



# Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

## Celebrating Conservation Leaders in Indiana

December 8 RCAS Program

The heart of east central Indiana is blessed with talented people doing extraordinary things to protect, conserve, and educate others about the natural environment. On December 8, Robert Cooper Audubon Society recognizes six individuals who have, for decades, contributed to natural resource conservation and environmental protection.

The chapter's highest honor, the **Robert H. and Esther L. Cooper Award**, will be

bestowed upon **Amy Wilms**. An avid birder, bird bander, and conservationist, Wilms has been co-managing the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, near Connersville, Indiana, for the past 15 years. She is currently president of the Indiana Audubon Society and has served in multiple volunteer roles for over 12 years including webmaster, past president, vice president, and secretary.

Amy is a master bird bander of hummingbirds, songbirds, and Northern Saw-whet Owls.

For his decades of leading wetland restoration in east central Indiana, the **Phyllis Yuhus Wildlife Habitat Preservation Award** honors **Randall "Randy" Lehman**. While serving as site manager of the Limberlost State Historic Site, Randy led efforts to restore the wetlands of Limberlost and was instrumental in developing a natural history program for fourth grade classes,

as well as making the Limberlost Visitor Center a reality. More recently, Randy was a founding member and past president of South Adams Trails, which connects Geneva to Berne and Ouabache State Park.

For excellence in educating the area's children, youth, and adults about conservation issues and practices, we honor two deserving individuals, **Tom J. McConnell** and **Bill Hubbard**, with the **Clyde W. Hibbs Education Award**. As a professor of biology at Ball State University, Tom McConnell has led numerous immersive learning projects with undergraduate students who wrote, illustrated, and published a series of books focused on wildlife conservation called Conservation Tales. Bill Hubbard is a life-long teacher who served for 40 years as a high school biology teacher and, more recently, as a part time naturalist at Limberlost State Historic Site. Currently, Bill also serves on the board of the Friends of the Limberlost.

The **Richard Greene Public Service Award** celebrates initiatives which serve the public's environmental interests and concerns. This year we celebrate **John and Carolyn Vann's** leadership with Solarize East Central Indiana. Since their retirement from Ball State University, they have conducted scores of citizen workshops to raise awareness about the advantages of solar energy, the requirements of solar installations, tax incentives, and Indiana's net metering policy.

Please join us for the 2021 Conservation Award Program and Reception at 7 pm on December 8 at the Alumni Center of Ball State University.



Amy Wilms, with a Scarlet Tanager who seems to have a thing or two to tell her!  
Photo from <https://indianaudubon.org/>

## Field Trips

*Everyone is welcome at field trips and programs. Binoculars are available on request.*

December 19, 8:45 am to 11 am: 2111 W Riverside Ave, Muncie, IN

### **Delaware County Christmas Bird Count**

Join us for a socially distanced 2021 Christmas Bird Count on Sunday, December 19. Those counting by car will meet at 8:45 am in the parking lot of the Charles W. Brown Planetarium on the Ball State University campus. You can also count from home or from a stationary blind or bird feeding station. To participate, please contact Jim Schowe at [jim.schowe@gmail.com](mailto:jim.schowe@gmail.com). As with last year, we will forgo carpooling and the traditional after-count luncheon. Let's see what species we can find this year!

*Due to the holiday, we will not hold a December walk at Mounds this year. See you in 2022!*

January 29 and February 26, 9 am to 11 am: 4306 Mounds Road, Anderson, IN

### **Mounds State Park**

In December our usual Mounds walk on the final Saturday of the month will not occur, since Saturday falls on the 25th. Join us in the new year when our monthly schedule resumes. Winter walks are sometimes quiet affairs, but they have their own appeal.

Meet at the Visitor's Center at 9 am. State Park fees apply.

February 18-21: pick your time and venue

### **2022 Great Backyard Bird Count**

Cornell Lab, Audubon, and Birds Canada invite you to participate in the 25th annual Great Backyard Bird Count. Count birds for as little as 15 minutes or as long as you like from a location of your choosing—your feeders, a local park, the community pond, or wherever. If you enter your sightings in eBird they will contribute to this worldwide effort. You do not have to be an expert; there are instructions available at <https://www.birdcount.org/> as well as links to last year's results, when almost a third of a million checklists were entered from over 180 countries. This is a fun activity to do with kids or grandkids. Give it a try!

## Programs and Events

December 8, 7 pm: Ball State University Alumni Center, Muncie, IN

### **Celebrating Conservation Leaders in Indiana**

Join us to meet our 2021 RCAS award winners and hear from them about the work they are doing to benefit our environment and our communities.

January 12, 7 pm: Zoom meeting

### **So Many Geese!**

David Shearer of BSU will talk about a study concerning the growing populations of Canada Geese in urban areas, their impacts, and management strategies. Register in advance for this meeting at

<https://bsu.zoom.us/j/7828412345>

February 9, 7 pm: to be determined (check our website for updates)

### **Charting a Course for Conservation**

Kelley Phillips and John Huber from Red-tail Land Conservancy will tell us about their organization and share details about Growing Home, a certification program for healthy habitats that support wildlife.

*For events scheduled at the BSU Alumni Center, note that parking is free and available on the north side of the building, with handicap parking near the entrance on the east side of the building. For in-person events, please follow current guidelines on face masks and social distancing. Please monitor [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org) for cancellations and updates.*

# So Many Geese!

January 12 RCAS program

In the past 60 years, temperate-breeding Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) populations have grown substantially. Population levels now create more conflicts with humans and cause personal and public damage in many parts of the country. These conflicts can have a negative impact on natural resources, agriculture, and human health and safety. At our January 12 program David Shearer, of Ball State University, will talk about a study concerning the growing populations of Canada Geese in urban areas, where conflicts with humans are much more likely. Using light-level geolocation units and band recovery data, the project investigates the ecology of urban geese around the Indianapolis metropolitan area to understand their movements, population dynamics, behaviors, and impacts of current management techniques on their population sizes. Information retrieved from this study will support alternative management guidelines to minimize conflicts regularly seen with this species.

The study also investigates human tolerance and acceptance of urban geese in central Indiana by surveying residents of areas that experience active management of goose populations.

David Shearer is from Erie, Pennsylvania. He received his bachelor of arts in biology at Gannon University in 2016 and his master of science at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana. His master's thesis was on antipredatory behaviors of wintering sparrows, specifically, the sparrow's ability to detect and recognize predators based solely on auditory cues (wing beat noises). Shearer started a doctoral program at Ball State University in the spring of 2019, beginning a study on the spatial ecology, population dynamics, and human perspectives of urban Canada Geese.



Geese being corralled during their molt  
Photo by David Shearer

# Charting a Course for Conservation

February 9 RCAS program

On February 9, 2021, our fellow conservationists at Red-tail Land Conservancy will speak at our monthly meeting. Kelley Phillips, communications & outreach manager, will present on Red-tail and land conservation, and one of the founding members of Red-tail's Growing Home Committee, John Huber, will talk about the Growing Home program.

Red-tail Land Conservancy is east central Indiana's nonprofit land trust. By preserving and restoring forests, prairies, wetlands, and waterways, Red-tail plans for a future where natural beauty and unique habitats will exist for generations to come. The conservation movement across the country is changing. Red-tail is on the forefront of the new techniques and technology required in a world where the pace of development and climate change is rapidly increasing. Ecological and community wellness depend on having critical habitats for wildlife and accessible landscapes for people to explore. By working together,

we can chart this new course for conservation in east central Indiana to preserve, protect, and restore our natural areas.

Land conservation can be also accomplished close to home, literally. Red-tail's new Growing Home habitat certification program educates and empowers community members to create pocket nature preserves in their yards or gardens using native plantings. Attracting and supporting birds, bees, and butterflies can be a rewarding and beautiful way to landscape personal outdoor spaces. John Huber will introduce us to the Growing Home program and share tips and insights to help us re-wild our urban spaces with homegrown habitats.

A Growing Home certified habitat  
Photo by K. Johnson



# Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*) of Limberlost

By Terri Gorney Lehman, photos by Kimberley Roll

Limberlost at dusk can be a magical place when the Short-eared Owls suddenly appear for a night of hunting. The owls like the open country and fly low over the fields and wetlands in search of shrews, moles, voles, mice, and other prey.

In 2011, the late Jim Haw, a Fort Wayne birder, noted that restored Limberlost Swamp Wetland Preserve, in Geneva, Indiana, was an ideal habitat for Short-eared Owls. On November 23 of that year, he discovered them there, and the owls were seen a number of times around dusk and into the evening hours over the next few months. On November 25, Randy Lehman and I, along with Ed and Cynthia Powers, were treated to a wonderful show of the owls at dusk.

The owls returned in 2012. Randy and I had at least two in the same location where they were previously observed.

Dave Reichlinger and I saw five on December 13 that same year. The third year, the owls were counted on the Christmas Bird Count, on January 1, 2014.

The birds were back in the fall of 2014, and I spotted one perched about two feet off the ground on March

21, 2015. In the summer of 2015, there was a flood in this area. That winter the owls were not noted as often as in the past; possibly their food supply was diminished by the flood waters. But the numbers rebounded, and the owls have been at Limberlost every year since.

The Short-eared Owls can be seen hunting or perched low over a field

during the day. Most commonly they are seen at dusk or in the early morning hours. In her book *The Hidden Lives of Owls*, naturalist Leigh Calvez reports that

besides eating small mammals, which form over 93% of their diet, they will on occasion eat a red-winged blackbird or a meadowlark.

The owls can be spotted in flight, perched on the ground (with their coloring they are well hidden in vegetation), and perched on road signs and posts. In 2017 Kimberley Roll took a picture of a Short-eared Owl and a

Northern Harrier, two species that often share the same hunting grounds (photo below—owl is the upper bird). The owls do not appear to be shy about chasing harriers away.

Short-eared Owls roost on or close to the ground, and, also in 2017, Ben Hess found a roost of five owls. It was in a restored wetland area acquired by the Friends of the Limberlost that had been farmland just three years earlier.

The owls generally arrive in November and by early spring they are gone. The earliest date that I have recorded one is November 13, in 2020, and the latest dates are for a pair that Randy and I found at dusk on April 7 and 8, in 2017.

I look forward to November and the return of Short-eared Owls. They are a favorite of mine, as Randy and I started dating at the time of their first arrival at Limberlost. Habitat restoration at the Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve has created the perfect wintering location for the Short-eared Owls. It is worth the effort to go out in the evening hours or in the early morning to experience these silent masters of the skies.



# Mary Gray Field Trip

By Jim Schowe

July 24, 2021, dawned as a beautiful sunny summer day in east central Indiana—a perfect day for a field trip with members of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society. Our destination was the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary (MGBS), located just south of Connersville, Indiana. MGBS is a 700-acre parcel of land dedicated to birds and wildlife in general. We had a date with MGBS manager and Indiana Audubon Society board president, Amy Wilms. Amy is one of a few licensed hummingbird banders in the United States and she treated us to the opportunity to watch her band hummers and get very close to the activities involved.

Amy and her husband, Carl, co-manage and live on the property. They feed hummers from their first arrival in late April until the birds have migrated south, usually by the end of September though some slow pokes may hang around until first frost. Feeding hummingbirds for so many years tends to produce a large population of hummers in the area, creating a natural laboratory for gathering data about the tiny birds.

The Wilms follow a process to trap hummingbirds so data can be collected. Carl is in charge of watching a



Ready for release  
Photo by Terri Gorney Lehman

nonharming trap, and when a bird flies in, he carefully puts the caught bird in a net bag for Amy to examine. A net bag with a knot in the drawstring means that this bird has already been



Hummingbird trap  
Photo by Terri Gorney Lehman

banded and has been recaptured. No knot means it is time to band the little one.

Amy then removes the bird from the net bag and places it in a 'nest' made from pantyhose for safe handling. From there she weighs the bird, takes various measurements, and checks for fat stores by blowing on the underside of its neck to

look for life sustaining fat deposits. Once the data are recorded, release is next. Field trip members all had the thrill of having hummingbirds placed in our hands and allowing them to escape to the safety of MGBS. We were all given the chance to hear a bird's heartbeat as Amy held one to our ears. A hummingbird's heartbeat sounds to me like an infant's heartbeat when it is examined by ultrasound. This is a truly gratifying experience.

Last week I went to MGBS to gather pawpaws

and I spoke with Amy. She said the migration is almost finished though she did just capture one 'fatty'; it weighed a whopping six grams, about the weight of a teaspoon of sugar.

The Wilmses are retiring and the moving to Georgia soon. Indiana Audubon Society, which owns and operates MGBS, is actively searching for their replacements. In the meantime, I am so thankful we had the chance to participate in a hummingbird banding session. Thank you Amy and Carl, and may you find happiness and joy in your retirement. We will miss you.

***The Ruby-throated Hummingbird beats its wings about 53 times a second.***

—Source:

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Ruby-throated\\_Hummingbird/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Ruby-throated_Hummingbird/overview)



Ruby-throated Hummingbirds rapidly double their body weight in fat as they prepare for migration  
Photo by Barry Jerald Jr./Audubon Photography Awards



# Robert Cooper Audubon Society

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## About RCAS

### Membership

Robert Cooper Audubon Society is a chapter of the National Audubon Society serving Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison, and Randolph counties. To join, visit the RCAS website.

### Officers

President:	Mary Annette Rose	765-774-3134
Vice-President:	Rose Jeffery	
Treasurer:	Jim Jeffery	
Recording Secretary:	Bethany Darby	

### Directors

2020-2022	Catherine Kubo	Jim Schowe
2019-2021	Kamal Islam	Kim McKenzie

### Programs and Field Trips

Most RCAS programs and field trips are free and open to the public. Programs are generally scheduled from October through June on the second Wednesday of the month. For updates on the schedule and meeting locations, refer to our website.

### Contact us

Chapter Website: [www.cooperaudubon.org](http://www.cooperaudubon.org)  
Find us on Facebook!  
Email: [admin@cooperaudubon.org](mailto:admin@cooperaudubon.org)

## It's Christmas Bird Count Season

In addition to the Delaware County Christmas Bird (CBC) Count, scheduled for December 19, there are numerous other CBCs scheduled around the state. For one close to home, consider participating in the Southern Adams Northern Jay Ouabache (SANJO) CBC. This count is on January 1 and will start at 8 am at the Limberlost Visitor Center in Geneva, at US 27 and 6th Street. Terri Gorney Lehman, the compiler, says there are good territories available for all, including both walking and driving routes. She is hoping to be able to have a chili lunch with carry in dishes (as in the past) at noon.

You can contact Terri at 260-413-5671 (cell) or [bandtgorney@aol.com](mailto:bandtgorney@aol.com) for more details.

For a listing of other Indiana CBCs, including contact information, go to the Indiana Audubon Society's posting at <https://indianaudubon.org/christmas-bird-counts-in-indiana/>

## About Cooper's Talk

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Cooper's Talk is published four times per year for members of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society. All are invited to submit photos, articles, and events for publication by emailing items to [admin@cooperaudubon.org](mailto:admin@cooperaudubon.org)