

Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

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Pat Bussey and Kay Charter

Looking Forward to Another Terrific Year

by Executive Director Kay Charter

A weekend visit by Dr. Gregory Butcher, Director of Bird Conservation for National Audubon, is but one of the exciting events for SBTH this year. Greg is coming in June to lead a couple of bird hikes, and he will be our special guest at a fundraising dinner at the Habitat Discovery Center. You can learn more about these events in the articles below. We are also partnering with other conservation organizations in the area to host a September seminar on sustainable gardening and development. Dr. Douglas Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home*, will headline that event.

It is important to note that both Dr. Butcher and Dr. Tallamy are members of SBTH. Each, a respected scientist in his field, is a strong supporter of our message and our programs. Their visits here will represent two of the many high points of a great year. L

Birds and Autumn Olive Don't Mix!

by Dr. Douglas Tallamy

Each time I drive south on Rt. 896 out of Newark, Delaware toward one of my research plots in Middletown, I point to a field -- at least what used to be a field -- and exclaim to whichever student is traveling with me, "This is what happens when autumn olive invades!" Seven years ago this area was a diverse assortment of goldenrod, horsetail, milkweed, switchgrass, and a dozen other species of forbs and grasses. Young black cherries, sweetgum, and Virginia pine, the first sentinels of returning forest, dotted the four-acre meadow. Together the mix of woody and herbaceous plants provided ideal habitat for avian scrub lovers such as yellow-breasted chats, field sparrows, song sparrows, blue-winged warblers, indigo buntings, and blue grosbeaks. Equally important to these birds was the quantity of food produced here. It was not a prolific berry source, but it generated grasshoppers and caterpillars by the pound. Because birds that breed in early successional habitats (as well as species that favor large tracks of mature forest) rear their young on insects and the spiders that eat insects, this is the nourishment most crucial to the long-term health of terrestrial bird populations. Insects make more birds for the next generation; and large insect populations are the difference between fledging one or two underweight chicks, or four or five plump ones. North American birds do not rear their young on berries for two reasons: 1) berries are high in sugar but low in protein and amino acids, the material needed to build muscle and fuel growth, and 2) there are no berries around during the spring and early summer when most birds are rearing young.

Today the field on Rt. 896 is a near-monoculture of

10-foot autumn olive shrubs. Gone are the patches of goldenrod and milkweed, the switchgrass and young cherries. And gone are the insects that once supported healthy bird populations.

Why doesn't autumn olive produce insect "bird food" just like native plants do? Because autumn olive, like so many of our invasive species, evolved in China. If all plants were created equal, its Chinese origin wouldn't matter. But every plant species protects its leaves with a species-specific mixture of nasty chemicals. With few exceptions, only insect species that have shared a long evolutionary history with a particular plant lineage have developed the ability to digest the chemicals in their hosts' leaves. These insects have specialized over time to eat only plants that make those particular chemicals. Insects from North America do not recognize autumn olive as food; even if they did, they wouldn't be able to eat it.

The unhappy irony here is that, for decades, bird lovers have been planting autumn olive to supply food for birds. Unfortunately, because autumn olive and its close cousin, Russian olive, are among North America's most invasive species, the offspring from such plantings are now replacing the native vegetation that produces the food birds really need; insects.

If you want to feed your birds, plant an oak tree. My students and I have compared the amount of caterpillar biomass produced by oaks with that produced by autumn olive. In our study, oaks created a whopping 275 times more bird food than autumn olives. Need I say more? L



Bringing Nature Home

by Dr. Douglas Tallamy*

*Eastern Kingbird on alternate-leaf dogwood
Photo by Douglas Tallamy*

Reviewed by Kay Charter

**Dr. Tallamy chairs the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He and his wife, Cindy, spend much of their time restoring their own ten acres to native plantings. In an interview late last year, he reported that forty species of birds nest on their ten acres.*

Two years ago, while attending an international wild-life conference, I struck up a conversation with the educational director of a state Audubon Society. In the course of the conversation I mentioned the fact that native plants host the insects that support our migratory birds. The young man, a biologist, challenged my statement.

“Do we know that’s true?” he asked.

He needs to pick up a copy of Dr. Tallamy’s wonderful new book, *Bringing Nature Home* (Timber Press, Inc., 2007, \$27.95). In it, Tallamy demonstrates the importance of native plants to healthy, viable terrestrial ecosystems.

The good professor says in his preface, “Occasionally we encounter a concept so obvious and intuitive that we have never thought to articulate it, so close to our noses that we could not see it, so entangled with our everyday experiences that we did not recognize it.” The concept is that because there is too little space left for the wild-life we care about, we must make our yards friendlier to the birds, frogs, butterflies and other wild creatures with which we share this planet. With roughly forty million acres of land in American yards, his is a compelling argument.

Tallamy appeals to the gardener in all of us to use native plants in our landscapes. Although he says that *Bringing Nature Home* is not a “how-to” book, in a way, it is precisely that. While he does not attempt to instruct us on which plants to use, he takes us step by important step through the crucial reasoning around why we should – indeed, why we must – return as much of our personal property to native plants as possible. We must do that because native plants support the insects upon which those same birds, frogs, butterflies (and all the rest of us for that matter) depend.

Filled with beautiful photographs of insects, plants, birds, and hard data presented in an easy to read style, *Bringing Nature Home* is a book every conservationist and conservation educator should read carefully. And then he or she must inform the public about this crucial issue. L

SBTH sells Bringing Nature Home for \$25.00, including shipping. Call or e-mail the office for a copy.

NOTE** Dr. Tallamy will be in the Grand Traverse Area on Saturday, Sept. 6 as part of a sustainable seminar. Mark that date on your calendar. Details will be available in our next newsletter.

Leading Bird Conservationist Coming to Leelanau

Dr. Gregory S. Butcher, Director of Bird Conservation for National Audubon, will be in Leelanau County on Saturday and Sunday, June 21 and 22. He will be the special guest of honor at a fund raising dinner on Saturday evening. The dinner will be held at SBTH’s Habitat Discovery Center, 5020 North Putnam Road. Dr. Butcher, author of last year’s “State of the Birds” report, will briefly share his findings that evening and he will be available for discussion during appetizers. Space is limited, so make your reservations early.

Butcher last visited Leelanau County in September of 2003 when he came to help dedicate our building. He has told us he is looking forward, with great anticipation, to returning to our beautiful area.

International bird tour leader and naturalist, Jeff Kingery, will assist Butcher in two hikes. A light breakfast of coffee and rolls will be served each morning prior

to setting out. Hikes will begin at 8:00 AM. Saturday we will meet at the Shuster property adjacent to Leelanau State Park. (Signs will be up.)

For Sunday’s hike on Charter Sanctuary, we will meet at the Habitat Discovery Center, 5020 North Putnam. Hikes will last approximately 2 hours. There is a \$20.00 per person fee for each. Funds raised will be used to help defray costs of continued bird surveys on Lighthouse West.

These are opportunities to learn more about migrating birds from the top bird conservationist in the nation. Both leaders will discuss the importance of the Lighthouse West property and Charter Sanctuary for migrating and nesting birds. The Leelanau Conservancy and Saving Birds Thru Habitat are sponsoring Dr. Butcher’s visit. Participation is limited. RESERVATIONS A MUST. Call 231-271-3738. L

Partners-in-Flight Conference

by Kay Charter

From February 13 through 16, the fourth of these international events took place in the McAllen, Texas Convention Center. For those four days, workshops and seminars were conducted and papers presented from 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM with a break for lunch. The place was packed with professionals involved in bird conservation as well as just plain birders who were interested in conservation. There were so many attendees that they were able to conduct (and have good attendance to) 8 sessions concurrently every day throughout the entire conference.

Anyone who has ever attended such an event, where virtually all minds and hearts are focused on one topic, will appreciate the fact that a high level of energy is generated. That alone makes it a great experience. And there are opportunities to reconnect with friends in the business of bird conservation, such as Paul Baicich (editor of the Birding Community E-Bulletin at www.steiner-birding.com/bulletin.html) and Greg Butcher. There were also new friends like Dr. Daniel Klem, expert on the issue of bird/window kills.

But the most important reason to attend a conference like this one is to take part in the seminars and attend sessions that might be helpful in one's work. Although I took a great deal away from the event, the issue that has stuck with me is that of bird/window kills. Like many others, I've had concerns about the loss of birds that crash into wind generators and communication towers. The tragic fact is that many more birds – by an order of magnitude – die crashing into windows every year than those that are lost due to any other human cause, including wind generators and communication towers. I came away from the meetings determined to make a difference.

Although both our home and the Habitat Discovery Center are largely protected, this organization has not done enough to raise awareness about this very serious issue. From now on, we will. Bird/window kills are now part of our PowerPoint presentation as well as our discussions on bird conservation.

Watch for an article in our next issue by Dr. Klem, complete with suggestions on how to mitigate the loss. **L**

Bobbie's Bits: Eat like a bird, do you? Most birds eat 25 to 50% of their body weight in food daily. Hummingbirds must eat about twice their body weight daily. Do the math: how many 1/4 lb burgers on buns would you need to eat in one day to match a birdy diet?

"Bobbie's Bits" is written by one of our most dedicated members, Bobbie Poor. Read more about her after her article on the last page.

GOOD NEWS FOR A TROUBLED WARBLER



Cerulean Warblers are threatened by mountain top mining in the Appalachian range.

Conservationists Hope to Turn Abandoned Coal Mining Lands into Bird Havens

by Alicia King

Recently, a coalition of groups contributed to a program that has the potential to dramatically alter the landscape of abandoned and disused coalmines throughout Appalachia for the benefit of some of our fastest declining birds. The project will plant 15,000 seedlings on a plot in Vinton County, Ohio that will serve as a model for future partnership efforts. The project will restore degraded mining lands to provide habitat for Cerulean Warblers and other interior forest birds that have been declining due to the loss and fragmentation of forests in the United States and Canada.

American Bird Conservancy is working with partners of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement's "Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative" to reforest abandoned minelands in the coal region of the Appalachian Mountains. Large blocks of mature forest there provide important habitat for Cerulean Warblers and other declining birds, but these forested areas have been degraded due to loss and fragmentation from past and current coal mining operations. Cerulean Warblers in particular, rely on large expanses of diverse hardwood forests in the Appalachians—80% of the global population breeds in the Appalachians, especially in West Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Pennsylvania.

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Our spring newsletter is an important one because it contains our calendar of events for May and June, which – with the return of our nesting migrants – make it the busiest of the year. We have printed the calendar on the last pages so that they can be clipped and taped to your fridge. Although press releases will go out for most events, we hope that you save this calendar and mark those events that interest you. When reservations are required, make them early so you will not be disappointed.

Please note that most SBTH programs are open to the public at no fee. However, because space is limited for Sanctuary hikes, reservations are firmly required. Please call 231-271-3738 to reserve your space.

Thursday, May 1 at 7:00 AM:

Gardening for Migrating Birds:

SBTH Executive Director Kay Charter will present her program to the Benzie County Audubon Club. The meeting is open to the public and will be held at the Tribal Lodge of the Grand Traverse Bay Indians in Benzonia.

Saturday, May 10:

Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day with Kirtland's Warblers

Join SBTH members and friends for a tour of Kirtland's Warbler habitat near Mio. Warbler expert Jerry Weinrich will be our host for the tour. We will meet at Tom's West Bay at 9:00 AM to carpool for the trip to Mio.

Sunday, May 18 – 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM:

Fourth Annual Nature North at the Civic Center

Bring the entire family and all your friends and neighbors for this outstanding event, presented for the general public by local, state and national conservation-oriented organizations. Activities include beginning birder's workshop, "Birdie Bingo," the great migration game, binocular making, "aliens from the deep" and more. This year's event will include a native wildflower sale by the Grand Traverse Conservation District. There is no fee for this event. For more information call 231-271-3738.

Friday, May 23 at 7:30 PM:

Frog Walk with SBTH Docent Ann McInnis

Why are frogs so happy? They eat whatever bugs them. Join Docent Ann McInnis in discovering amazing "wows" about amphibians followed by a special night walk to hear the spring chorus of some of Michigan's frogs and toads at the Charter Sanctuary. What does their presence indicate about healthy ecosystems for birds and other living things? Meet Friday May 23rd at 7:30 PM at SBTH's Discovery Center building at 5020 North Putnam Road.

Saturday, May 24 at 8:00 AM:

Bird Hike on Charter Sanctuary:

Join SBTH Executive Director Kay Charter for a hike around Charter Sanctuary. See firsthand how native plants increase nesting bird populations. Reservations required.

Saturday, May 31 at 8:00 AM:

Bird Hike on Charter Sanctuary:

Join SBTH Executive Director Kay Charter for a hike around Charter Sanctuary. See firsthand how native plants increase nesting bird populations. Reservations required.

Saturday, May 31 at Dusk:

Night-time Insects:

MSU Extension entomologist Erwin “Duke” Elsner will present a program at the Discovery Center in search of night-flying insects including moths, beetles, mayflies and many other groups. Plan to stay late. Action picks up as night goes on. Be prepared for cool weather and mosquitoes. Bring a flashlight. Space limited; reservations required. Call 231-271-3738 to reserve your space.

Thursday, June 5 at 10:00 AM:

Butterfly Walk

MSU Extension entomologist Erwin “Duke” Elsner will lead a hike on Charter Sanctuary in search of butterflies, moths and other flying insects. Hike begins at the Discovery Center at 10:00 AM. Please call 231-271-3738 for reservations.

Wednesday, June 18 at 7:00 – 8:00 PM:

Wetlands Bird Walk/Talk

SBTH Executive Director Kay Charter will lead a walk at the Inland Seas wetlands in Suttons Bay.

Saturday, June 21 at 8:00 AM:

Bird Hike at Lighthouse West Property:

Dr. Gregory S. Butcher will lead a hike at Lighthouse West on Saturday morning, June 21. International bird tour leader and naturalist, Jeff Kingery, will assist Dr. Butcher. A light breakfast of coffee and rolls will be served prior to the hike, which will begin at 8:00 AM and will last approximately two hours. Funds raised during the hike will be used to help defray costs of continued bird surveys. This hike offers a great opportunity to learn more about migrating birds from the top bird conservationist in the nation. Both leaders will discuss the importance of the Lighthouse West property for migrating and nesting birds. We will meet at the Shuster property just south of Leelanau State Park. There is a \$20.00 per person fee for this walk. Call SBTH or the Leelanau Conservancy (231-256-2665) with questions.

Saturday, June 21 at 6:00 PM:

Fund Raising Dinner at the Habitat Discovery Center:

Dr. Gregory S. Butcher, Director of Bird Conservation for National Audubon will be the guest speaker at a fund raising dinner at the Habitat Discovery Center. Dr. Butcher is author of the most recent State of the Birds report, which was completed just last year. He will bring us up to date on this important issue. Participation is limited so reservations are a must. Call SBTH for details.

Sunday, June 22 at 8:00 AM:

Bird Hike at Charter Sanctuary

Dr. Gregory S. Butcher will lead a hike on Charter Sanctuary and international bird tour leader Jeff Kingery will assist him. A light breakfast of coffee and rolls will be served prior to the hike, which will begin at 8:00 AM and will last approximately two hours. This hike offers a great opportunity to learn more about migrating birds from the top bird conservationist in the nation. Both leaders will discuss the importance of the Sanctuary and habitat work being done on it on behalf of migrating and nesting birds. Funds will be used for habitat studies and bird surveys. Call SBTH with questions.

Thursday, June 26 from 3 to 6 PM:

Pig Roast and Family Fun Festival at Northport Marina Park.

Join Ann McInnis and other SBTH volunteers for this meal as well as simple, fun activities for kids and a make-it/take-it activity.

MORE GOOD NEWS

Brown Pelican May Fly Off ESA List



(With permission from the Birding Community E-Bulletin)

In February, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne marked the recovery of the Brown Pelican from the edge of extinction by formally proposing to remove the remaining protected populations of the species from coverage under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) along the Gulf and Pacific Coasts, as well as in the Caribbean, and Central and South America.

The pelican's recovery is due in large part to the federal ban on the use of the pesticide DDT in 1972, following Rachel Carson's published revelations about the dangers associated with unrestricted pesticide use.

The Brown Pelican was first declared endangered under the Endangered Species Conservation Act in 1970, a precursor of the current ESA. The Brown Pelican was removed from the list of endangered species in 1985 in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and northward along the Atlantic Coast wherever it nested. Today there are over 620,000 brown pelicans found across Florida and the Gulf and Pacific Coasts of the U.S., as well as in the Caribbean and Latin America.

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Early growth will benefit priority species such as the American Woodcock, and Prairie Warbler for several years. As the stand matures, it will provide habitat for interior forest birds such as Ceruleans.

Over the last 30 years, many mines have been reclaimed to non-native grasslands or shrublands, replacing diverse hardwood forests with large, unnatural openings. However, some of these areas now support populations of other priority birds such as Golden-winged Warblers, Northern Bobwhite, Henslow's Sparrows, and American Woodcock. Future reforestation efforts will be coordinated so as not to negatively affect these species.

Alicia King is Executive Director of the American Bird Conservancy, a network of organizations with a shared interest in the conservation of wild birds. Through the Alliance, millions of birdwatchers and concerned citizens

If the Brown Pelican is removed from the list of Threatened and Endangered species under the ESA, other federal laws, such as the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Lacey Act, will continue to protect the species, along with its nests and its eggs, from harm. ┘

About Our "Good News" Pieces

SBTH recognizes that we face significant conservation challenges if we are to preserve those things in the natural world we most care about. However, there are victories, such as those described in the above two articles that we should celebrate. Positive outcomes such as these offer us hope, without which we would become discouraged and give up our efforts. It is the goal of this organization to empower people to work to make a genuine difference, especially for our troubled migratory bird population, by simply incorporating native plantings into their personal landscapes. So enjoy the good news about the Brown Pelican and habitat development on behalf of the Cerulean Warbler.

Then do your part by picking up a flat of wildflowers or half a dozen berry-bearing shrubs that are native to your region. Add some native trees. Plant them in your yard. Next year do the same thing. Pack your yard with those natives that will create habitat by hosting life-giving insects. Then watch for Song Sparrows, Red-eyed Vireos or Gray Catbirds to come and nest there...even if you live in an urban area. Keep an eye out in spring for spectacular songbirds returning from the Tropics, which land in the oasis you have offered for rest and refueling. Imagine what our world would look like if everyone did that. So join us. Do your part and then revel in the results. ┘

are united with conservation professionals, scientists, and educators to benefit bird conservation efforts. (SBTH is a member of ABC.)

The Alliance's goals are to work together to prevent further bird extinctions, to reverse declines in bird populations, and to assure the protection and management of sufficient habitat to effectively conserve populations of the full range of native, wild bird species for the future.

The Alliance serves as a forum for organizations to exchange information and ideas regarding current issues in bird conservation, assists its members in conducting collaborative advocacy, and provides resources to assist its members in their bird conservation work. Learn more BCA at: www.birdconservationalliance.org ┘

Because We Care

by *Bobbie Poor*

People who work with animals have been taught not to be anthropomorphic. Give a wild creature a personal name, it is said, and it loses its wildness. Give it a name and one will care too much for it. Let's think about that. Isn't "to care" a good thing?

At our feeder this morning, there are Mabel, Pop and Bullyboy. Sissy pecks hopefully on the ground, ignored by her cardinal parents, while Bullyboy stuffs himself with their approval. Flit and Flash wait to dash, in chickadee fashion, for a morsel while Greyshanks, a squirrel, gleans crumbs that drop from Mabel's beak; Paul Bunion, the resident Pileated Woodpecker, hammers with determination on a dead birch. The tree is his pantry, his playground and cell phone. We leave it up for him.

An owl may snatch Greyshanks to feed her hungry chicks. A Cooper's Hawk may pick off a hesitant titmouse from the feeder. They, too, must partake of Nature's bounty to survive. Nature is neither good nor bad; it simply "is." Our backyard, a sort of feathered version of "Meerkat Manor" illustrates this. Still, we can't help it. We care.

And caring so much for our avian visitors means we will care about providing native plants for their real food; about keeping waters in our lakes, rivers and aquifers unpolluted for all creatures to drink; about working to assure clean air for all to breathe and fly through; about offering poison-free insect populations for wild birds to feed their babies.

So go ahead. Give your backyard birds names. You care. You will make a difference. **L**

Bobbie Poor is a docent for SBTH when she is in her summer digs north of Leland. During the winter months, she lives outside of St. Louis, Missouri, where she is also a docent for the St. Louis Zoo.

Tundra Swans Go Through in Big Numbers

Throughout the weekend of April 5 and 6, a number of large flocks of great white birds were reported flying over the greater Grand Traverse area. Various SBTH members saw flocks of the birds from as far south as Clare to as far north as Old Mission.

These were Tundra Swans, and they were from the eastern wintering population. They were on their way from wintering grounds along the Atlantic Coast (from New Jersey down to South Carolina) to breeding sites in the tundra. Since they regularly fly over Michigan during migration, this was not the first report we've received of sightings in our area. It was, however, certainly the largest numbers we've ever heard of, as well as the most flocks.

Because this imposing bird breeds so far from human habitation and interference, it has not shared the fate of its cousin, and the only other native North American swan, the Trumpeter. Trumpeters were driven nearly to extinction by market hunting. Indeed, they were believed for a while to be extirpated. (Happily, with protection and efforts to place breeding pairs on small, relatively remote lakes and ponds, they have made a comeback.)

Today, the overall population of Tundra Swans is an estimated 170,000 individuals. In spite of that relatively high number, this elegant bird has declined nearly forty percent in the past four decades. The birds face all the problems that all species that depend on coastal estuaries, plus they are subject to threats of global climate change on their Arctic breeding grounds.

One of their major wintering areas is Chesapeake Bay, where they face competition with non-native Mute Swans. Maryland Department of Natural Resources is working to control the Mute populations on behalf of the Tundras and other birds that rely on the rich habitat in that bay. **L**

**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:

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Nest Builders: Those who make an annual pledge at the Bobolink level (\$250) or higher/

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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:
bobolink3@prodigy.net

Thank You!



Saving Birds Thru Habitat

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Mission Statement:

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.**