



Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

Thirty-three Years of Birding for Bucks

By Donna McCarty



The Close Encounters
Birdathon Team
Photo provided by the
author

Benefiting birds while having a ball raising money has been the goal of the Amos Butler Audubon Society (ABAS) since conducting its first Birdathon in 1987. The ABAS Birdathon has engendered more volunteer participation than any other chapter activity. Over 40 individuals take part in a "Big Day" event, scouring the state for a 24-hour period in a quest to count as many species as possible. You will be astounded by the record species count!

Teams ask donors to sponsor their efforts, and those not on a team solicit funds from friends, coworkers, and relatives. Some also serve on planning and grant recommendation committees.

Birdathon chair Donna McCarty will talk about the chapter's modest beginning with just one team expanding to a dozen teams by 2010 and the surprising fundraising success during the pandemic. The program will highlight the diversity of grants funded, partnerships developed,

creative fundraising, and the unexpected species found on the team's "Big Day" events.

Donna McCarty has won numerous service awards, including the Robert and Esther Cooper Conservation Award in 1993. She has been ABAS Birdathon chair since 1987 and is a previous ABAS president, program chair, and conservation chair. She volunteers at the Eagle Creek Park Ornithology Center, where her duties include doing presentations with the Center's Peregrine Falcon.

This program will take place via Zoom, on March 10, starting at 7 pm. Check our website for login details prior to the event.



Donna McCarty and Freija
Photo by Jenna McElroy

We're Birds of a Feather!

A membership in National Audubon Society automatically includes a membership in a local chapter. If you live in East Central Indiana—counties of Blackford, Delaware, Grant, Henry, Jay, Madison, or Randolph—you are a member of Robert Cooper Audubon Society (RCAS). As a local chapter, we work to protect and enhance the quality of our natural environment; educate our members and others about the natural world and the special relationship that humans have with it; and provide educational programs, field trip activities, and other programs of interest.

**We welcome
your
participation!**

If there is room in your life for more fellowship and more fun, while furthering our shared environmental goals, please consider joining us. Our programs and activities are open to ALL. However, your support of \$20 annually (or \$30 for a mailed copy of the quarterly newsletter) greatly benefits our local education and stewardship activities. Your support could be remitted via PayPal at cooperaudubon.org or by mail to P.O. Box 1635, Muncie, IN 47308-1635.

Attend a Monthly Program

We meet every month, October through June, for a program about nature, natural

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Field Trips

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

*In spring a birder's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of —
MIGRANTS!*

For in-person events, please follow current guidelines on face masks and social distancing. Please monitor www.cooperaudubon.org for cancellations and updates.

March 27, April 24, and May 29, 9 am to 11 am: 4306 Mounds Road, Anderson, IN
Mounds State Park

We plan to start our monthly walks again at Mounds, beginning with the walk on March 27. Meet in the viewing area of the Visitor's Center at 9 am.

Saturday, April 10, 8 am to 10 am: East 650 South Road, Muncie, IN
Red-Tail Nature Preserve

We will gather at 8 am at the preserve parking lot.

Saturday, April 17, 8 am: N River Rd and N Quarry Rd, Marion, IN
Matter Park, Marion

Meet at the first parking lot on the left off Matter Park Circle. We will start by birding the botanical gardens next to the parking lot and then make our way to the trail that runs along the river. Pack a lunch and explore this lovely municipal park and its springtime inhabitants!

Saturday, May 1, 9 am to 2 pm: 7324 Yohne Rd, Fort Wayne, IN
Fox Island County Park, Fort Wayne

We will meet at 9 am at the Nature Center parking lot. Pack a lunch!

Saturday, May 8, 8 am to 10 am: 801 E. 10th Street, Anderson, IN
Edgewater Park, Anderson

We'll look for spring warblers and other migrants in Anderson! Meet at the parking lot (on Rayl Street) at 8 am and walk along the paved river trail. Afterwards we may drive a short distance to check out Killbuck Wetlands or Shadyside Park.

Saturday, May 15, time TBA: 4407 West Kilgore Avenue, Muncie, IN
Service Trip at Dutro-Ernst Woods

Take action by joining us and the Red-Tail Conservancy for a Weed Wrangle at Dutro-Ernst Woods, an urban oasis in Muncie. We will remove invasive plant species, like garlic mustard and Asian bush honeysuckle, and pick up some trash. Dress for outdoor work and bring gloves, drinking water, and (optionally) loppers. Check the website for updates, including start time.

Programs and Events

March 10, 7 pm: Via Zoom

Program: Thirty-three Years of Birding for Bucks

Join us for a program about Amos Butler Audubon Society's Birdathon. Our speaker will be Donna McCarty, past president of ABAS and chair of the Birdathon since 1987.

April 14, 7 pm: Via Zoom

Program: The Sustainable Economy

Author Bob Devine will talk about his recently published book and explore the idea that almost all environmental problems are at heart economic problems.

May 12, 7 pm: Via Zoom

Program: Threats to Coastal Wetlands and Wading Bird Populations

Past RCAS Program Chair and current Texas A&M University doctoral student Alexander Sharp will speak to us about his ongoing research.

June 9, 7 pm: Via Zoom

Program: Quail Conservation in Indiana

Presentation by Ryan Owen, Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever Senior Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist, Northeast Indiana.

www.cooperaudubon.org

Swift Tower Is Finally Up!

By Willy DeSmet, photos by Randy Lehman

Nine years in the making, the swift tower debuts this season.

Before humans put their mark on our natural landscape, Chimney Swifts roosted and nested mostly in hollow trees. When vast woodlands were converted to agriculture, the swifts adapted and started using chimneys and similar man made structures. For a time, it was a boon to the swifts. But as more and more of us cap our chimneys and remove hollow trees, Chimney Swifts are increasingly displaced.

In 2011 RCAS learned that the chimneys at 20th Century Flats (a historical apartment building in downtown Muncie) had been permanently capped during a restoration. These chimneys had been a favorite roosting spot for Chimney Swifts for many years. RCAS contacted the newspaper, which published an article on the swifts and their roosting plight, and also opened discussions with Bill Morgan, Muncie's Historic Preservation Officer. The chapter then organized a public presentation by Shirley Needham, a long-time wildlife rehabilitator who specializes in Chimney Swifts. This was followed by a field trip to watch migrating swifts return to a roost.

When Sarah and Jon later learned about plans for Muncie Central High School to cap their chimneys under the mistaken belief that swifts are a health hazard, they reached out to the school board and the county Board of Health to educate them about the birds' habits and habitat needs.

Engagement didn't stop there. The chapter applied for a grant from the National Audubon Society to build and erect two swift towers. The planned sites were at McCulloch and Heekin parks, as suggested by Bill Morgan.

The funds awarded in the grant were not sufficient for two towers, so in 2013 the project was reduced to a single tower. The site was changed to Muncie Central High School, as this was

considered a great opportunity to engage and educate students and staff. However, after receiving the grant and buying the building materials, the project languished.

Then in 2015 the swift tower became a joint project between Robert Cooper Audubon Society and the Friends of the Limberlost, and the location was moved again, to Geneva, in Adams County. In 2014 Alex Forsythe (a volunteer with Friends of the Limberlost) created a Chimney Swift program for the Limberlost historic site in Geneva. The program was a hit, and Curt Burnette, naturalist with the Limberlost Historic Site, has been giving this program every year since. For years a population of Chimney

Swifts has roosted in chimneys in downtown Geneva, and watching the swifts come into their roost has been a part of the program. So the Friends were naturally interested in helping with the project.

After a false start and problems coordinating material delivery and labor, the project again fell into a snooze. But not for long. Talks and discussions restarted. The Friends decided not to install the swift tower as a free standing structure, like most of them are, but rather to attach it to an existing barn. Then we hit another snag. The roof of the barn had been in need of repairs for a while; better to wait to install the chimney until after the repairs were done. The roof repairs were expedited and, once the roof was repaired, the project gathered steam again. Curt volunteered to construct the tower. He lives close by and worked on it in his free time. Perseverance paid off and, as of the end of 2020, the tower is up!

The Friends had an interpretive sign for the swift tower made in 2018 as part of a larger grant. We are hopeful that the swifts will check out this new "housing unit" when they return to the area next year. And we hope that you pay it a visit as well!



Alex Forsythe and Curt Burnette at the swift tower

The tower from the inside up



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My Thoughts...Phil

By Jim Schowe

Several years ago at a monthly meeting of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society, we learned from researchers at Purdue University that oak trees in wooded areas were not reproducing as fast as they were dying. It seems strange that one of our native trees would not be a mainstay in our canopy. Maples, hickories, elms, and even hornbeams are taking over the forests. The researchers' study found that young oak saplings need much more sunlight to start their growth to the treetops. Maples and hickories can grow faster with less sunlight, out-competing the genus *Quercus* (oak) for canopy domination. It takes an open area of more than 1,000 square feet

"Chinkapin oak acorns are the preferred food for wild turkeys, grouse, white-tailed deer, black bears, chipmunks, squirrels and hogs."

From the Arbor Day Foundation Tree Guide

to admit enough sunlight for an oak tree to begin its growth, and even then it still has to compete with a large array of obstacles to reach maturity: insects, disease, storms, and fire, to name a few.

Enter Phil Tuttle, a quiet, unassuming man who regularly attended our monthly RCAS meetings and whom many might remember as the guy in the wheelchair. Phil was a close observer of his yard and its surrounding property. Occasionally he would tell us what special or unique bird he saw at his feeders, which he always kept full of a variety of seeds and suet.

The closest oak tree to Phil's property was almost 200 yards away, a grand chinquapin, perhaps 150 years old, with a trunk about 30" in diameter. Despite the distance, an enterprising squirrel buried an acorn near Phil's feeders one year. And the following spring, as the acorn took sprout and pushed its tiny leaves a few inches above the ground, Phil was there to observe.

Now, back to the RCAS meeting on the plight of the oaks: After the Purdue researchers' presentation, I volunteered that I would be planting some oaks on former cropland I owned. Phil offered his lone seedling to augment the black oaks, scarlet oaks, and red oaks I was planting. The seedling still had its acorn attached and, to be honest, I doubted whether the transplant would work: Deer love to eat tender young oaks and there are many deer close by. But with a hardware cloth cage, the young oak I fondly named 'Phil' thrived. It is now three and a half years old and stands a mighty 14" tall. Too small not to protect from the deer but large

enough to need a new cage. The nearest cropland is now in alfalfa, which the deer seem to prefer to oak trees, giving 'Phil' a better chance.

Phil, the person, told me that he loved pawpaws, and each year I would pick some for him and leave them in his mailbox. This year, however, there was a note on the mailbox from the postal service stating not to make deliveries as the house is vacant. I wondered what happened. I wanted to give Phil an update about his namesake tree and to offer help.



Chinquapin Oak, photo by the author. Acorn image from <https://nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/field-guide/chinkapin-oak-chinquapin-oak>



Another year has passed since I wrote this story. Phil, the tree, is 10" taller and soon will outgrow its new cage. I never learned the whereabouts of Phil, the human; but I have some pawpaw puree in the freezer to make him some bread if I ever find him.

Who was Esther Munro Cooper?

By Terri Gorney

Esther Launa Munro was born February 2, 1900, in Piper City, Illinois. She was the first of six children born to Asa and Edith (Dillon) Munro. Asa and Edith moved their young family to Crane Township in Paulding County, Ohio, and then again to rural Geneva, Indiana, when Esther was sixteen.

They traveled to Geneva in a Jeffery seven-passenger touring car. A railroad box car brought the family's household goods and livestock, including two horses, a cat and dog, and a few farm implements. Asa, a farmer by profession, purchased the land known as "the old Porter farm." This was the 231-acre farm of Charles and Gene Stratton-Porter. The farm included oil wells, as well as cattle, cropland, and woods. By the 1920s, the oil industry was fading in this area. Asa planted sugar beets, a good cash crop at the time.

Esther enrolled at Geneva High School and graduated in 1919. In 1923 she earned a bachelor's degree from Indiana University, where she belonged to the Cosmopolitan Club.

After graduation, she taught primary grades in the Hartford Township Schools, just outside of Geneva. It is possible that she taught at Hartford School No. 6 ("A Girl of the Limberlost" school), located on her parent's farm. Esther, with her sister-in-law Agnes Biery Fravel Munro,

eventually donated the 25-acre woods and the Hartford No. 6 school house ruins to the ACRES Land Trust in 1994.

After teaching for several years, Esther continued her own education and earned a master's degree from Ball State University in 1929. It was here that she met fellow student Robert Holiday Cooper in biology class. They married in December 1930. By this time, she had already been elected to the Indiana Academy of Science, one of the oldest scientific professional membership organizations in the United States.

Esther taught after their marriage and supported Robert while he earned his doctorate. After five years away from Muncie, they returned in 1935 when Robert accepted a position in the biology department of Ball State University. He taught at BSU until he retired in 1968.

In 1969, Esther and Robert donated 30 acres off Bethel Road in Muncie to BSU, to be managed by the Department of Biology. It was part of the 123-acre farm they purchased in 1951. This land is known as the Esther and Robert Cooper Memorial Woodland Area.

The Coopers lived long lives and were active in the Muncie community. Robert died in 1990 and Esther died in 1997 about five weeks shy of her 98th birthday. They are buried together in Knightstown, Indiana.



Esther Munro, from the Arbutus Yearbook, 1923
Photo source: Flickr

We're Birds of a Feather!...continued from page 1

history, or conservation. Monthly meetings are usually held at the Muncie Public Library's Kennedy Branch, in Muncie, Indiana, although this past few months we have been meeting virtually on Zoom. We look forward to resuming in-person meetings as soon as it is safe.

Go on a Field Trip

Field trips can be anything from a walk in a local park to a half- or full-day outing further afield. If you are one of the many folks who have had more opportunity to watch your yard birds this year and would like to learn more, field trips are a great way to become a better birder. Birders love sharing tips on what to look

and listen for. And several pairs of eyes mean more spots.

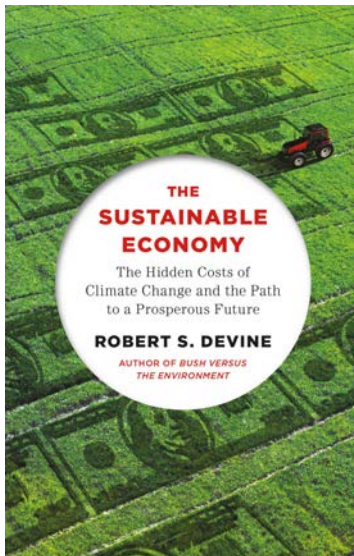
Take a Leadership Role

RCAS is a purely volunteer organization, and we can always use extra hands. We currently have positions open for Program Chair (schedules speakers and plans monthly meetings) and Education Chair (plans educational and outreach events). There are also frequent opportunities to join the board. And we welcome help on individual projects and issues, for example in crafting draft position papers or organizing and leading field trips or service events such as Weed Wrangles.

Upcoming Talk: Bob Devine on the Sustainable Economy, April 14

On April 14, at 7 pm EST, author Bob Devine will give a talk via Zoom about his book, *The Sustainable Economy: The Hidden Costs of Climate Change and the Path to a Prosperous Future* (published in October, 2020, by Penguin Random House). He will explore the idea that almost all environmental problems are at heart economic problems. Rather than focusing on the destructive business behaviors of some corporations and individuals, Bob will probe flaws in the DNA of supply and demand that render the market incapable of handling many critical issues, such as climate change.

He'll reveal how the costs of global warming, many of which are overlooked, add up to an urgent rebuttal to those who assert that society can't afford to tackle climate change; in truth, we can't afford not to. As part of the solution to these structural defects, Bob recommends a shift to what he calls sustainability economics. He'll note some of the actions we can take as



individuals and, especially, as citizens working together to help make the transition to a sustainable, just, and prosperous economy.

Bob would like to spend at least half of the presentation having a discussion with attendees, so he hopes that you'll have plenty of questions and comments about subjects like the value of ecosystem services, how to price the risks of a chaotic climate, ways to promote equity in climate economics, and a concept of freedom that reaches beyond simple free-market dogma. And don't forget to ask about orbiting giant mirrors!

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