



Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

A Link to the Past: The Civilian Conservation Corps

June 18 RCAS Program

Our June meeting will feature Liz Marthaler from Mounds State Park, who will talk about the Civilian Conservation Corps and its impact on our parks. Please join us!

Liz Marthaler, assistant property manager at Mounds State Park, will join us to discuss the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the impact this program had on national, state, and local park systems within the United States, including the impact on the Indiana State Park system. She will also discuss issues these CCC-built parks are facing and one possible solution to those issues.

Liz Marthaler grew up in south-central Indiana, frequenting state parks and state forests as a child. She earned her bachelor of science degree in natural resources and environmental management from Ball State University in 2011 and spent a decade working in



conservation-related fields for organizations such as Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies, AmeriCorps, and Brown County State Park. In May of 2024 she received her master of landscape

architecture degree from Ball State University with a focus on public lands. Currently, she is the assistant property manager at Mounds State Park in Anderson, Indiana.

The program will start at 7 pm at the Ball State University Nature

Lab at 2500 West University Avenue on the BSU campus. Parking is available in front of the greenhouse and is free after 5 pm. The building is handicap accessible.

Election of Officers at the June RCAS Meeting

Also on the agenda for the June 18 RCAS meeting is the election of chapter officers and directors for terms beginning July 1. The slate of candidates proposed by the nominating committee follows, but nominations will also be accepted from the floor. If you are interested in taking a role on the RCAS leadership team or just volunteering with us, please contact Rose Jeffery at admin@cooperaudubon.org. There are numerous ways to serve. See page 5 for a

For two-year terms, ending on June 30, 2027

Director.....Brian Wolfe *

Director.....Julie Bruner*

For one-year terms, ending on June 30, 2026

Treasurer.....Jim Flowers*

Recording Secretary...Elizabeth Ploog*

*Indicates incumbent

summary of what our dedicated volunteers achieved in 2024-2025 and for opportunities to help.

Field Trips

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



Mounds walks are fun for all!
Adrienne and Jed Davis
joined our February walk
Photo by Rose Jeffery

June 14, July 12, and August 9, 9 am to 11 am: 4306 Mounds Rd., Anderson, IN

Mounds State Park

Join us for a Second Saturday walk at Mounds State Park. The excitement of migration wanes as our local breeders settle down to the business of raising families. By midsummer, the air will be full of the sounds of begging baby birds.

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

May 24 and 25

Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge and Clifty Falls State Park

It's not too late to plan on attending this overnight trip, which will take us to two gems of southeast Indiana: Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge and Clifty Falls State Park. Visit cooperaudubon.org for full details.

If you're interested in participating in this trip, please contact Barb Stedman, RCAS field trip chair, no later than May 15, at bastedman@gmail.com. You'll receive complete details about our rendezvous time and location as soon as they're determined by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service officer who will be leading our walk at Big Oaks.

Late July or August – date and time to be determined

Helen Steussy's prairie

Helen Steussy, recipient of our 2022 Cooper Conservation Award and our 2015 Yugas Wildlife Habitat Preservation Award, will lead us on a tour of her 20-acre prairie. Because the peak bloom time will depend on heat and precipitation, we'll visit Helen's New Castle property in either late July or sometime in August.

Watch our website (cooperaudubon.org) and Facebook page in July for details.

Programs and Events

June 18, 7 pm to 9 pm: BSU Nature Lab, 2500 W. University Ave., Muncie, IN

A Link to the Past: The Civilian Conservation Corps

For our final program of the 2024-2025 year, Liz Marthaler, assistant property manager at Mounds State Park, will present a program on the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Attend in person or join the webcast by Zoom at:
<https://bsu.zoom.us/j/88WxlPqTheUAbJatJPFRg>

September 6: Sunset Shelter, Summit Lake State Park, 5993 N. Messick Rd, New Castle, IN

Save the date for the annual RCAS Picnic

This year, we will hold our annual picnic at **Summit Lake State Park**, followed by an afternoon birdwalk. Mark your calendars and watch for details in the fall newsletter.

Notice of Proposed Change to the RCAS Bylaws

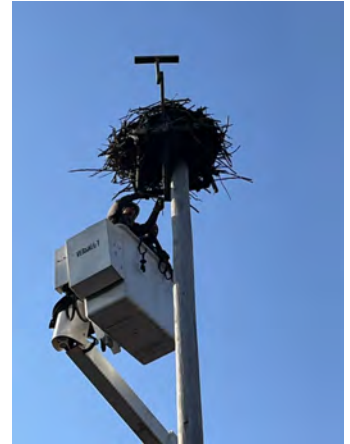
In addition to election of officers, the business portion of the June 18 RCAS meeting will include a vote on whether to make changes to the RCAS bylaws. There are two small changes being proposed. One is to increase the term of the treasurer from one year to two years. This would provide the ramp-up time for installing a new treasurer to be leveraged over a longer term. The second change is to consolidate the two communications committees specified in the current bylaws (a separate committee is required for the newsletter) into a single committee. The current version of the bylaws can be accessed [here](#), and a mark-up with the changes is [here](#).

Youth Birding Field Trip—Saturday, June 7, 9 am to 11 am

Robert Cooper Audubon Society is teaming up with Red-tail Land Conservancy to offer a youth birding trip at the Red-tail Nature Preserve. This event is open to all ages, but materials will target ages 8 to 15. Children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Participants will:

- Get a close look at an osprey platform, and probably an osprey, using a spotting telescope
- Learn to use binoculars (loaner binoculars will be available)
- Learn to identify some of our native Indiana birds
- Learn about the relationship among native plants, insects, and the birds they support
- Learn about plants and birds of the prairie versus those of the woods and the lake

The program is free to attend, but registration is required. See cooperaudubon.org/field-trips/ for more information.



The osprey platform at Red-tail Nature Preserve being repaired this spring
Photo from [Red-tail News](#)

An Update from the Schowe Homestead—Maple Syrup

By Jim Schowe

Our winter weather is starting to cooperate. Night time temperatures are below freezing and daytime temps above; just the right time to wander in the woods with brace and bit, buckets and spikes. The time is right to collect maple sap and start the syrup making process.

New England is famous for maple syrup, but did you know that we have those same trees in abundance here in Indiana? There are a few commercial syrup producers, mostly Amish concerns, in this area who collect sap by the hundreds of gallons. Then there are hobbyists like myself who produce less than a gallon of syrup each year. I have only been a syrup sapper for three years. I never imagined that it would be so easy, though it is time consuming. Expensive too! Yes, the sap is free but the propane to boil the sap into syrup is costly. And time consuming, because the ratio of sap to syrup is forty to one. For each quart of syrup you must collect ten gallons of sap, then tote the full buckets to your heat source and keep your eyes on the boiling process.

I have just completed my first boiling session of the season. From a full five gallon bucket of sap I have almost a pint of syrup. I do most of the boiling in my outside, open-air kitchen. When the boil-down is almost finished I bring the hot liquid into my inside kitchen to finish. Sap goes from a water mixture to syrup after sufficient water in the sap has evaporated and the liquid reaches a temperature of

219.5 degrees Fahrenheit. I have to keep a very close eye on the progress, and as soon as the vaporous bubbles of the boiling sap give way to a thick brown mass, it is time to take the mixture off the heat, strain it, and save it in a jar.

It is now about two weeks since I wrote the last paragraph. I should have reread the previous words because while heating up today's syrup it boiled over onto our glass top range. It is funny how a person's reactions aren't as fast as the fumes rising from the heat. The plume of smoke that filled the house gave the outdoor air the look of California smog as we opened the windows and doors, hoping the brisk southeast wind would help clear the kitchen. Afterward, being a responsible sapper, I cleaned (well, mostly cleaned) the range top, and it only took me forty minutes. There is still burnt-on sap that will just have to wear off with time. I gotta remember to not let the sap boil over again. Want to bet that I forget!

The weather has been kind of iffy when it comes to sap collecting. One day is cold and the sap is slow to run, next day it is warm and my smaller buckets overflow before I can do my collections. Perhaps that is why it is so rewarding; you not only have to physically do the work, but you must use your best judgment to get good results. Oh yeah, there are also the rewards of having a tasty, natural product on your French toast in the morning.

For each quart of syrup you must collect ten gallons of sap...

There's a Word for That: Leucism

By Catherine Kubo

Feather color and pattern is a key way to identify birds for most of us. We look for the black face mask, the black wings setting off white wing bars, the yellow undersides, the red crest, and so forth. But occasionally we come across birds that don't quite look right. They may be paler than normal overall, or have patches of white feathers where we expect brown or black, or any

number of other differences. It can sometimes take a second look to identify the species, a look that focuses more on size, shape, habitat, and movement. But what's behind this occasional feather color variation?

There are a number of conditions that can lead to these puzzlers. One is complete, or pure, albinism in which a bird lacks the gene to create the melanin that forms its black and brown pigments.

These birds

may not be completely white, as the ability to form other colors such as yellow and red may be unaffected. But they will lack dark pigments in their feathers, legs, and bills, and their eyes will be colored only by the blood vessels behind their retinas, leading to a characteristically pink look. Without the protective effects of melanin, such birds have poor sight and often do not live to maturity, so we don't see them much.

More commonly, the oddly colored adult birds we encounter are leucistic. **Leucism** refers to a condition where pigment is abnormally deposited in some or all of a bird's feathers. Leucistic birds can show patches of white, commonly in the head and shoulders, and are often referred to as pied or piebald. Or the entire bird can be paler or browner or grayer than normal. Feathers without melanin are weaker than normal and wear out more quickly, but the condition is less debilitating than pure albinism.

There are other conditions that can lead to oddly colored birds, including xanthochroism (yellow or orange feathers instead of red) and melanism (darker coloration overall). A bird suffering loss of feathers in an injury may grow in white feathers to last until the next molt, when they will be replaced by normally colored feathers. This often shows up in tail feathers.

There is some debate about the best terminology to describe divergent coloring in birds. David Sibley has an informative [post](#) on his website and there is a good [summary](#) at

Cornell's FeederWatch site. Whatever terms you use, it is always fun to encounter these atypical individuals and ask "What the heck is that?"

See page 6 for the answer to the photo quiz.



A leucistic American Robin, spotted by RCAS members Barb Stedman and Martha Hunt, at the Missouri Botanical Garden
Photo by Martha Hunt



Can you guess the species?
Photo by Barbara Baird/
Audubon Photography Awards

Indiana University Student Awarded This Year's Fox Graduate Student Grant

Sara Isgate awarded the 2025 Fox Student Grant.

RCAS is pleased to announce the award of this year's Fox Graduate Student Grant to **Sara Beth Isgate**. Sara is working towards her PhD in the evolution, ecology, and behavior program at the Indiana University department of biology. She has developed original behavioral assays to measure cognition in free-living birds and quantify how birds adapt to obstacles in

their environment. She will use these to understand how global warming and heatwaves influence cognitive performance in Tree Swallows.

We wish Sara well in her research and look forward to hearing about her results. And we are grateful for the generous donations of Josie and Geoff Fox that make this grant possible.

RCAS in 2024-2025 and Committee Chairs for 2025-2026

This past year, Robert Cooper Audubon Society has planned and implemented a variety of events for members and citizens of East Central Indiana. The board of directors and chairs of standing committees dedicated countless hours toward our mission to enjoy, learn, educate, and protect our natural environment and wildlife.

In addition to the elected positions to be filled in June, RCAS has a number of appointed positions, some of which will be changing in July. We are fortunate this year in that most of our committee chairs will continue serving. Returning chairs are

Abby Shaw, education chair;

Kamal Islam, program chair;

Barb Stedman, field trip chair;

Jeff Ray & Jim Schowe, conservation co-chairs;

Brian Wolfe, advocacy chair; and

Doris Cheney, assisted by **John Cheney**, hospitality chair.

The communications committees will continue to be staffed by

Barb Stedman, website manager;

Julie Bruner, Facebook;

Jim Jeffery, mailing list; and **Catherine Kubo**, newsletter editor.

This year's change is on the membership committee: We are pleased to welcome **Martha Hunt** as the new membership chair. In this role she replaces **Sandy Ho**, who will be departing for the East Coast to assume a new role as grandmother. We wish Sandy well and thank her very much for her many years of service. We will miss her and her husband Tai Ping on our walks. Her quiet manner belied her sharp eyes, and she was often the one to discover elusive skulkers for us.

RCAS Accomplishments in 2024-2025	
Conservation Projects	Work days (2 days, 15 participants, 40 hours) Dutro-Ernst Stewardship (> monthly) Osprey platform repair Bluebird house installation and monitoring
Programs and Picnic	9 programs (125 participants)
Fox Student Grant	1 recipient, for \$535
Conservation Awards	Cooper Conservation Award: Bill Buskirk Education Award: Erica Oliver Habitat Preservation Award: Hamilton County Department of Parks and Recreation Public Service Award: SICIM/DEPP Youth Conservation Award: Mary Amanda Wells
Education	4 events (182 participants)
Field Trips	15 events (154 participants)
Christmas Bird Count	Delaware County CBC (17 participants, 47 species)
Cooper's Talk Newsletter	4 editions reaching over 350 households
Outreach to other civic groups	5 events
Advocacy	3 events and actions

Volunteer with Us in 2025-2026!

As Audubon chapters go, RCAS is not an especially large one. But given our size, we manage to do a fairly impressive number of things each year. And we have a lot of fun doing them. However, as so often happens, our eyes are bigger than our stomachs! Many more projects tempt us than we have the people-power to take on. And we know there are good ideas out there that we haven't thought up yet.

This translates to plenty of opportunities for the general membership to help. In addition to coming out for Field Trips and Programs, you can volunteer on a work day, help staff a table at one of our outreach

programs, monitor a nest box, or share your ideas for other activities! So, whether you want to be outdoors or indoors, active or sedentary, whether you have a couple hours or more, whether you know a lot about birds or very little, there is a spot for you. Come and share in the rewards of furthering our mission to protect, conserve, and educate others about the natural spaces where wildlife thrives. And share in the fun!

Talk to us at one of our events about opportunities, or email us at admin@cooperaudubon.org.

*Share in the fun while
doing good—
volunteer with us
today!*



P.O. Box 1635
Muncie, IN 47308-1635
cooperaudubon.org
cooperaudubon@gmail.com

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:	Rose Jeffery
Vice-President:	Catherine Kubo
Treasurer:	Jim Flowers

Directors

2023-2025	Brian Wolfe	Julie Bruner
2024-2026	Jim Schowe	Kristy Tuttle

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 third Wednesday of the month. For updates and reminders on the schedule and meeting locations, refer to our website or join our distribution list by sending a request to admin@cooperaudubon.org.

Contact us

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

Mailing Cost Increase

Printing and mailing costs have increased. Members who prefer to receive a hard copy of Cooper's Talk in the mail have been paying an extra \$10 per year in addition to their membership dues. We are raising that to \$15 dollars per year to cover the extra costs. This change is reflected on our website and in the form included in our newly updated club brochure. It takes effect the next time you pay your dues. There is no extra charge for members who receive Cooper's Talk via email. If you would like to do so, you may sign up for our email distribution list by sending a request to admin@cooperaudubon.org

Answer to the Photo Quiz

Did you spot the **Gray Catbird** on page 4?

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