



Cooper's Talk

Newsletter of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, serving East Central Indiana

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Indiana Bicentennial Birding Big Year!



Join Indiana Audubon Society, the Indiana DNR, and Robert Cooper Audubon Society as we celebrate birding in Indiana during the course of the state's bicentennial. In 2016, birders are invited to seek out as many species of birds that can be found in Indiana. To play, birders must seek out a minimum of 100 species of birds in Indiana during the contest period. All birders finding 100 species will receive a commemorative IBBBY sticker or decal provided by Indiana Audubon. The real challenge will be for birders to find and log 200 species of birds. In the spirit of the 100th anniversary of the Indiana State Parks and National Park Service, 100 of the 200 species must have been found on an Indiana State Park (or reservoir) or National Park site in Indiana. Many great prizes will be available to encourage you to bird our great state during the bicentennial. Learn more at <http://www.indianaaudubon.org/Activities/IndianaBicentennialBirdingBigYear/tabid/562/Default.aspx>.

Upcoming Programs and Events

Puerto Rican Parrots

Tuesday, January 19, 7:00 p.m.

The Puerto Rican Parrot is one of the most highly endangered bird species in the world, and the only parrot species native to the United States. These gorgeous and garrulous birds have faced numerous threats in the past, including habitat loss, hunting, and the pet trade. There has been a concerted effort to save them in the past several decades, but they remain critically endangered. After having served as a high school science teacher for many years, Dr. Tom McConnell is now a science teacher educator at Ball State University. He will speak about the charming Puerto Rican Parrot and the ongoing efforts to conserve them.



Ball State University American Fisheries Society

Wednesday, February 10, 7:00 p.m.

Many of us are familiar with invasive plant and animal species in our woods and prairies, but introduced species are a huge problem in our waterways as well. This month's speakers are members of the American Fisheries

Society student chapter at Ball State University. They will discuss invasive fish species and their impacts on aquatic ecosystems here in Indiana. AFS is a career-preparatory organization where members have the opportunity to meet and network with professors, fellow students, and professionals in the field of aquatic biology and fisheries through hands-on workshops, community service projects, and conferences. They organize White River Cleanups in order to preserve the health of the local White River, and are currently working on starting a project with the John Craddock Wetland and Nature Preserve in Muncie.

Save the Date for Two Overnight Spring Trips!

April 23 and 24

Trip to Big Oaks National Preserve. We will bird at the preserve on Saturday, then head to Clifty Falls State Park to spend the night. We will hike and bird at Clifty Falls SP in the morning before heading home.

May 7 and 8

Indiana Dunes Birding Festival
This is the second annual festival sponsored by Indiana Audubon.

Keep an eye out for more information on these great events!

The Peabody Memphis Ducks

By John L. McKillip

Since 1933, the Peabody Memphis (TN) Hotel has played special host to an unusual tradition - a duck march - at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. each day. The Peabody Ducks are five North American mallards - one drake (male) with white collar and green head and four hens (females) with less colorful plumage. Since 1940, the official Peabody Duckmaster is responsible for escorting the ducks from their lavish rooftop duck palace to the red carpet in the lobby, where their parade ends at the grand fountain, with guests and eager bystanders busily photographing the strange tradition.

Current Duckmaster Anthony Petrina, a Memphis native, is only the fifth Duckmaster in the hotel's history. Original Duckmaster Edward Pembroke held the position for 50 years, retiring in 1991. The ducks are meticulously raised by a local Memphis area farmer. Each group of Peabody Ducks lives at the hotel for only three months before retiring from their duty and returning to the farm. This unusual tradition began when several ducks appeared one morning in 1933 in the hotel fountain by inebriated pranksters. Once publicized in the Memphis Commercial Appeal, the circus trainer-turned Duckmaster #1, took over and created this long-standing tradition.



2015 Conservation Award Winners

Our annual conservation awards banquet, held on November 16, was a wonderful evening, with approximately 65 members, guests, and friends of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society on hand. This year's festivities included a silent auction, with products and gift certificates donated by RCAS members and friends.

The inspiring highlight of the evening was hearing each of the five award winners tell a bit about the work that they - or the organizations they represent - had done to win their respective awards.

(For full details and photos of the evening, visit www.cooperaudubon.org.)

The Robert H. and Esther L. (Munro) Cooper Conservation Award was given to the **Amos W. Butler Audubon Society**, in recognition of its outstanding and conservation and stewardship of birds and habitats in Indiana and in Central and South America, as well as its excellent educational bird programs for the public in central Indiana.

Much of the chapter's work is made possible through its annual Birdathon fundraiser, which, to date, has raised more than \$500,000. These funds have been used to support a wide variety of conservation projects, such as Cerulean Warbler research in southern Indiana; purchase of more than 2,000 acres in Central and South America to protect wintering grounds of migratory birds; establishment of Important Bird Areas in Indiana; the Lights Out Indy program, aimed at reducing bird mortalities; and habitat conservation and restoration projects in Indiana.

The chapter's extensive education programming reaches more than 1,300 children, youth, and adults each year through engaging and educational bird programs.

Dr. **Tom Sproat**, a wildlife biologist from Northern Kentucky University, was awarded the Clyde W. Hibbs Conservation Education Award.

Tom has been teaching for several decades, with an emphasis on educating the public about wildlife, conservation, animal behavior, and preservation of natural habitat.

One of his greatest accomplishments has been creation of Biology Integration and Outreach in Science Education (BIOSE). This not-for-profit organization is dedicated to providing science education opportunities for K-12 schools and science and education research opportunities for teachers and students.

Through BIOSE Tom has reached thousands of children, adults, students, and teachers as far north as Muncie and as far east as Pittsburgh, often taking birds of prey, snakes, and other wild animals to schools, civic organizations, and parks through his Critters in the Classroom program. He has even taken high school students to perform environmental research in Colorado and in Costa Rica.



L-R: Tom Williams (accepting for Helen Steussy), Matthias Benko, Linda Hanson and Bea Sousa (League of Women Voters), Rob Ripma (Amos Butler Audubon Society), and Tom Sproat

2015 Conservation Award Winners

The Phyllis Yuhás Wildlife Habitat Preservation Award was presented to Dr. **Helen Steussy**, of New Castle. Helen's labor of love in restoring 33 acres began in 1994, when she and her husband Tom Williams purchased 12 acres, gradually purchasing more adjacent plots of land.

Helen's restoration work has included planting many of hundreds of tree seedlings and 15 acres of prairie. "Our prairies are now full of a plethora of native species," Helen said, "and the wildlife is spectacular. Birds of every shape and size from the soaring hawks to the smallest hummingbirds. Butterflies flutter over the prairie like drifting flowers. And when you pause in the depth of the prairie in August your chest fairly thrums with the hums of the hundreds of bees of more species than I ever dreamed imaginable."

Just over a decade ago, Helen and Tom signed their property into a conservation agreement with Red-tail Land Conservancy, of which Helen was a founding member.

The **Muncie/Delaware County League of Women Voters (LWV)** was awarded the Richard Greene Public Service Award for its leadership and community activism in the campaign against the proposed Mounds Lake Reservoir project.

When the reservoir was first proposed, LWV members researched the issue and undertook a campaign to educate the public on its likely impacts: water contamination, destruction of unique and sensitive habitats, threats to species of conservation concern and an archaeologically and culturally significant area, displacement of residents from their homes, and other environmental and economic concerns.

They spoke to community groups, rallied high attendance and voiced strong opposition at town council meetings, encouraged citizens to write to their local governmental representatives, and kept the public informed via their website, emails, and letters to the editor of area newspapers.

Its members successfully harnessed the power of citizens to impact what has arguably been the most important environmental issue in East Central Indiana in 2014 and 2015.

The Charles Wise Youth Conservation Award was presented to 14-year-old **Matthias Benko**, Indianapolis, for his passion, advocacy, and hard work for birds.

As a Youth Advisor of the **Indiana Young Birders Club (IYBC)**, Matthias helps plan field trips, the event year, and annual conference for the IYBC, as well as hosting at least two events each year and writing periodic blog posts - all to promote the IYBC and the well-being of birds.

Matthias is also Youth Editor of the IYBC's quarterly newsletter, and in 2015 he was given the club's Youth Conservation Awareness Award.

He has given many presentations on the protection of birds and habitat at events around the state, and he was even invited to serve as a keynote speaker at the Biggest Week in American Birding festival in Ohio. Matthias is also active in Scouts, and for his Eagle Scout project he built and erected dozens of new bird houses at the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary.





Robert Cooper
Audubon Society

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Dates for Your Calendar

Jan. 19: Puerto Rican Parrots – Dr. McConnell
Jan. 31: Mounds SP Bird Hike
Feb. 10: BSU American Fisheries Society
Apr. 23-24: Big Oaks NWR and Clifty Falls SP
May 7-8: Indiana Dunes Birding Festival

Chapter Website: www.cooperaudubon.org
Find us on Facebook!
Email: cooperaudubon@gmail.com

Program meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month (except July, August, & September) at
Muncie Public Library, Kennedy Branch
 1700 W. McGalliard Rd., Muncie, IN
 7:00 pm: chapter business & refreshments
 7:15 pm: scheduled program

Cooper's Talk is published 5 times a year by the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society serving Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison, and Randolph Counties.

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