Saturday, July 18, 10AM:
"Kirtland's Warbler Update"
with Dave Ewert

On October of last year, the Kirtland's Warbler was removed from the endangered species list. This large and beautiful warbler was the first bird to be listed as endangered. At its low point, the number of breeding pairs was well under two hundred. Recovery efforts resulted in a rebound, and breeding pairs are now around 2300, which led to the delisting by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Join Kirtland's Warbler specialist, Dr. Dave Ewert to learn what's next for this jack pine nesting warbler.

Saturday, August 15, 4-6:30PM:



"Our Birding Foremothers"
with Paul Baicich

Paul's engaging presentation about how the work of our birding foremothers of the late 19th and early 20th century still inspires and informs us today. Baicich, who is traveling from Maryland for the festival, is a noted author, conservationist and speaker.

Saturday, October 24, Time & Location TBA:
"America's Roots in Your Garden; Native Plants"



From A to Z"
with Steve Keto

Steve worked in the Michigan greenhouse industry as a commercial propagator of North American Native Plants for 20 years. In his presentation, Steve introduces the tips, tricks, philosophy and skills necessary to be successful using native

plants in the landscape. Using the alphabet, he organizes the many topics native plant enthusiasts should embrace before setting out on this gardening adventure.

Saving Birds Thru Habitat gratefully accepts gifts in honor or in memory of others.
When making such a donation, please let us know who should be informed of your gift.

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The mission of Saving Birds Thru Habitat is to protect, enhance, and restore habitat for North American birds, and to educate people of all ages about this important mission and how to achieve it. Our goal is to improve habitat for migrating birds one backyard at a time.

Social Distance Birding

by Brian Allen

It's a dark snowy day, one of those disappointing in early spring, but darker yet from the Covid-19 pandemic that is like a sinister cloak over the country. Like everyone, I am struggling with this new circumstance, yet have found that there is still joy in the world. My most joyous moments are being with my wife and visiting with our family by Face Time on the phone, despite the disappointment of not being able to hold our grandchild. My other joy is getting out birding and hiking to experience another spring that will advance no matter what.

I've read directives this week to those going birding to keep social distance. Admonished to not share rides or binoculars, I prefer to look forward to being outside experiencing the joy of spring. Although we stay apart when I meet people on the Arcadia Boardwalk, to avoid contagion, the enthusiasm for the ducks and geese is a different and more welcome contagion. When we see a group of Sandhill Cranes spread their wings to take flight and bugle their wild call, we all feel a surge of joy that displaces the sore feeling of the incessant Covid-19 news.

We need to keep learning about our world to feel good and do good, and not just by TV news, FaceBook, Twitter and Instagram. We are very fortunate to live in this part of Michigan with so many state parks, national forest lands and conservancy preserves - the great libraries of land. I hope you can take some time to experience their trails and paths. Now we can get out, guidebook or app in hand, to learn about fungi/

mushrooms, mosses, lycopods, ferns, spring flowers and birds that are out where there is room for all of us.

I'm sure you know a local woods where you can immerse yourself in the gradual show of spring over the next couple of months. I walk the trails behind my house at least once or twice a week. Now I take comfort in the old friends I see out there waiting under sun or clouds. First is the grove of old white pines that tower above me with parental power and benevolence. Just down the hill is a shaggy juniper, too old to care about its appearance but still welcoming as a shelter for the Song Sparrows. The wild rose looks hideous with its thorns and partly diseased stems, but will be decked out in pearly white blossoms in a complete transformation in a month.

I suffer from a deficiency of verdancy that is assuaged by climbing over the downed logs in the cedar swamp until I arrive at a bubbling spring. Even in mid-winter it is a green meadow oasis, with bright mosses, liverworts, Christmas fern, and watercress. It is now the site of the first green blush of the season with newly emergent grasses. The sound of the trickling water takes away more of the sore sour feeling. The verdant green gives me a reassuring promise of spring and more joy that will come when I will be able to pick up my grandson to show him the flowers, hear the birds and feel again the warm sun. 🐦