



Cooper's Talk

Robert Cooper Audubon Society

The White River Freshwater Mussel Propagation Facility: A Novel Approach in the Bureau of Water Quality's Ongoing Efforts to Improve Water Quality

March 18 RCAS Program

This presentation will begin with a brief summary of the Bureau of Water Quality's (BWQ's) multifaceted and unique history in water quality assessment, protection, and improvement within Muncie, Indiana, since 1972. Discussion will then focus on the BWQ's newest water quality improvement efforts—freshwater mussel propagation and restoration. Topics will include the fascinating life history of our native freshwater mussels, historical impacts on their once thriving communities, the essential roles they play in our local waterways, and all that goes into our efforts to restore local native populations.

Laura Bowley received her bachelor's degree in aquatic biology and fisheries



Ms. Laura Bowley from the Muncie Bureau of Water Quality

management at Ball State University in 1996. She started at the Bureau of Water Quality as an intern in 1995 and has held multiple positions throughout the years, with over 20 years as the aquatic macroinvertebrate and mussel biologist. Currently, Laura is the stormwater coordinator, surveillance supervisor, and leader of the propagation program at the White River Freshwater Mussel Propagation Facility. In addition to her roles at the BWQ, she also serves as chairperson of Indiana's Mussel Technical Advisory Committee.



Fatmucket Mussel
Image from the Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks <https://bit.ly/3YU5Qqj>



RCAS Celebrates the 2025 Conservation Award Recipients

At our December meeting, about 60 people gathered to hear from five members of our community who have made a difference in conservation in East Central Indiana. Inspiring talks were given by award winners, from left to right, Diana Bowman, Keith Morris, Ryan Smith, Sheryl Myers, and Chayson Brown. In front of Ryan is Emeric Smith (age 6), who ably assisted in presenting his father's award, and behind Ryan is his younger son, Gideon (age 4).

Field Trips

*Everyone is welcome at field trips and programs.
Loaner binoculars are always available.*

Saturday, March 7, 9 am to 11:30 am: 4306 Mounds Rd., Anderson, IN

Mounds State Park Service Trip

For our third annual service trip at Mounds we will return to the area below the fen to remove invasive honeysuckle and burning bush. Meet in the Friends Shelter parking lot at 9 am. Dress for the weather and bring work gloves, loppers, and drinking water.

March 14, April 11, and May 9, 8 am to 10 am: 4306 Mounds Rd., Anderson, IN

Mounds State Park

Come join a Second Saturday walk at Mounds State Park and enjoy the returning breeders and the migrants just passing through. **Please note that the start time on these walks is moving to 8 am for the duration of daylight savings time.**

Meet at the Visitor's Center parking lot at 8 am. State Park fees apply.



American
Woodcock
Photo by John
Troth / Audubon
Photography
Awards

Sunday, March 15, 7:30 pm to 8:45 pm: Cooper Farm, 5800 W. Bethel Ave., Muncie, IN

Woodcocks at Cooper Farm

On Sunday evening, March 15, we'll head to Cooper Farm (a BSU property) to look for male American Woodcocks performing their amazing aerial mating display. Meet at Cooper Farm, at 7:30 pm. Please park in the gravel lot next to the house, not by the barn.

We'll walk a short distance to the viewing area. The path is often muddy and the weather unpredictable in mid-March, so be sure to wear warm clothes (possibly rain gear) and rubber boots, and be prepared to stand for a while in the dwindling twilight as we wait for the birds to begin their display. Also, bring a head lamp or flashlight. A special treat is that Kamal Islam—ornithologist and board member of our Audubon chapter—will be on hand to help us spot the birds and tell us about woodcock behavior! Audubon magazine also offers great information about woodcock courtship (go to https://bit.ly/Audubon_mag_woodcocks).

Saturday, April 25, 8:30 am to 10:30 am: 3500 N. County Rd. 300 W., Middletown, IN

Stout Memorial Woodland

For this trip, we'll be in search of wildflowers and early migratory songbirds, both of which are found in abundance at Stout Woods in the spring. The 36-acre state nature preserve, which is owned and protected by Red-tail Land Conservancy, is known as one of the best upland hardwood forests in East Central Indiana.

We'll gather at 8:30 am. Look for Red-tail's Stout Memorial Woodland sign, at the T-junction of County Road 350 North into 300 West. A small gravel parking lot there will comfortably fit three to four cars, but other cars can park along 350 North, directly across from the entrance.

We'll walk down a grassy lane to access the preserve. If it has rained recently the trail may be muddy in some areas so plan on footwear appropriate for the conditions.

Saturday, May 2, 8:30 am to ?: Hueston Woods Nature Center, College Corner, OH

Hueston Woods State Park

Jared Merriman (a member of the Dayton Audubon Society) will be our guide as we explore Hueston Woods State Park, in southwest Ohio. The 3,500-acre park incorporates a 200-acre old-growth beech-maple forest and 625-acre Acton Lake. The park's varied habitats function as stopover sites for neotropical migrants (including warblers) and as sanctuaries for many uncommon vagrant species. The park's Great Blue Heron rookery, with more than 75 pairs, is one of the largest in the state. See birdinghotspots.org/iba/hueston-woods for more details.

We'll meet at 8:30 am at the Nature Center, which is located near the northwest corner of the park. Restrooms at the park office, which is adjacent to the Nature Center, are open 24 hours a day. Bring a water bottle and a sack lunch. We'll picnic together and do some early afternoon birding before heading home.

Field Trips, continued

Saturday, May 16, 8:30 am to ?: Hominy Ridge Lake Shelter House/Pavilion, Lagro, IN

Salamonie River State Forest

Salamonie River State Forest is a beautiful 950-acre forest in Wabash and Huntington counties. It should be a great place to see some migrants, other birds returning to their breeding grounds, and those that never left. Salamonie Lake, directly adjacent to the forest, hosts a variety of waterfowl on its 2,600-plus acres.

We'll meet at the Hominy Ridge Picnic area in the Salamonie River State Forest. See map on our chapter website: The forest and Hominy Ridge are highlighted in pink at the top left corner. In Google Maps, search for "Hominy Ridge Lake."

We'll bird in the forest before exploring other areas around the reservoir. Be sure to bring a water bottle, and anyone who'd like to stick around for a picnic should bring a sack lunch, too.

Programs and Events

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

The White River Freshwater Mussel Propagation Facility: A Novel Approach in the Bureau of Water Quality's Ongoing Efforts to Improve Water Quality

Laura Bowley, Muncie Bureau Of Water Quality surveillance supervisor/stormwater coordinator and propagation program leader at White River Freshwater Mussel Propagation Facility, will tell us about the fascinating life history of our native freshwater mussels, historical impacts on their once thriving communities, essential roles they play in our local waterways, and what goes into the bureau's efforts to restore local native populations.

Attend in person or register in advance for the webcast at:

<https://bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/oqcfoLecQ1eWrQY-nerKw>

April 15, 7 pm to 9 pm: BSU Nature Lab, 2500 W. University Ave., Muncie, IN

Good Genes or Good Parenting: What's Preferred in a Bird's Mate?

Dr. Kelly Miller, assistant professor of biology at Ball State University, will give our April program. Is it better to choose a mate that will pass good genes on to offspring or one that will be a good parent and help care for the offspring? Come and find out what her Prothonotary Warbler studies have shown.

Attend in person or join the webcast by Zoom at:

<https://bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/A2E9r9wTQ3OUmoLeFVweew>

May 20, 7 pm to 9 pm: BSU Nature Lab, 2500 W. University Ave., Muncie, IN

A Link to the Past: The Civilian Conservation Corps

Liz Marthaler, assistant property manager at Mounds State Park, will present a program on the Civilian Conservation Corps and its impact on national, state, and local park systems, including those of Indiana. This program was originally scheduled for June of 2025 but was postponed due to threatening weather.

<https://bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/oCgOPORERHqddm-HnJNBzg>

“Love Birds” Scavenger Hunt

February 9 through 14 at the Kennedy Library in Muncie

In partnership with our own Audubon chapter, Kennedy Library is hosting a self-guided Love Birds Scavenger Hunt inside the library. Stop by the library to pick up a scavenger hunt list and search the library for seven hidden “love birds.” Once you’ve found them all, turn in your completed list to receive a small prize—while supplies last. This fun, drop-in activity is perfect for bird lovers, families, and anyone looking for a sweet way to explore the library. No registration required. Just come in, grab a list, and start hunting!

www.cooperaudubon.org

(continued on page 6)



Seeking a Kestrel Pair in Need of a Good Home

By Catherine Kubo

The American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) is a charismatic little falcon, the smallest of the three falcons we have in Indiana, the other two being Peregrine Falcon and Merlin. There are several species of kestrel spread across old world continents and islands, but ours is the only one of its kind in the new world. You have probably seen one sitting on a wire as you drive through the countryside or hovering in midair for a seemingly endless stretch over a farm field as it hunts for small rodents and insects. The males are a striking combination of rusty brown and slate blue-grey, whereas the females are primarily brown-streaked; both sexes sport the dark malar stripes typical of the falcon group.

Like so many other bird species, American Kestrel is experiencing a decline in numbers. Loss of suitable habitat is thought to be a primary contributor to the decrease, as more and more land is cleared for development. Kestrels are secondary cavity nesters, meaning they are unable to excavate their own cavities and rely on existing ones, such as old woodpecker nests. Many studies have shown that they readily take to using man-made nest boxes and that placing one in protected habitat can successfully attract a breeding pair.

With all this in mind, RCAS has collaborated with Red-tail Land Conservancy to erect a kestrel box on a Red-tail property in the Muncie area. The box was constructed by Jim Schow, one of RCAS's talented woodworkers, and the required 15-foot mounting pole was purchased with the generous support of a grant from Josie and Jeff Fox. The box is now in place, and we are looking forward to our first season as kestrel landlords. Like all good landlords, we have a responsibility to keep the

premises in good condition. For kestrel boxes, this means keeping them free of nesting attempts by invasive European Starlings and other undesirable tenants.

To this end, we are seeking volunteer box monitors to help with biweekly checks on the box, starting in March and lasting through the end of the breeding season in June. Monitoring is fairly easy—you just walk a short way in to the refuge over a mown trail and spend 15 to 30 minutes observing the box. Afterwards, you can access an online spreadsheet to enter a one-line report of any activity. A phone number is available to call if starlings have moved in or the box otherwise needs attention.

Interested? We are having an informational meeting at the BSU Nature Lab on Feb 12 at 6:30 pm. Please come learn more, and possibly sign up to be a volunteer. The BSU Nature lab, where we also have our monthly programs, is located at 2500 W. University Avenue, Muncie, Indiana. Parking is available and free after 5 pm.

If you cannot make this meeting but are interested, please contact Rose Jeffery at admin@cooperaudubon.org. She can send you more information. There will be an on-site orientation later in February for volunteers.



Red-tail staff and RCAS members gather for a group photo under our new kestrel box.
Photo by Brian Wolfe



Male American Kestrel
David Zieg/Audubon Photography Awards

Flight of the Godwit: Tracking Epic Shorebird Migrations

By Bruce Beehler with Illustrations by Alan Messer

Smithsonian Books, 2025, 272 pp.

The Autumn 2025 issue of *Living Bird* included a mention of *Flight of the Godwit: Tracking Epic Shorebird Migrations* by Bruce Beehler, and my interest was piqued. If you desire an epic journey covering thousands of miles without leaving your armchair, this book is ideal.

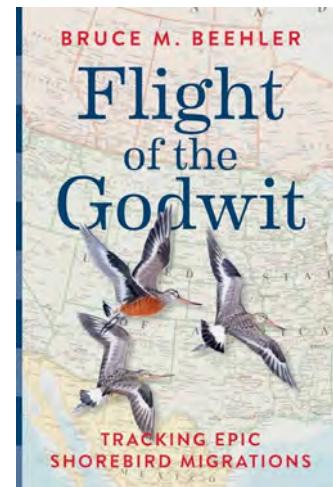
Flight of the Godwit is meant for bird lovers. It blends travelogue and guidebook elements as the author presents detailed descriptions of species appearances, ranges, habitat preferences, nesting behaviors, diets, and behavioral patterns, accompanied by population figures and conservation concerns. He also describes the roads, towns, and natural areas that he visited. His shorebird focus is on what he calls the Magnificent Seven: Bar-tailed Godwit, Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Curlew, Whimbrel, Bristle-thighed Curlew, and Upland Sandpiper. Even though these were his target birds, he is interested in all shorebirds, and in birds and animals in general. His sense of awe about experiencing new places and the natural

world around him is contagious.

Beehler embarked on his extensive journey from his home in Maryland, traveling to Texas and on to the Arctic Ocean; he visited 37 states, 9 Canadian provinces, the Yukon, and Northwest Territories, and he observed both spring and fall migrations.

This book will give the reader a greater appreciation and understanding of shorebird migration and the grand flights undertaken annually. A map in the back of the book shows the author's "migration path." The one downside for me was that there were no photos in the book, only sketches.

One cannot have a better guide than Bruce Beehler. This was a great book to read while anticipating spring migration in Indiana, and Beehler has earned his spot on our household guidebook shelf, alongside Crossley, Peterson, and Sibley.



-Reviewed by Terri Gorney Lehman

The Hidden Life of Trees

By Peter Wohlleben, Translated by Jane Billinghurst

Greystone Books, 2016, 288 pp.

This book is not new; it came out in 2015, in German. The English translation was published in 2016. It received rave reviews for bringing recent scientific discoveries to the general public and is an international best seller.

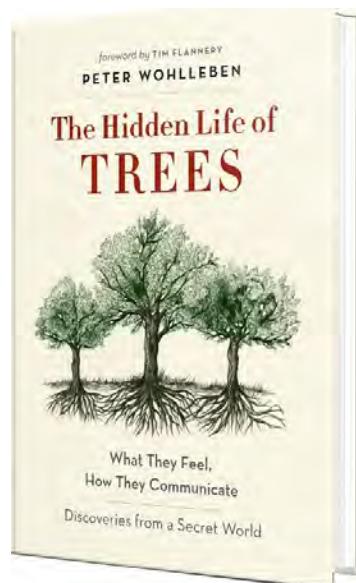
The author explains how trees communicate, share nutrients, and depend on and help each other. His narrative is based on scientific studies (clearly explained in the text and referenced in the footnotes) as well as on his experiences over many years as a forester.

Wohlleben is sometimes criticized for using human terms (such as compassion, fear, etc) when describing nonhuman relationships and states, and for oversimplifying complex ecological

concepts. Whatever you call these processes and relationships, phenomena such as mycorrhizal networks are surprising and interesting, and were fairly unknown until recently.

Even if you agree that his writing is too anthropomorphic at times (and he has written several other books that get the same criticism), the book is well worth reading.

-Reviewed by Willy DeSmet



An Update from the Schowe Homestead

By Jim Schowe

It is long past time for the trees to turn colors and for the leaves to fall. Since we moved here, raking fallen leaves is a job I no longer face each autumn. I and my tender shoulder are happy to have left that behind at my previous address. The only organic material that falls near the house here is the spent needles from the many



Black-capped Chickadee landing on *Fraxinus* (Ash), Antrim county, Michigan. The tree shows clear signs of the ash borer tunnels that led to its death. Photo by Steve Jessmore/Audubon Photography Awards

white pine trees I planted thirty years ago; some of these needles are repurposed each year as bedding for next year's purple martins.

Speaking of autumn, have you noticed that the fall of the year seems shorter than when we were younger, and not as colorful? Missing are the early bright yellows of the ash trees. They were mostly killed by the Emerald Ash Borers (EAB) some years ago. At our Muncie address we had two spectacular ash trees that seemed to turn yellow earlier than most other trees. Every year I raked those leaves and added them to farm fields as extra organic matter. Of course they were not the only contributors to my raking chores—my

neighbor had a sprawling red oak to the west of me and he was glad to share its bounty of leaves.

I have written before that we have a twelve-acre woods here in Randolph County. The autumns are less colorful here, too. As we take a walk through the woods we can see the ghosts of more than fifty dead ash trees. The peeling bark clearly shows the remains of the tunnels EAB larvae left behind. It only took about two years from when I first spotted the adults to the point where all the ash trees showed the distress signs of starvation due to the larvae tunnels. Now, hikers in our woods must be wary of dead limbs that may fall on them. The stricken trees also start to fall and then lean against other healthy trees, endangering them too.

Fortunately, all is not doom and gloom. Researchers from Cornell University, the same team that discovered EAB many years ago, have found a few ash trees that have resisted EAB attack. They are collecting scions (living branches) from the unaffected ash trees and are grafting them to other less susceptible stock in hopes of reviving the species. Researchers Mike Griggs and Todd Bittner have named the surviving ash trees "lingering ash."

Griggs and Bittner's goal is to propagate 50 to 60 genotypes or individual parent trees of each of the three ash trees species —white, green, and black ash. Right now some 139 grafted trees have been planted into three conservation banks, one of which is Cornell's Botanical Gardens conservation bank site.

I pray that they are successful. It won't be in my lifetime, but just maybe a colorful early yellow autumn will be enjoyed by future generations.

"Love Birds" Scavenger Hunt...continued from page 3



How to participate:

- Pick up your search list at the Kennedy Library Information Desk, starting February 9.
- Hunt through the library to find all the "love birds" (and learn a little something about each one).
- Submit your completed list at the Information Services desk by Monday, February 16, to earn a small prize!

An extra feature at Kennedy Library during all of February will be the display of an actual Black-winged Lovebird specimen, on loan from Ball State's biology department.

Kennedy Library, a branch of the Muncie Public Library, is open 10 am to 7 pm, Monday to Friday, and 1 pm to 5 pm on Saturdays. The library is closed on Sundays.

Safeguarding the Songs of Spring

By Kamal Islam

Many of "our" songbirds spend more of their time in Central and South America than they do with us. Conservation of these species entails safeguarding songbird habitats not just locally but throughout the



Americas. Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology has produced a short video about the "Five Great Forests" of

In addition to many wondrous tropical species, a trip to Costa Rica affords birders the chance to see familiar birds in new settings.

Great Crested Flycatcher (above right) and Swainson's Thrush, (above left)

Photos by Mary Alvarado

Chestnut-sided Warbler (right)

Photo by Sandra Rothenberg/Audubon Photography Awards

Mesoamerica, forests that serve as critical wintering grounds and stopover sites to billions of migratory songbirds. You can access the video via this link: <http://bit.ly/45koPLJ>

For the past several years, RCAS has made an annual donation to the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), an organization with especially strong ties to Latin American conservation groups. ABC and its partners take conservation one step further than we can do locally by purchasing and protecting land far from our borders.



Christmas Bird Counts, 2025

This year was the National Audubon Society's 126th Christmas Bird Count (CBC), and members of RCAS participated in two local counts. As usual, the Southern Adams, Northern Jay and Ouabache (SANJO) count was held on New Year's Day, and five RCAS members participated. Terri Gorney Lehman, the count compiler, reported that 5,125 individuals birds were counted from 52 different species, including four Hermit Thrushes, 1,795 European Starlings, and one Snow Bunting. Rose



and Jim Jeffery and Curt Burnett had a flock of 64 Wild Turkey.

Two days later, the Delaware County count, sponsored by RCAS, took place. Jim Schowe organizes and compiles this count for us. He reported that 14 participants counted 2,650 individuals from 45 species. This is far fewer individuals than last

year, due mainly to a paucity of starlings (only 326 this year!). Notable sightings included a flock of 75 Greater White-fronted Geese flying south over Prairie Creek, one Trumpeter Swan, and 255 Horned Lark.

Thanks to all who participated!



American Tree Sparrow (above)
SANJO CBC
Photo by Randy Lehman

White Crowned Sparrow (left)
Delaware County CBC
Photo by Lois Rockhill



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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: Rose Jeffery
Vice-President: Catherine Kubo
Treasurer: Jim Flowers
Recording Secretary: Elizabeth Ploog

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Communications:	Barb Stedman, website Julie Bruner, Facebook Jim Jeffery, mailing list Catherine Kubo, newsletter

Contact us

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

First-time Migrant



A young Yellow-crowned Night Heron, photographed last August by Lois Rockhill at Fall Creek Park in Pendleton. It's an unusual sighting for Madison County. The bird may have hatched south of us and taken a slight northern detour before heading to Central or South America.

Programs and Field Trips

Most RCAS programs and field trips are free and open to the public. For updates and reminders, refer to our website or join our mailing list by sending a request to admin@cooperaudubon.org.

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Cooper's Talk is published four times per year for members of the Robert Cooper Audubon Society. Please submit photos, articles, and events for publication by emailing admin@cooperaudubon.org