

# Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

November, 2015, Volume 14, Number 2



*Thanks to a generous gift from a Saving Birds member, we were able to hire an air conditioned charter bus for their hour and a half trip to Magee. Last year we had to use an un-airconditioned school bus. Since the day was very hot, everyone appreciated being able to travel in comfort.*

On Friday, May 8, we hosted our second annual field trip to Magee Marsh for Jennifer Snapp's Ronald Brown Academy fourth graders. For those new to our organization, Ronald Brown Academy is a Detroit inner city school. We "adopt" these kids for several months by going into the classroom to teach them about birds and bird conservation as well as how to use binoculars and field guides. We also underwrite the cost of field guides for each student, a logo tee shirt for each and at least three field trips –

birding hotspot Magee Marsh in Ohio being the most significant.


While we were at Magee, we stopped for a short Q&A session during which we asked the kids what they know about habitat. One little girl raised her hand and said, "Don't use plants from other parts of the world. They will wreck your habitat!" This delightful child had clearly gotten our message that native plants are essential to healthy habitats. Other students also understood the importance of native plants.

Our Board Treasurer, Dave Watkins, is our project manager for this effort, and it has been Dave who has gone into the classroom before, between and after field trips to do the teaching. During one session a few weeks after the trip to Magee Marsh, Dave asked the students how many species of birds they could remember. He expected they might be able to recall five or ten species. They got to ten, then fifteen, struggled to twenty and finally finished at twenty-five different species. And they used full, correct names for each species, such as American Redstart rather than just redstart and Common Yellowthroat rather than yellowthroat. That would be a remarkable feat for a seasoned birder, but for kids who have only recently been introduced to birds, it was an incredible



result, one that indicates how much they have gotten from this program.

A few weeks after the Magee Marsh trip, Dave set up additional field trips to Stoney Creek Metro Park and Rouge River Birding Observatory. Sara Cole, Program Director for Detroit Audubon, joined him as a preliminary move toward facilitating the Detroit Audubon adopting their own group. For next year they will join us to get an idea of process and procedures when working with that school system. Concurrently, we are working on a template for them to use as they work their way into their own project.

Finally, along with this year's fourth graders, we included last year's fourth grade class (now in fifth grade). And next May, we will take both of those classes when we take Mrs. Snapp's new fourth graders. Those students who finish all three years will receive a certificate of completion and a special gift. 

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

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**Edited by:** Kathie Snedeker  
Kay Charter

# Welcome!

## New SBTH Board Members



### Dave Barrons

Dave is a Michigan native, growing up in Midland in the '50 and '60's, and returning to the state shortly after college. He's lived full time in Michigan since 1973, and in Leelanau County for 27 of those years. Dave's love of birds began early, as he watched through his mother's 'bird' window. She kept a life list of birds seen only through that window, and Dave continues the same tradition

looking out on his own back yard, which is an SBTH Bird Certified Habitat. Dave's commitment to the SBTH mission of increasing bird habitat starts in his own backyard.

Dave is a retired television meteorologist, working all 30 years of his career in Northern Michigan. Though he joined the SBTH Board of Directors just recently Dave has worked with Executive Director Kay Charter on a number of projects for many years. Along with Kay, he was co-founder of the Leelanau Peninsula Birding Festival and co-founder of the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail.

He is personally interested and active in the SBTH Certified Bird Habitat Program, and he is currently working with his own township to facilitate an ordinance requiring all commercial development and multi-family to use only native plants in landscaping and re-planting.

Dave was recently appointed to the Leelanau County Parks and Recreation Board where he plans to be a voice for native plants and bird-friendly habitat development in each of the County's three parks: Myles Kimmerly, Veronica Valley, and Old Settler's Park.



### Lisa Meils

Lisa has been interested in birds and nature for as long as she can remember. Lisa grew up in Rochester, Michigan where her mother shared her love of birds with her from the time she was a very young child. Her home was situated on a wooded ravine with a small stream flowing through it, from where family members could enjoy sightings of many avian residents and travelers. She remembers well how

excited they all were the day they were visited by a Saw Whet Owl.

Lisa recalls asking her parents why they didn't have a lawn, and they explained that if they did, they wouldn't have the birds and

animals in that frequented the yard without the natural habitat that was there. This was Lisa's first exposure to the Saving Birds Thru Habitat mind set.

Lisa is a dermatologist by profession and a naturalist at heart. She lives in Troy, and is happiest outdoors, especially when she can see and hear birds. Indigo Bunting is her favorite avian species. As an adult, her childhood interest in birding was renewed when she met Dave and Sheen Watkins. Since then, she has experienced many an ornithological adventure in their company.

Lisa has always felt that the best environment is a natural one. Saving Birds Thru Habitat is her first exposure to an organization committed to teaching and expanding that philosophy. Lisa is very happy to be able to assist in assuring the success of such a wonderful organization by serving on its Board of Directors.



### Carol Ross

Carol Ross was raised in Birmingham, Michigan and Benzie County. She attended Michigan State University, and currently lives in Traverse City. For the last 20 years has worked for Manpower where she has been Branch Manager since 2008.

Carol has worked with a number of NGO's during her time in our area, and has had significant experience as a board member for several of those

organizations. She professes to "love fundraising," and readily accepted the position of Chair of our Fundraising Committee.

She currently serves on the Traverse Area Human Resources

Board of Directors, is a former Big Sister – (matched for 10 years and is still in touch with her "little"), she served as Co-Chair for American Cancer Society's Relay for Life-Traverse City, and she served the American Heart Association as Fund raising Committee Chair. Carol has a passion for training and was a Junior Achievement classroom instructor and participates in numerous employment and training related events as a subject matter expert.

In her spare time, Carol loves to read, travel and, of course, learn about birds. Reading about Charter Sanctuary back in the mid 1990's, Carol visited and toured the property with Kay Charter. That's all it took and over the years Carol has supported the growth and development of Saving Birds Thru Habitat. When recently approached to join the Board she enthusiastically accepted and looks forward to honoring the Board's goal "to improve habitat for migrating birds one backyard at a time."



## From the Executive Director's Desk

by Kay Charter

### Our Work Goes On

Our brilliant Neotropical species have come north, raised their young and returned to warmer climes. In some ways, these bright avian beauties are at the heart of our work, but in spite of their physical absence, the exciting work of Saving Birds continues right through the winter. Our latest project is developing a program encouraging local governments to adopt native plants ordinances for new commercial and multi-family use construction. Our proposal will come with sample language and lists of historically endemic native plants, as well as suggestions on where to find them. Two local townships have

already adopted such ordinances, and several of our Board Members are working on adding their respective townships to that list.



Doug Tallamy:

Also new this year is a partnership with Voogt Farms in Marne, Michigan, a purebred Angus breeding and research facility. Owners Gary and Shirley Voogt (pronounced "Vote") love birds – especially meadowlarks. They have agreed to participate in a project surveying nesting birds on their land, and studying ways to reduce the loss of upland nesters to harvesting of hay. See Gary's take on

the project on page 5 of this edition.

We are also putting programs together for next year. Already on the calendar is an all day fund-raising program on June 28 centering around migrating birds and their needs. This program will feature:

- Dr. Dave Ewert, Ornithologist and Senior Scientist for The Nature Conservancy
- Dr. Greg Butcher, International Migratory Species Coordinator for the U. S. Forest Service
- Brian Zimmerman, Four Season Nursery owner and landscape designer
- Brian Allen, Michigan super-birder and Saving Birds' Board Member
- Sheen Watkins, Nature photographer and Saving Birds' Board Vice President
- Local native wildflower photographer Mike Berst.

On August 20, Doug Tallamy will return to present one of his great programs on the importance of native plants to birds and other wildlife. Doug will also lead a hike through our new gardens to check out what fascinating insects are hanging out there.

You won't want to miss these two exciting days, so mark your calendars now.




## Letter From Our Board President

by Linda Ketterer

The fall colors are really giving us a beautiful show in Leelanau County this year. And one of the telltale signs of the changing season showed up outside my window several days ago – a flock of juncos beneath the feeder. I have to confess to having somewhat of a love-hate relationship with juncos. I love to see them in the winter, but am always waiting for them to leave in the spring!

We were delighted to host Leno Davis last week for a couple of days while he attended and presented a paper at a conference in Traverse City. Leno is a doctoral student in Ecology, Evolution, and Environmental Biology at Miami University in Ohio. He and his wife, Alma, joined all the volunteers from SBTH last spring to lead the Ronald Brown Academy students birding at Magee Marsh in NW Ohio. It was wonderful to see him again and to have a chance to learn more about his involvement on the board of the non-profit, Birds Caribbean, in his home, the Bahamas. For any of you who are planning a winter get-away to the Caribbean, I encourage you to check out their website, [www.birdscaribbean.org](http://www.birdscaribbean.org) or the Facebook page for Birds Caribbean. You'll find all kinds of information about endemic birds, birding trails, guides, and even a downloadable app for identification of Caribbean birds.

The board for SBTH has been working hard this fall with a consultant from NorthSky Non-Profit Networks, increasing our knowledge as board members and working to strengthen the whole organization. As a result of this work, we will be working on a number of projects over the winter including an updated strategic plan as well as planning for some special events for Summer, 2016. It is wonderful to have engaged and dedicated board members. Elsewhere in this newsletter, please take a moment to read about our newest board members.

I hope that you will have a chance to stop by the Discovery Center to see all the wonderful work that was done on the Demonstration Garden. All the hard work of a few volunteers has transformed the space into something very special. 

Linda Ketterer



**Hints to I.D.:** Note two toes; woodpeckers have "zygodactyl" toes – two forward and two back. Also the black necklace with spotted breast and finally the dark moustacial marks alongside the gape (mouth). Answer on page 8.

# A Chickadee's Guide to Gardening

by Doug Tallamy

Plants are as close to biological miracles as a scientist could dare admit. They allow us, and nearly every other species, to eat sunlight, creating the nourishment that drives food webs on this planet. Plants also produce oxygen, build topsoil and hold it in place, prevent floods, sequester carbon dioxide, buffer extreme weather and clean our water. Considering all this, you might think we would value plants for what they do. Instead, we value them for what they look like.

When we landscape around our homes, many of us choose beautiful plants from all over the world, without considering their ability to support life within our local ecosystems. Last summer I did a simple experiment at home to measure just how effective plants we use for landscaping are in supporting local animals. I compared a young white oak in my yard with one of the Bradford pears in my neighbor's yard. Both trees are the same size, but Bradford pears are ornamentals from Asia, while white oaks are native to eastern North America. I counted the caterpillars on each at head height. There were 410 caterpillars on the white oak and only one caterpillar on the Bradford pear. Was this a fluke? Hardly. The next day I repeated my survey on a different white oak and Bradford pear with a similar result.

Why the huge difference? Plants don't want to be eaten, so they have loaded their tissues with nasty chemicals to deter insects. Insects do eat plants, though, and they

achieve this by adapting to the chemical defenses of just one or two plant lineages. So some insects have evolved to eat oak trees (or cherries, or ashes, and so on) without dying.

By contrast, local insects have only just met Bradford pears, in an evolutionary sense, and have not had the eons required to adapt to their chemical defenses. And so Bradford pears, and other non-native plants, stand untouched.

In the past, we thought this was a good thing. We didn't want insects eating our expensive Asian ornamentals. We were happy with our perfect pear trees, burning bushes, barberries, crape myrtles, bush honeysuckles and all the other foreign plants.

But there are serious ecological consequences from such choices. Last year I watched a pair of Carolina Chickadees in my yard feed their young. Both parents took turns feeding the chicks, each bringing a caterpillar to the nest once every three minutes. They did this from 6 a.m. until 8 p.m. for each of the 16 days it took the chicks to fledge. That's a total of 350 to 570 caterpillars every day for a clutch of chickadees, depending on how many chicks they have. So, an incredible 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars are required to make one clutch of chickadees. And chickadees are tiny birds: just a third of an ounce. What if you wanted to support red-bellied woodpeckers in your yard, a bird that is eight times heavier than a chickadee? How many caterpillars would that take?



Carolina Chickadee with food for young.

My point is that what we plant in our landscapes determines what can live in our landscapes. Controlling what grows in our yards is like playing God. By favoring productive native species, we can create life — and by using non-native plants, we can prevent it. A yard dominated by Asian ornamentals does not produce nearly the quantity and diversity of insects that birds need to reproduce. Some might argue that we should just let those birds breed “in nature.” That worked in the past, but now there simply is not enough “nature” left. And it shows. There are 50 percent fewer song birds in North America today than there were just 40 years ago. Our yards offer one of the most empowering conservation options we have by simply incorporating life-supporting native plantings.

By the way, you might assume my oak was riddled with unsightly caterpillar holes, but not so. Since birds eat most of the caterpillars before they get very large, from 10 feet away the oak looked as perfect as a Bradford pear.



## Our Beautiful Garden Redesign

On the back page of our spring edition was an article about several grants — the largest from Wildflower Association of Michigan — to be used to redesign our native plants gardens. Many people have an image of native plants as being weedy looking. Although our gardens were not weedy looking, they did not have the tidy, structured appearance of a formal garden. With a plan designed by landscape designer Brian Zimmerman, and a team led by Jim Heffner, the lion's share of the work was done in June. Native, berry-bearing shrubs, included in the plan, are yet to be installed, and the seating area has not been done. With an additional grant from the Friendly Garden Club, the shrubs will be purchased and installed next May. The seating area, which will overlook the prairie on the adjacent property (owned by Jim and Kay Charter), will be installed at the same time.

It is our hope that this polished new garden will become a destination site for those interested in learning more about native plants.



## Northport Parade

On the afternoon of Sunday, August 30, Saving Birds joined other recipients of grants from the Leelanau Township Community Foundation to celebrate its 70th anniversary. Here are members Ed Ketterer (left) and Dave Barrons (right) carrying our banner in the celebratory parade through Northport. Member and founder Jim Charter is behind Ed, Executive Director Kay Charter is in the center and to her left is our Board President Linda Ketterer. The photo is by Ed Noftz.

## Voogt Farm Partnership

by Gary Voogt



Last May my wife Shirley and I left our beef cattle farm in Ottawa County to participate in a great birding event arranged by Pam Grassmick on Beaver Island. Greg Butcher, International Migratory Species Coordinator for the U.S. Forest Service, led the birding hike and later gave a presentation. Kay Charter got us interested in her wonderful Saving Birds' Certified Habitat program. We applied for certification for our farm. We purchased and read Doug Tallamy's book (*Bringing Nature Home*). Shirley and I were hooked. Imagine walking with a group of intense experts where the conversation goes, "I just heard a (bird 1)." "No, the (bird 1) call is a 'PST' pst pst", but this was a (bird 2), whose call is 'pst pst PST'." Whoa!

Kay Charter was wearing a Bobolink T-shirt. We said we have bobolinks on our farm. Also lots of meadowlarks and kingbirds. On the ferry ride back to the mainland, we visited with Greg and Kay about the challenges upland nesters experience with modern hay production and rotational grazing. The questions began to emerge: If grazing and haying are harmful to ground nesting birds, why do they seem to thrive on our farm? Are they really thriving here? Could we farm differently and make habitat even more beneficial to birds? Do grassland nesters need grazing and mowing to preserve

the grassland, which if left to go 'natural' would revert to shrub and trees?

This past summer we went to seek out Kay at their beautiful Discovery Center in Leelanau County. She had been thinking about those bobolinks and meadowlarks. She was ready for us. Would we consider a project to survey and document upland nesters on our farm? Absolutely! Within a week Kay contacted Greg Butcher to design the survey, and asked Chip Francke, a naturalist who had spent time in Leelanau County, now here in Ottawa County, to manage the surveys.

Chip came to the farm. He's a genuine birder all right, plus a naturalist knowledgeable in forbs, shrubs and tree habitat for birds. We saw a lot of birds, even late in the season. Chip confirmed with Kay our farm was impressive for birds and habitats for birds. The survey will begin in the spring!

We are indebted to Kay Charter and her many birding friends for bringing us all together. Her life mission, for the love of birds, needs our ongoing support.



Gary and Shirley love the meadowlarks that nest on their property. Thanks to Jim Stevenson for this photo of an Eastern Meadowlark.



# *Saving Birds Thru Habitat* Membership List 2015

## **NEST BUILDERS**

### **Donors \$250 and up:**

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Thomas and Sarah Woods  
Oryana  
Beaver Island Association



In July Rick Evans was honored as Volunteer of the Year by Saving Birds for his years of dedicated volunteer work. Rick has answered every call, no matter how small or great. Rick began working with us by helping with the hard work of building the stream for our frog pond. He has served as a volunteer field trip leader for school kids for more than ten years; Rick loves few things more than leading young students around Charter Sanctuary in search of common and not-so-common birds. He also served on our Board of Directors as Secretary for six years. Rick is the kind of volunteer who helps keep the wheels of our organization going around. Many thanks, Rick! 

Jim Heffner, shown here with Executive Director Kay Charter (on his right) and Board President Linda Ketterer (on his left) was honored as our Conservation Partner of the Year. Jim - virtually singlehandedly - moved legislation through the Acme Township Board mandating that all new commercial and multi-family buildings be landscaped with native plants only. We became connected with Jim when he contacted us for a supporting letter.

Jim subsequently not only joined Saving Birds, he also made a contribution to our garden redesign project and then volunteered to be the lead for the project. Jim spent many, many hours here (after making the hour plus drive from his home) not just guiding our other volunteers, but engaging in the back-breaking work it took to move the job toward its end.

Whenever you visit our gardens think of Jim and his dedication to this project. Thank you, Jim!! 

## Thank You

### We Appreciate the Following Memorial and Honorary Gifts:

- Brewer/Leece Honoring **Judie Leece**
- Ellen Mershon Honoring **Gina Erb**
- James and Penelope Szczechowski Gift for **John Sargent**
- Gina and John Erb in memory of **Helen Wells**
- Kay and Jim Charter in memory of **Helen Wells**
- Janet Wander in memory of **Keith Wander**
- JoAnn and Jack Pope in memory of **Jennifer Pope and Maurice Pope**
- Elizabeth Myers in memory of **Posy Shuster**
- Kay and Jim Charter in memory of **Posy Shuster**
- Jim and Kay Charter in memory of **Clive Moorhead**



### For Amazon.com Shoppers

If you shop on Amazon, you can help generate funding for Saving Birds by simply signing in to AmazonSmile. Amazon will then donate an amount equal to 1% of your sales to Saving Birds. It's a painless and cost-free way to help our organization.

### 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.

- Yes! I want to support Saving Birds Thru Habitat with a Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal at the following level:**
  - Chickadee (\$25)                       Bluebird (\$50)
  - Common Yellowthroat (\$100)       Bobolink (\$250)
  - Piping Plover (\$500)                 Loon (\$1000)
  - Bald Eagle (\$5000)                  Other (\$ \_\_\_\_\_)
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Thank you for your donation. We are a 501(c)(3) organization; your tax-deductible gift is very important to us.

**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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Saving-Birds-Thru-Habitat

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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.*

### Answer to the question on page 3: Northern Flicker



Our Vice President Sheen Watkins took this delightful shot of a fledgling Red-winged Blackbird high stepping its way to its mother for a moth meal. Go to: <http://www.sheenwatkins.com> to see more of Sheen's beautiful nature photography.