

Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

May 2010, Volume 9, Number 1

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Edited by:

Kathleen Snedeker
and Kay Charter

From the Director's Desk

by Kay Charter


Last month, Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy Executive Director Glen Chown gave significant credit to this organization for its educational efforts regarding the prairie installation near Arcadia Dunes. This is a 350 acre project that saw nesting bobolinks two years ago and upland sandpipers last year. It has become a model for other organizations embarking on similar projects

Also last month, Sarah Litch, who chairs Leelanau Clean Water applauded Saving Birds for working to get the Grand Traverse area *Phragmites australis* control project off the ground. This ongoing project has been so successful that it has been tagged "The Michigan Model," and is being studied in other regions with the same problem.

Next month, we are invited to join a symposium on Beaver Island as a presenter. Our topics will concern managing forests for bird populations and how to encourage birder-based ecotourism on the Island.

The above are just some of our environmental efforts on behalf of birds and other wildlife. Much of what we do is behind the scenes, lobbying on behalf of those marvelous native plants that offer so many benefits. I thought you'd like to know about a few of them. 🐦

Is Anybody Out There?



Okay, now that I have caught your attention, I have something for you all to contemplate. Remember when you were a kid? Not so long ago, I know I've been there. What did you do with your day? Ride your bike, play hopscotch, climb trees, explore the woods and creeks, watch the birds fly over your head? Your parents couldn't keep you in the house nor did they want you there.

What has happened? I know that young kids are not reading this newsletter so I'm appealing to the parents and grandparents who can remember the freedom and pleasures of discovering the great outdoors. We are the ones who are now concerned about what happens to "our places to explore" because we've been there. What is going to happen to the next generations who spend so much time indoors staring at computers, TV, and Gameboys? How are they going to appreciate what the earth has to offer? I hate to say it, but it is up to us, the seasoned veterans, to reach back into our memories to show the young people all the joys we experienced in our youth. If we don't do it now we're going to lose them forever.

Saving Birds thru Habitat has many wonderful opportunities for you to entice your kids into the wonders of nature. Mark your calendars for these upcoming events:

For the first time we are very excited to be offering **Wonders of the Wild Day Camp** (WoW) for children 7-11, at SBTH

Discovery Center near Omena. Campers will explore plant power, investigate insects, search for salamanders and slithery snakes, and go on a songbird safari. Our WoW campers will practice what they have learned by planting a Wildlife Magnet -- a garden of native plants -- at the Old Art Building in Leland. June 28 through July 2, 9am – noon.

Your entire family will appreciate **Walking in a Good Way**, with Hank Bailey, Grand Traverse Band Natural Resources Department of Fish and Wildlife Technician. Hank will discuss and demonstrate native philosophies and traditions as they relate to the Anishnaabek's relationship with the environment. How do these ancient philosophies and traditions relate to present day treatment of our environment? Join us for this program, where you and your family will learn to walk in a good way. Saturday, July 17th, 2 – 3PM.

Warm August nights bring out a group of beautiful moths called "underwings" because of their boldly patterned hind wings. At rest on tree trunks during the day, their bark-colored front wings cover the bright hind wings, making them almost impossible to notice. **Sugaring for Moths** with Duke Elsner will take you along a woodland path to see these moths as they come to feed on a bait made of sugar and several secret ingredients. August 25th, 9 PM – Midnight

Come and join us for one event or all events. I promise you won't regret it, nor will your kids! Check out our calendar for our other great events, including butterfly and moth hikes, two programs about gardening with native plants (complete with plant sales), a program about "lakescaping" and a presentation about North American prairie.

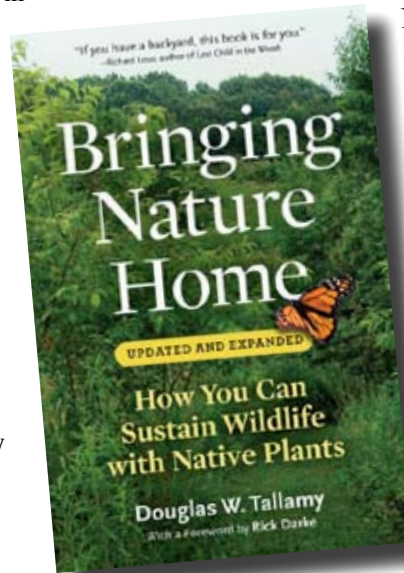
Happy Birding!
Gina Erb, President 🐦

On Creating a Local “Tallamy Garden”

This concept grew out of the information in Dr. Douglas W. Tallamy’s landmark book *Bringing Nature Home*. In the book, Tallamy, who is Chair of the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware, documents the dependence of insects, and in turn the dependence of birds, on native plants, especially those plants that serve as larval hosts. (Probably the best known example of insects requiring specific native plants is the absolute dependence of monarch butterflies on the genus *Asclepias*, the milkweeds, of which our area has five native species.) Even birds that feed extensively on seeds and berries rely on nutrition from insects to rear their young.

Tallamy has carefully studied and documented feeding habits of many insect herbivores, particularly Lepidoptera (moth and butterfly larvae), on various plant genera, and has compiled a list of those most important in sustaining the lives of these declining insects. He has shown that large urban and suburban landscapes based heavily on alien plants – those plants that came from another part of the world -- have adversely impacted native plant populations. Those impacts have, in turn, adversely impacted our native wildlife. Tallamy has developed a list of the most important plant genera on which Lepidoptera rely.

Some progress is being made in bringing native plants into prominence in ornamental landscapes. At least two local nurser-



ies are increasing native plant sales (Four Season Nursery and Bellweather Gardens), and organizations like the Michigan State Extension and local Conservation Districts are providing vital leadership. An important step forward is a new “back yard consultation” service offered by Saving Birds Thru Habitat (see following article) to provide guidance on improving landscapes with the goal of serving the needs of birds.

Still in the conceptual state is a proposal by SBTH member and Master Gardener Mike Davis to develop a demonstration “Tallamy Garden,” which would incorporate as many native plants from Tallamy’s list as is practical. Its purpose will be to teach, publicize, and encourage restoration of enough continuity of native plantings in home and commercial landscapes to reverse the downward trend in the all-important plant-insect-bird food web. (Saving Birds Thru Habitat has agreed to act as an advisor on the project and Master Gardener Pam Schmidt will help guide the project.)

A site has yet to be determined for this educational garden. Once the best location is selected, a grant will be sought to cover the costs of the plants. Master Gardener volunteers will prepare the site and will then plant and maintain the garden

Saving Birds Thru Habitat is looking forward to partnering on this very worthwhile project. 🇺🇸

Backyard Habitat Consultation

This year we are offering backyard habitat consultations to those interested in improving habitat for migrating and nesting songbirds. Plant surveys for these consultations will be carried out either by Greg LaCross, who chairs the Science Department at Northwestern Michigan College, or Field Ecologist David Dister. David is our Technical Advisor regarding plant identification.

Following the surveys, property owners will receive a report identifying existing non-native invasive species, suggestions for removal, and a list of recommended native species suitable for the site. The overarching theme will be to improve the quality of the habitat to the benefit of nesting and migrating birds. Please call the office at 231-271-3738 for more information and fee structure. 🇺🇸



Photo by
Doug Tallamy



Each year, SBTH assists with school field trips at various Fairmount Minerals sites. Fairmount, a sand mining company, restored this southern Michigan property after mining was completed. During this trip, students from Bridgman Elementary School were fortunate enough to see Canada goose goslings leave the nest for the first time.

Chance Favors the Prepared

by Dave Dister

Photo by Dave Dister

Long after my years of college instruction, a single phrase remains etched in my brain, “Chance Favors the Prepared.” It is a simple concept: one’s “chance” of recognizing something unusual is directly related to one’s knowledge about it. Your chance of finding a black-throated blue warbler each spring is slim if you do not recognize the male’s distinctive song. Knowing the song and having “good ears” probably increases the odds of finding this bird in suitable habitat from 1 percent to 20 percent (i.e., 20 times more likely) because this species is uncommon as a migrant and breeder in Michigan and adjacent states.

Birding can be as innocuous or engaging as one desires, and it has been my passion for more than 40 years. But wanting to find that rare bird, and achieving success, depends on more than enthusiasm and wishful thinking. One has to strategize on the optimal habitat, season of the year, time of day, and weather conditions, plus have a good knowledge of the plumage and vocalizations. Lastly, pure luck or “chance” is the final factor for encountering really rare species.

On November 7, 2009, Bob Morman and I were conducting a shoreline bird count at Big Sable Point in Ludington State Park (Mason County). The object of this count (conducted at many other sites along Lake Michigan’s eastern shoreline) is to record all species of birds seen migrating along the shoreline, and well off-shore, for two hours beginning at sunrise. I was scanning the lake for waterfowl and gulls with my spotting scope when Bob mentioned that there was a gull-like bird to the north of us along the beachfront, and was possibly a phalarope. I took his comment with a grain of salt and slowly turned my scope to the north.

I quickly got a fix on the bird at low power and then zoomed in at 60x. It took about 2.8 seconds before I determined it to be a

phalarope — a red phalarope! Its drab gray and white winter plumage lacks dark stripes on the back typical of the red-necked phalarope, and the bird’s bold white wing-stripe is lacking on the Wilson’s phalarope. I had only seen a red phalarope once before, in 1988 in southeastern Indiana. The red phalarope breeds in the high arctic tundra, and winters at sea in the Atlantic Ocean, but much remains unknown about the species. Once I realized the significance of this bird, I grabbed my camera and ran to the grassy bluff on the shore near the bird, which was spinning in circles on the water – a key feeding behavior of all phalaropes. I crept through the beach grasses and, while holding my breath, began taking a dozen photos between grass stems. The bird took off from the water, hovered briefly, and then headed north with the aid of a stiff tailwind. When I reviewed my photos, I was ecstatic to find a few that were fairly sharp and would easily corroborate this extremely rare bird – generally reported only once or twice annually in Michigan.

Time is of the essence when it comes to rare birds, which generally don’t linger, especially when harassed by pesky birders that get much too close for comfort. As with many rare birds that I have yet to see or have seen but once, I routinely check various bird guides with illustrations and photos to keep sharp on key aspects of plumage. I was prepared, and chance gave me the opportunity to document an extraordinary shorebird. 🐦

David Dister is a Field Ecologist and avid birder. The shoreline surveys he conducts are used by a number of organizations, including Michigan Audubon. He serves as Technical Advisor to SBTH.



Ovenbird by Jeff Kingery

Photo by Jeff Kingery

starlings, and woodpeckers will all destroy (and sometimes eat) eggs and nestlings, primarily because they want to raise their own brood in that cavity.

Nest Predators

By Greg Butcher

A few years ago I was walking in the woods when an ovenbird shot out almost from underfoot. By stopping dead in my tracks and looking carefully at the spot where I first saw the bird, I was able to find the nest – my first ovenbird nest ever. It wasn’t as well covered as I’d expected, so I got a good look at the four eggs.

I was elated until I returned the next day to find the site all messed up and the eggs missing. What had taken the eggs? The list of potential villains is large. It could have been any number of snake, bird, or mammal species.

Some bird species are predators on eggs and nestlings of other species. Grackles, crows, and jays are notorious, but many other birds also cause problems. A lot of eggs and nestlings are lost during competition for nest cavities. House wrens, house sparrows,

Continued on Page 6

Saving Birds Thru Habitat

Unless otherwise noted, please meet for all events (except Nature North) at Boardman River Nature Center, 1000 Boardman River Road. For additional information/directions, call 231-373-8300.

May 26, 10AM – Noon

SBTH/Leelanau Conservancy Bird Hike on Charter Sanctuary.

More than 60 species of birds have nested on the sanctuary since the Charters purchased it seventeen years ago. Leaders: Conservancy docent Bobbie Poor and SBTH Executive Director Kay Charter.

May 29 10AM – 4PM

Plant Native/Plant Michigan:

SBTH will participate in this native plant sale at Four Season Nursery. Check website for more details: www.fourseasonnursery.biz



June 5, 1PM – 3PM

Charter Sanctuary Bird Hike with Kay Charter.

This hike will focus on the many species nesting on the sanctuary, including rarities like the mourning warbler as well as more common species like Baltimore oriole, common yellowthroat, indigo bunting and many others.

June 12, 10AM – 4PM

Nature North

Saving Birds Thru Habitat is a participant in Nature North at Boardman River Nature Center in Traverse City. This year's event promises to be the best to date. Bring your kids and grandkids to take part in hands-on nature based activities. Find event info at www.natureiscalling.org.



June 24, 1PM – 3PM

Butterfly Hike with Duke Elsner:

The Grand Traverse area has a rich diversity of butterfly species, thanks to the many plant species and landforms of the region. Some species are likely to be encountered almost anywhere, but there are many species that can only be seen by venturing into their unique habitats. This hike will take you through several different habitat areas at SBTH in an effort to see both common and some very special species of Michigan butterflies.

June 28 – July 2, 9AM – Noon

SBTH Day Camp at Discovery Center:

New to the summer calendar this year, Wonders of the Wild Day Camp has some answers for kids who wonder, "What's going on out there?" Curious campers, age 7 to 11, can join the fun at the Saving Birds thru Habitat Discovery Center near Omena where they will explore plant power, investigate the insect world, search for salamanders and slithering snakes, go on a songbird safari and discover some amazing mammals.

Artist Susan Fawcett will spend a morning teaching the kids how to draw birds, and we will learn how to use a birding field guide; each child will receive his or her own copy to keep, and we will dissect barn owl pellets to learn what the birds had for a meal.

Five adventure-filled mornings from 9 - 12, begin on June 28 and culminate on July 1 when the WoW campers will share what they have learned by planting a Wildlife Magnet – a garden of native plants – at the Old Art Building in Leland.

The camp fee is one hundred dollars per child. Deadline to register is Monday, June 14th. For information and registration please call 231-3738.

Calendar of Events for 2010

*ture North) at the Habitat Discovery Center, 5020 North Putnam
all 231-271-3738. Loaner binoculars are available.*

July 17, 2PM – 3PM

Walking in a Good Way.

People of all ages will appreciate our presentation by Hank Bailey, Grand Traverse Band Natural Resources Department of Fish and Wildlife Technician. Hank will discuss and demonstrate native philosophies and traditions as they relate to the Anishnaabek's relationship with the environment. How do these ancient philosophies and traditions relate to present day treatment of our environment? Join us for this program, where you and your family will learn to walk in a good way.



July 24, 2PM – 4PM

Native Plants with Landscape Designer Brian Zimmerman

Join Landscape Designer Brian Zimmerman of Four Season Nursery who demonstrates how to incorporate native trees and shrubs in a way that is attractive to us as well as birds.

Brian will have a substantial selection of native trees and shrubs for sale following his presentation.

August 25, 9PM – Midnight

“Sugaring” for Moths with Duke Elsner:

Warm August nights bring out a group of beautiful moths called “underwings” because of their boldly patterned hind wings. At rest on tree trunks during the day, their bark-colored front wings cover the bright hind wings, making them almost impossible to notice. This night-time walk will take you along a woodland path to see these moths as they come to feed on a bait made of sugar and several “secret” ingredients.



August 28, 2PM – 3PM

Vern Stephens presents North American Prairies:

Vern will present a PowerPoint program on the importance of this unique ecosystem. Native prairie plants will be available for purchase.

September 18, 1PM – 3PM

Lakescaping:

Sarah U'Ren, Program Director for the Watershed Center, will demonstrate how to landscape your property with an eye toward protecting your watershed. Lakescaping is a set of landscaping practices done along a lake's shoreline that are beneficial to water quality and the environment, minimizing traditional grass lawns and maximizing natural plantings of native flowers, grasses, trees and shrubs. Incorporating a greenbelt garden (or buffer strip) along your shore is one of the best things you can do on your waterfront property to protect water quality. Learn how these greenbelt gardens protect water quality, prevent erosion, increase property values, and attract wildlife to your shoreline.



Big bluestem prairie on Charter Sanctuary

This presentation will be particularly helpful to riparian owners.

September 25, 1PM – 3PM

Introduction to Prairies:

Powerpoint program by Kay Charter followed by a prairie hike on Charter Sanctuary. This program represents a partnership between Saving Birds and Plant It Wild, an organization dedicated to fostering greater awareness and appreciation of the fragile natural environment of our region.

Background Photo by Jeff Kingery

Nest Predators *Continued from Page 3*

To reduce bird predation on eggs and young birds, it is probably important to take care in bird feeding so as not to attract cowbirds, grackles, jays, and crows. If these species predominate at your feeders, it may be best to take a hiatus from feeding.

Although birds eat eggs and young birds, it's almost certainly mammals that do the most damage. A surprisingly large number of mammals eat bird eggs – from the tiny deer mouse, to rats, chipmunks, squirrels, weasels and minks, to skunks, opossums, raccoons, foxes and bears.

One of the greatest threats to baby birds and their parents – especially in urban, suburban, and farmland areas – is the domestic cat. Many individual cats specialize in birds; others take them as part of a more varied diet. Cats will catch birds even when they aren't hungry. Because of the loss to cats, the American Bird Conservancy recommends that cat owners keep their cats indoors – for the health of the cat as well as for the birds.

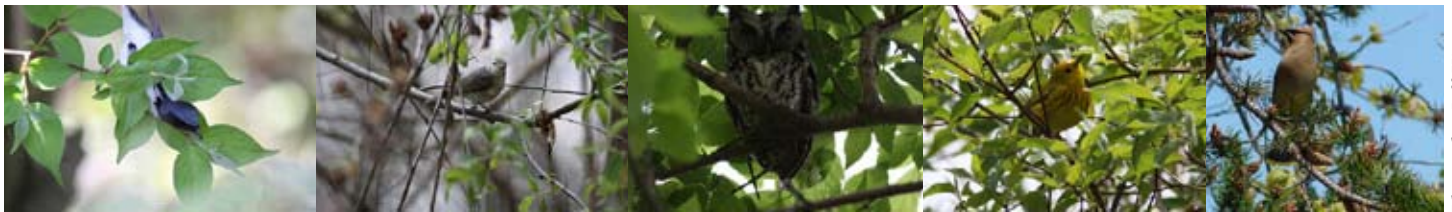
The North American Bluebird Society lists 11 species of snakes as possible predators at bluebird boxes, with black rat snakes leading the list. Alexander Skutch, the legendary Central American ornithologist, hated snakes with a passion because of the eggs and baby birds they ate. However, there is no evidence that snakes are increasing, so little sense that the snake problem is out of control.

In many situations, providing good habitat is enough to ensure healthy bird populations. But it is always good to keep an eye on the predators. Small to medium-sized mammalian predators are quite common these days for two reasons: large, “top-down” predators such as mountain lions and wolves are no longer common enough to keep them in check, and the medium-sized predators take advantage of garbage and other foods that humans supply, especially at feeders.

If predators in your neighborhood are out of control, a trapping program may help to restore the balance. Importing wolves or mountain lions is not yet an option, although many bird-lovers are seeing improvements as coyote populations expand back into parts of the country where they have been absent for decades. Like wolves and lions, coyotes prefer to eat medium-sized predators over birds. 🐦

Dr. Gregory Butcher is Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon. He is a member of SBTH.

Ed. Note about nest predators: When our Habitat Discovery Center was built, the decision was made not to put bird feeders up. This was done so as not to attract rodents and other mammals to the property, which would almost certainly have adversely impacted nesting success. To date, more than a dozen species have nested successfully on the property, with no mammalian interference.



Photos by Jeff Kingery

Four Season Native Tree and Shrub List

Below is a complete list of the native trees and shrubs currently offered by Four Season Nursery. Join us on Saturday, July 24th at 2PM when Four Season owner Brian Zimmerman presents a program on incorporating plants like these into your landscape. Please note that some plants may not be available until midsummer.

Trees

Striped Maple	Wild Plum
Red Maple	Choke Cherry
Sugar Maple (hardmaple)	White Oak
Silver Maple	Swamp White Oak
Serviceberry/Juneberry/ Shadblow	Bur Oak
Yellow Birch	Northern Red Oak
Paper Birch	American Mountain Ash
Blue Beech	Basswood
Hackberry	Mountain Maple
Redbud	Balsam Fir
Pagoda Dogwood	Common Juniper
American Hazelnut	Common Juniper (low growing)
Common Witchhazel	Eastern Red Cedar
Tamarack	White Spruce
Tulip Tree	White Pine
Ironwood	American Arborvitae
Hop Tree	Canadian Hemlock

Shrubs

Bearberry - Kinnikinnick	Staghorn Sumac
Black Chokeberry	Swamp Rose
Speckled Alder	Michigan Rose
New Jersey Tea	Pussy Willow
Buttonbush	American Elderberry
Virgin's Bower	Red-berried Elder
Sweet Fern	Buffaloberry or Soapberry
Gray Dogwood	Willowleaf Spirea
Red-osier Dogwood	Steeplebush
Bush Honeysuckle	American Bladdernut
Shrubby St. John's Wort	Snowberry
St. John's Wort	Arrowwood Viburnum
Michigan Holly	Nannyberry (small tree)
Spicebush	Blackhaw Viburnum
Common Ninebark	Highbush Cranberry
Sand Cherry	
Fragrant Sumac	

Prairie Habitat and Native Plants For Sale

Saturday, August 28, 2010
SBTH Discovery Center



2010 Plant List:

Grasses:

Little Bluestem
Big Bluestem
Indian Grass
Switch Grass
Prairie Dropseed
Sideoats Grama
June Grass

Wildflowers:

Bergamot
Black-Eyed Susan
Blue Vervain
Boneset
Butterfly Weed
Cardinal Flower
Columbine
Compass Plant
Culver's Root
Cup Plant
False Boneset
False Dragonhead
Foxglove Beard Tongue
Gray Headed Coneflower
Golden Alexanders
Great Blue Lobelia
Hairy Beard Tongue

Hoary Vervain
Horsemint
Ironweed
Joe Pye Weed
Lead Plant
New Jersey Tea
Nodding Wild Onion
New England Aster
Marsh Blazing Star
Prairie Coreopsis
Prairie Dock
Prairie Smoke
Pale Purple Coneflower
Purple Coneflower
Queen of the Prairie
Rattlesnake Master
Rosin Weed
Rough Blazing Star
Round Leaf Ragwort

Sand Tickseed
Showy Goldenrod
Sky Blue Aster
Spiderwort
Stiff Goldenrod
Swamp Milkweed
Sweet Black-Eyed Susan
Thimbleweed
Turtlehead
Western Sunflower
White Wild Indigo
Wild Lupine
Wild Senna
Woodland Sunflower
Zig Zag Goldenrod
Blue Eyed Grass



**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)
 Other (\$ _____)

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

In memory / honor (please circle one) of:

Acknowledgment card to go to: _____

Would you prefer your membership/gift to be anonymous?

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____
(payable to **Saving Birds thru Habitat**)

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Summer Address (if different)

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

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!



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*Check Out Our
Web Site!!*
www.SavingBirds.org

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.

