

# Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

April, 2019, Volume 18, Number 1

## Our Executive Director Goes to Washington



Kay Charter, Executive Director,  
Saving Birds Thru Habitat



Steve Homer, Vice President of Policy for  
the American Bird Conservancy


### Congrats to Our Executive Director!

Kay Charter is going to Washington! Steve Holmer, Vice President of Policy for the American Bird Conservancy, invited her to join him there for some lobbying.

Steve's job is to track legislation moving through Congress that either positively or adversely affects our bird populations. As part of his efforts, he heads up the Bird Conservation Alliance, with more than 220 non-profit organizations of all sizes, from National Audubon and National Wildlife Federation to our own Saving Birds. Steve writes petitions about bird related legislation and sends it around to the BCA list for members to sign. When he came to speak at our fundraiser last August, he said that Saving Birds Thru Habitat is his most reliable supporter.

However, when he sent a petition around last month, an email glitch prevented our director from signing it. She emailed asking him to make certain Saving Birds was on the list. He responded immediately that he would do so, and then invited her to travel to Washington to lobby with him. She accepted – happily – and will be spending several weeks in D. C. in the fall.

While there, Kay will accompany Steve on his rounds in Congress, and will be speaking with our Senators and Representatives about several pieces of legislation. Those include reducing pesticide impact on birds, the Antiquities Act (which allows presidents to establish national monuments), and conservation and management of native plants.

It is Kay's hope that sharing her passion for birds, and the reasons for their decline, with congressional leaders, will help move favorable bills forward. In the process, it will also further enhance this organization's standing and recognition as a force in the conservation movement nationwide. 


### A Letter From Ontario Member, Anne Butt



I discovered Saving Birds Thru Habitat while searching for material for a North American Native Plant Society sale. We wanted to show that choosing native plants is essential to the ecosystem. I emailed Saving Birds and asked for a copy of your poster "Grow a Bird Feeder." We received copies of the poster along with copies of a companion brochure, and your excellent "Habitat Hints" brochure. The brochures provided excellent tips on how to further help birds, and offered a guide to choosing an appropriate mix of plants for a yard. (In a bit of happy serendipity, plants named in the brochure are native in the Toronto area, too.)

Here, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, we are a layover spot for migrating birds heading north in the spring.

Kay recently shared additional SBTH educational handouts for use in information displays for native plant sales, lectures, conferences and gardening shows. Helping people understand that birds and insects depend upon native plants for food, shelter and nesting materials engages individuals and provides the best reason to plant natives.

Saving Birds thru Habitat does a remarkable job teaching those who care about birds how to build habitat. I can imagine the work and commitment of its membership... and also the joy in celebrating the results! I appreciate being able to use SBTH materials towards our common goal, and have shared them with groups for which I am a member - NANPS, Seeds of Diversity and Dallington Pollinators Community Garden. Restoring habitat is the most important thing we can do these days, and for that reason, I strongly support "Saving Birds". 

Website: [www.savingbirds.org](http://www.savingbirds.org)

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Kay Charter

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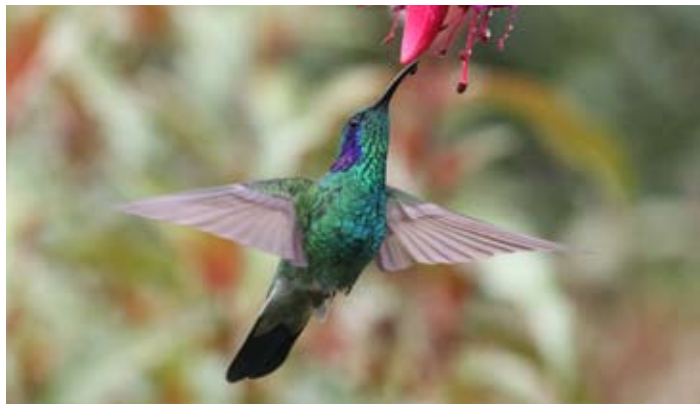
Edited by: Kathie Snedeker, Kay Charter



# Costa Rica Birding

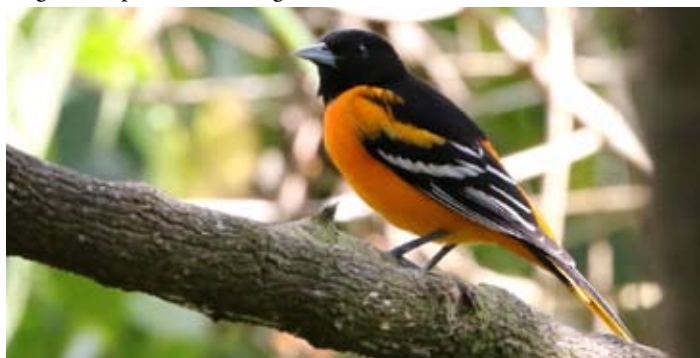
by David Dister  
Technical Advisor

Early this year, I was able to make a trip to Costa Rica with a local guide. Costa Rica is roughly the size of West Virginia and yet has a list of 920 bird species! The country is situated between two oceans and includes various tropical eco-zones from coastal lowlands to high altitude mountains. For most of the country, the winter season is relatively dry, though the Pacific Ocean coast is much drier than the Caribbean coast. And though my Spanish is not great, Costa Rica is among the best in Central America for bilingual citizens and field guides. My 12-day birding tour was led by Johan Fernandez. I was one of just five birders on the tour.



*The Lesser Violetear is one of 49 species of hummingbirds in Costa Rica, and is common at high altitudes.*

Ecotourism ranks as the number one industry in Costa Rica, with birding tours and various other adventures and seaside retreats as popular options. I was hoping to add 100 to 150 bird species to my life list, and this tour exceeded my expectations with 175 or so "lifers." While open habitat birds were usually seen by all, tropical forest birds were generally much more difficult to locate, and the use of a green laser pointer used by the guide to one side of the target bird proved to be a great aid.



*The Baltimore Oriole is a familiar neotropical migrant that breeds along our waterways, and which is common in Costa Rica in the non-breeding season."*

In addition to life birds, there were at least 75 species that I had seen previously in the U.S. These included Neotropical migrants in the Great Lakes (Baltimore Oriole, Tennessee Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Broad-winged Hawk), boreal or temperate long-dis-


tance migrants (Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, and Spotted Sandpiper), and local subtropical birds often seen in southern Florida, Texas, or Arizona. Among the 920 total bird species were 49 diverse species of hummingbirds, and I was fortunate to see 22 of these flying jewels.



*The Broad-winged Hawk is an uncommon summer resident in our deciduous forests, and is very common in winter in Central America.*



*The 3-toed Sloth is a charismatic tropical mammal, and is occasionally seen carrying young in its arboreal habitats."*

Such an awesome birding adventure strengthened my concern for the protection of birds and their critical habitats across all continents, whether migrants or locally restricted endemics. 


## Wisdom Does it Again!



*Sixty-eight year old Wisdom with her newly-hatched chick.*

Wisdom, a Laysan albatross and world's oldest known, banded wild bird has hatched a new chick at Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge and Battle of Midway National Memorial.

She is at least sixty-eight years old, has raised between 31-36 chicks in her lifetime, and is still going!

We think the most amazing aspect of this bird is that she has clearly avoided eating the plastics that have killed millions of seabirds. 



## From the Executive Director's Desk

by Kay Charter

When our founding Board of Directors was working on a mission statement for us, one member wanted it to refer only to Leelanau County.

But the decline of avifauna is not limited to Leelanau County, the state of Michigan, or even to the United States. I wanted to reach far beyond our beautiful corner of the world and urged our board members to support a broader mission. They did.

A year later, we began to work with a large ranch and a Texas State Park in Balmorhea, Texas, a community in need of economic assistance.



Kay Charter at Sandia Springs Wetland with Project Manager Dave Wilson.

In a few months, we put together a birding festival for the area. Birding opportunities in that area are unique and relatively abundant. Those involved embarked on the effort to draw birders, which would impact the local economy far beyond the actual event itself as word spread throughout the birding community at large.

As it turned out, the impact was ultimately much greater. Don and Ellen Weinacht, the ranchers who participated in the festival, became serious birders. More importantly, as this is not always the case, they are equally serious about bird conservation. In 2011 they began a wetland restoration project – Sandia Wetlands - to serve migrating and overwintering birds. It has been a great success, not just for birds, but also for a community that has benefitted from the steady stream of people arriving to check out birds that occur in and around the wetland.

Sandia Wetlands is not the largest effort for Saving Birds beyond Leelanau County. For more than a decade, we worked with an international sand mining company, consulting with numerous sites in seven states on ways to improve habitat. Our programs have been presented across the country, from California to Connecticut. Perhaps even more importantly, our newsletters and educational materials have been sent far and wide in response to requests from other non-profit organizations and individuals. (Please see Anne Butt's letter on page one of this issue.)

Birds know no boundaries; they move across state, national and international borders. There is no question that we should reach as far as we can to educate people on how they can help reverse the heartbreaking decline in their numbers.

This organization has been incredibly successful, thanks to efforts by a stream of able board members, a host of dedicated volunteers, and – most importantly, the generosity of our financial supporters. Thanks to all of you for your continuing support!

A green ink signature of Kay Charter, followed by a small green bird icon.

## Letter From Our Board President

by Bert Thomas



That empty patch of ground over there might be perfect for some small plants or even a tree or two. This is what springs makes one think, when the migrants arrive and perch nearby and call to one another. A red wing blackbird, first of the season, just found the feeder. That patch has been snowbound for nearly five months until just now. It has enough sun and the soil is rich. And it's close enough for tending. "Leave the dead leaves," she said, "They're cover for insects birds need." Holes are dug, native plants and trees go in, and so life goes on.

The other day, Kay said "I'm running on all eight cylinders now!" And she is. Take a look at the rich slate of programs she's planned for the year. Great speakers lined up, fabulous subjects scheduled and all perfectly aligned with our mission. And she's heading to D.C. at the invitation of the American Bird Conservancy to lobby Congress in September. It's going to be a banner year. The board is charged up, too. Time to clear the trails, clean the pond and start the pump, open the Habitat Discovery Center, in hibernation since last fall, and get the word out.

Although our nature center and much of our work is located in and near Leelanau County, we have a broad reach, with supporters and educational efforts stretched across the country.

The board of directors has the crucial task of building up our kitty so that it's fat enough to allow us to continue these great programs far into the future. That means we'll have to shake the tree (native) a little harder this year. We might cajole, implore, wheedle, inveigle and perhaps even try some charm to achieve our purposes. No organization does what we do or has the breadth of mission we do without appropriate funding. We all know that.

We thank you sincerely for all your support. We couldn't do it without you. Keep it up!

A green ink signature of Bert Thomas.

Bert Thomas

SBTH Board of Directors President



Remember, NO JELLY FOR ORIOLES. Oranges are perfect, and they love them.



# Saving Birds 2019 Calendar of Events

**\*\*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.**

## **Thursday, May 9, 6:30PM: Presentation by Kay Charter for Wild Ones: "Grow Your Own Bird Feeder," at the Boardman River Nature Center.**

When we tell people about what Saving Birds Thru Habitat does, we are often met with the answer, "Oh, we help birds; we feed them," which brings to mind the old saying: Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day; teach him how to fish and he will be able to eat for a lifetime." The saying, however, does not translate exactly as nestling birds and adults of the same species usually have quite different diets. Join Kay to learn what that means, and how each of us can make a difference for our declining bird populations.

## **Saturday, June 1, 10:30 – 2:00: Conservation Workshop at Saving Birds:**



**Eric Ellis**, Project Manager for the Great Lakes Commission, works on the Coastal Conservation and Habitat Restoration Program Area on a variety of habitat projects. Eric will present a PowerPoint program about improving the habitat on your property with native plants. Includes a light lunch and guided field trips to Leelanau Conservancy easement properties, including Charter Sanctuary

## **Saturday, June 8, 10AM: Howard Youth, Senior Writer and Editor at American Bird Conservancy, will present "Our Birds' Secret Lives in the Tropics,"**



Howard spent three years observing birds in Nicaragua, where he lived from 2014 to 2017. Each year from October through April, species we consider to be our birds - orioles, grosbeaks, buntings, and warblers, and many of our water birds, among others, spend more time in the tropics than they do nesting in the United States. Howard will discuss not only the strange distribution of wintering

Neotropical migrants in Nicaragua (where western species mingle with eastern species), but also how, while wintering down in the steamy south, many the migratory birds adjust their diets and behaviors.

Howard became smitten with herons while at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in 1978 and has been an avid birder since. As a free-lance writer, his articles have appeared in many

publications. In 2014, he authored the Field Guide to the Natural World of Washington, D.C., which highlights the wild places and flora and fauna of the Nation's Capital. Howard has lived and birded extensively in Ecuador, Nicaragua, Canada, Spain, and India.



## **Saturday, June 29, 9:30 AM – 4PM: All Day Workshop.**

**Mike Dawson**, amphibian expert from St. Louis Zoo will present, "**What's that calling? The Frogs and Toads of Michigan.**" Join us to learn about the 13 frog and Toad species of Michigan and how to identify the different species based on their breeding calls. Find out about the importance of frogs and toads to ecosystems and what's happening to our amphibian friends both globally and in our own communities. Learn about local projects you can get involved in to help local frog conservation efforts.

Michael works as an educator/conservationist for the Saint Louis Zoo's Education Department. He is also the Saint Louis Zoo's FrogWatch Chapter Coordinator and the Midwest FrogWatch coordinator, and an adjunct professor for Webster University where he teaches an Animal Behavior and a Citizen Science course.

**Katie Grzesiak**, Coordinator of the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network will present, "**What's in Your Garden?**". Some species are illegal, some are a bad idea, and some just need a watchful eye, while others have so many names it's hard to even keep track. We'll also discuss look-alikes, disposal, prevention, and native replacements for some invasive species.

After lunch, Mike will lead a frog walk on Charter Sanctuary, **Dave Dister** will lead a bird and dragonfly hike and Katie will lead a native plants identification walk through the gardens around our nature center .

Fee of \$40 per person includes lunch. Space is limited so registration is strongly recommended. Sign up on our website ([savingbirds.org](http://savingbirds.org)) or call 231-271-3728



**Saturday, July 27, 10AM: Jerry Weinrich on Michigan's Bald Eagles**



Jerry Weinrich is the official Bald Eagle counter for the Federal and State Governments. He will bring us up to date on the status of the Bald Eagle population in Michigan's Lower Peninsula.



**Wednesday, July 31: NAHA Garden Tour**

Saving Birds will be one of the stops on the garden tour for the **Northport Area Historical Association**. A native plants expert will be there to answer questions.



**Saturday, Aug. 24, 10:30AM: Bug walk with Doug Tallamy.**

Join entomologist and best selling author **Doug Tallamy** for a hike to search for insects on Charter Sanctuary. \$25.00/per

person. Limited space; sign up on our website ([savingbirds.org](http://savingbirds.org)) or call 231-271-3738.



**Saturday, Aug. 24, 4PM – 6PM: Fundraiser**

Special program with best selling author **Doug Tallamy**. Join us for Western Swing music by **The True Falsettos**, wine, hearty hors d'oeuvres and a silent auction. Doug

will debunk the current information from some who believe we should accept plants from other parts of the world. In answering this, Doug will present his new program, "Are Alien Plants Bad?" \$45/per person.



**Saturday, Sept 7, 11AM – 4PM: Community Education and Workday.**

The entire community is invited to join us to hear a notable speaker discuss the importance of native plants. There will be refreshments, after which we will plant native trees and shrubs on Charter Sanctuary to enhance early successional forest habitat for catbirds, thrashers, buntings, and others.



*Photo courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Joel Trick*

**Saturday, Sept 21, 10AM: Delisting an Iconic Endangered Michigan Species:**

**Dr. Dave Ewert** updates us about the status of the Kirtland's Warbler. Dr. Ewert is the top expert for this beautiful, endangered bird.

**The Effects of Pesticides**



Spraying your home and garden with pesticides for spiders, or your trees for tent worm caterpillars, has an effect on songbirds and other wildlife. Insecticide toxicity is broad and indiscriminate. Insecticides are ordinarily applied to treat for one or two insects. But everything in nature is connected. When you affect one population, it has a ripple effect across species that depend upon and coexist with that population.

Spraying insecticides kill those things you don't like, but also kills all other insects, including bees and butterflies. Moreover, many insects live a short time before they perish. Birds like this Ovenbird, which spends most of its time on the ground in wooded areas, can easily die from ingesting insects that have been sprayed. Even so-called "green" chemicals are toxic to other organisms, including you, your children and and your pets.



*Our beloved chickadees love spiders. Spraying for spiders might just eliminate one of your favorite yard birds.*

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**Questions?** Please call (231) 271-3738 or email: bobolink2000@gmail.com

SBTH • P.O. Box 288 • Omena, MI 49674 **Thank You!**





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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.*



## Flower Power

Although widespread use of neonicotinoid insecticides is at least partly to blame for the declining bee and butterfly populations, loss of habitat is the most serious issue for virtually every declining species on the planet. The good news is that we can all be part of the solution for our pollinators by simply adding native plants to our landscapes. There are numerous online sites that sell “wildflower” seeds that are purported to help pollinators. Unfortunately most of these wildflowers are not native, and some are even invasive (like baby’s breath). Our new Pollinator Packet includes seeds of only native wildflowers from The Great Lakes area. Planting instructions are on the back of the packet.

The enclosed seeds will cover a 60 square foot area. These seeds should be used **ONLY** in Great Lakes States. The packets are \$9.95 each. Check the SBTH web site for ordering information.