December 2026 to February 2027
Volume 52, Number 4

Cooper's Talk
Robert Cooper Audubon Society
Enjoying birds, protecting nature, educating for tomorrow in East Central Indiana

It's Time for Our Annual Celebration of Conservation Heroes!

December 2, RCAS Program

Come and celebrate with us!

Each year we gather to honor individuals or groups who have worked to improve the natural environment in East Central Indiana. The event is free of charge and will include light appetizers and a raffle. The main focus will be on our awardees.

We are pleased to announce the following awards.

The **Charles D. Wise Youth Conservation Award** is given for excellence in conservation practices by a youth under the age of 18. This year the award goes to **Rozzie Garringer** for volunteer efforts to teach and motivate Wildlife Warrior students and to improve local habitat by removing invasive species.



Jon Creek, winner of this year's Robert H. and Esther L. Cooper Award

The **Clyde W. Hibbs Conservation Education Award** is given for excellence in educating the area's children, youth, and/or adults on conservation issues and practices. This year the award goes to **Tim Carter**. During his 20 years at Ball State University, Dr. Carter has inspired countless students and the broader community to learn about and value wildlife and the habitat that supports it.

The **Phyllis Yuhas Wildlife Habitat Preservation Award** is given for the development or preservation of habitat with significant wildlife and/or native plant life populations. This year the award goes to **Brad Hanauer** for his work clearing land, fighting invasives, growing and planting natives, and helping students and landowners to understand the goals of the Delaware County Invasive Plant Project (DIPP).

The **Richard Greene Public Service Award** is given for active involvement in serving the public's environmental interests and concerns. This year the award goes to the **Muncie Sanitary District Bureau of Water Quality** for their **Freshwater Mussel Propagation Program**: Chuck Jones, director; Laura Bowley, biologist. This innovative program is improving water quality by propagating and restoring mussels to the White River.

The **Robert H. and Esther L. Cooper Conservation Award** is given to honor overall contributions to conservation of and appreciation for the natural environment. This year the award goes to **Jon Creek**. Jon has been a true champion of conservation activities for our chapter, spearheading some of the most important projects that we have ever undertaken. He has further served environmental causes in East Central Indiana as a founder, member, or leader of multiple conservation and civic organizations.

Please come to the ceremony on December 2 from 6 to 9 pm and hear from the award winners themselves as they tell us more about their work. The event will be held at the Ball State University Alumni Center, 2800 West Bethel Avenue, Muncie, Indiana.

If you plan to come, please RSVP at cooperaudubon@gmail.com by November 20, and please include the number in your party. Your responses will help us arrange for the appropriate catering order.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Field and Service Trips

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

December 12, January 9, and February 13, **9 am to 11 am**: 4306 Mounds Rd., Anderson, IN

Mounds State Park

We continue our Second Saturday walks at Mounds State Park. The start time on these walks is **9 am** during the winter months. Meet at the Visitor's Center parking lot. Reacquaint yourself with our wintering birds and meet some new birders. Are you curious about birding or know someone who is? These walks are great for beginners. Come join us! State Park fees may apply.

Saturday, December 19, 8:45 am: 2111 Riverside Ave., Muncie, IN

Delaware County Christmas Bird Count

Join us for the Delaware County Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, 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. The Jefferys will host a post-count open house for teams finishing up by early afternoon, or those wanting to stop in for a mid-count warm-up. To participate, please contact Jim Schowe at jim.schowe@gmail.com.

Friday, January 1, 8 am: Limberlost Visitor Center, Geneva, IN

SANJO Christmas Bird Count

Southern Adams Northern Jay Ouabache (SANJO) will hold its Christmas Bird Count this year on Friday, January 1. Contact Terri Gorney Lehman at 260-413-5671 (cell) or bandtgorney@aol.com for more details.

Saturday, January 16, 10:00 am to noon: Foundational Sciences Building, Room FB 250, BSU, 622 N. Martin St., Muncie, IN

BSU Animal Diversity Collection

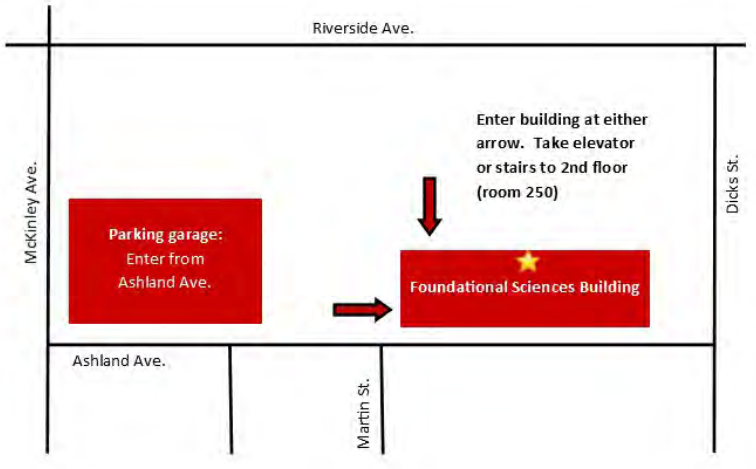


Dr. Kelly Miller holds the skin of a Golden-breasted Starling
Photo by Barb Stedman

Come enjoy the comfort of an indoor field trip to Ball State University's Biology Department. There, Drs. Kelly Miller, Kamal Islam, and Tim Carter will show us some of the department's avian and mammalian gems in its Animal Diversity Collection.

One highlight will be the Virginia and Edmund Ball African Bird Collection, which was curated by our chapter's own namesake, Dr. Robert Cooper, in the 1960s and '70s. Most of these birds have been preserved as bird study skins, which are specimens used by students, researchers, and museums.

We'll gather in FB 250, on the north side of the Foundational Sciences Building. Free parking is available in the parking garage directly west of the building. Be sure to park on the second floor or higher. (The first floor and ramp are metered parking only.)



Friday to Monday, February 12 to 15

Great Backyard Bird Count

Participate in the 2027 Great Backyard Bird Count from the comfort of your own home, or watch our website or Facebook page for details on an opportunity to share this event with others. Regardless of where you are birding, additional instructions for Great Backyard Bird Counting are available at birdcount.org/participate/

Programs and Events

Wednesday, December 2, 6 pm to 9 pm: BSU Alumni Center, 2800 W. Bethel Ave., Muncie, IN

2026 RCAS Conservation Awards

On Wednesday, December 2, we will host a reception for our 2026 RCAS Conservation Award winners. Light hors d'oeuvres will be followed by presentations from the awardees.

Please RSVP by November 20 at cooperaudubon@gmail.com to attend in person. Or register in advance for the webcast at:
2026 RCAS Conservation Awards Zoom link

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

How does climate change affect cognitive performance? An operant conditioning experiment on a bird thriving in heat

Ms. Sara Isgate, a doctoral student at Indiana University-Bloomington, will tell us about her research experiments on how birds adapt to higher temperatures. Sara is the 2025 recipient of the Josie & Geoff Fox Graduate Student Grant awarded through RCAS. Her research focuses on Tree Swallows *(Tachycineta bicolor)*, small cavity-nesting migratory passerines that breed along a wide thermal gradient. In recent years, many other North American bird populations have been on the decline, likely due to the consequences of human-caused climatic change. However, evidence suggests that Tree Swallows may benefit from increased heat, as their breeding territories have expanded southwards.



Sara has investigated cognitive processes like memory formation and problem-solving that may be helping these birds thrive, thus demonstrating a way that nature can build heat resilience.

Attend in person or register in advance for the webcast at:
bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/KVRPUSvkRleAayPwc75WeA

Left: Doctoral student Sara Isgate holds one of her study subjects, a Tree Swallow

Below: BSU assistant professor of biology, Dr. Rob Denton, will tell us about rule-breaking salamanders

Wednesday, February 17, 7 pm to 9 pm: BSU Nature Lab, 2500 W. University Ave., Muncie, IN

All-female Salamanders: The genomic, evolutionary, and physiological consequences of strange reproduction

Exotic biological phenomena aren't confined to faraway places or television screens—sometimes your own backyard can be home to organisms that break all the rules. In this talk, Dr. Rob Denton, assistant professor of biology at BSU, explores an unusual group of local rule-breakers: the all-female mole salamanders (genus *Ambystoma*). These cryptic animals practice a bizarre reproductive strategy, "stealing" sperm from males of other species and juggling multiple copies of massive, divergent genomes.



While evolutionary theory predicts that an all-female lineage stuck in between sexual and asexual reproduction should quickly become an evolutionary dead end, mole salamanders have persisted for roughly five million years and remain widespread and abundant today. Discover how Dr. Denton's research untangles the consequences of this dynamic lifestyle, from their tenuous coexistence with other species to how they maintain their metabolism in the face of genomic chaos.

Attend in person or register in advance for the webcast at:
bsu.zoom.us/meeting/register/MRR_cO_uRzKMSyoRLyhQsA

What *Is* in a Name?

By Rose Jeffery

RCAS has a new tagline:

Enjoying birds, protecting nature, educating for tomorrow in East Central Indiana

At the Robert Cooper Audubon Society board meeting of August 4, 2026, we discussed whether our society should shed the honorific "Audubon" from our name. This move has been taken by many chapters across the nation, including two prominent Indiana chapters. Amos Butler Audubon is now Bird Alliance of Central Indiana and Stockbridge Audubon Society is now Three Rivers Birding. We thought the issue deserved serious consideration.

John James Audubon (1785-1851) was a famous naturalist and artist who made great contributions to ornithology. He was also a slave owner, and stands accused of several instances of untruthfulness, academic fraud, and plagiarism. To quote the National Audubon Society's main webpage about John James Audubon, "he was a complex and troubling character who did despicable things even by the standards of his day."

Several important points were made during our discussion:

1. We cannot expect perfection from any human being now or in the past. We hope to appreciate the good without excusing the bad in each individual. We should not attempt to expunge or sanitize troubling history. On the other hand, the fact that very flawed people can also create important and positive work should temper our judgments. History is complicated, as are people.
2. The Audubon name has now come to stand for so much more than one historic person. The National Audubon Society was founded in 1905 and is one of the oldest conservation groups in the world. From the Audubon Plumage Law in New York (1910) to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918, to more modern campaigns to ban DDT and protect the Bald Eagle, the National Audubon Society has taken the lead.
3. For good or bad, the name Audubon no longer has much resonance for much of the public. In fact, this is a major reason to consider changing our name. Robert Cooper Audubon Society does not convey well what we stand for to the public.
4. A name change would incur some costs both in terms of dollars and of time. We already feel constrained by the lack of time, energy, and volunteers. A name change would necessarily take resources away from our conservation work.

After an open and respectful discussion, we decided to retain the name Robert Cooper Audubon Society but add a new descriptive tagline after our name: "*Enjoying birds, protecting nature, educating for tomorrow in East Central Indiana*." This, we hope, will better advertise our goals without requiring a full-scale rebranding. Keeping "Audubon" in our chapter name is to honor not John James Audubon but the National Audubon Society and what it has achieved as one of our oldest conservation groups.

With this new resolve, we are reminded that we need to grow our membership. With more participants–ideally reflecting the diverse backgrounds and ages in our community–we can more easily reach our goals. There is so much work to be done in conservation. We need everyone equipped to act because environmental issues are relevant to everyone and will shape the futures of us all.

Proposed Bylaw Change to Be Voted On at an Upcoming Meeting

The RCAS bylaws specify that elections for officers should be held each year at our regular meeting in June. For two years in a row, we have had to cancel the June meeting due to storms. We have postponed elections to our fall picnic, which is less than desirable since new officers are supposed to start on July 1.

The board proposes that we amend the bylaws to require elections before the end of the fiscal year. With this flexibility, we hope to avoid the problems of the last two years. A general membership vote on this change will be scheduled for our regular January meeting.

An Update from the Schowe Homestead

By Jim Schowe

It seems like October is a month when we have to say goodbye: to the garden, to leaves on the trees, and to crops in the fields. This year, my wife and I had to say goodbye to a companion we had for more than thirty years.

We purchased our little property thirty-three years ago. Included in the purchase was a ten acre field, eight acres of mixed hardwoods, a pile of demolition rocks, and a one acre pond. We used the rocks to line the banks of the pond to reduce erosion, then started to plant trees. One of the first was a spruce we bought in northern Indiana. The darned thing was only two feet tall and I doubted if it would live past its first year as we couldn't water or tend to it like we should have. But to my surprise it did grow and, indeed, flourish. We built our house next to the tree to take advantage of it as a wind break. That tree had my respect for its determination to live. Unfortunately, that determination died this year. We hired an arborist to remove the tree and upon inspection found thousands of small holes in the main trunk showing where some kind of insect chewed through the bark.

I really liked that tree.

Looking towards the north from my chair right now I can see at least three white pines planted by the previous land owner that have perished. They are in a remote fence row, and unless they fall into my field they will stay there as food and shelter for native wildlife.

This year we purchased trees from the Soil and Conservation District office to help offset those that have died—none of which are evergreens. We plant a diverse array of trees. This year we planted tulip poplar and flowering dogwoods. I can't wait to see them bloom.

Though I don't want to say goodbye to any more of my plantings, I promise that I will continue to plant more trees in a variety that benefits the natural beauty of east central Indiana.



A Cedar Waxwing sips nectar from a blooming tulip poplar, Indiana's state tree. Photo by Wildreturn, CC BY 2.0, via Wikimedia Commons

Indiana Audubon Society News

Terri Gorney Lehman Honored and RCAS Recieves a Grant

RCAS member and frequent contributor to this newsletter, **Terri Gorney Lehman,** was recently honored by the Indiana Audubon Society (IAS) as the recipient of the 2026 James H. Mason Service Award. Terri is a researcher and writer who documents the history of birding and bird conservation in Indiana. In its announcement, IAS noted that she "has written about Indiana Audubon's early years and leaders, including women whose contributions deserve wider recognition, and has shared that history on 'Hoosier History Live,' a weekly radio show about Indiana history." The Mason Award, created in 1989, recognizes IAS members for their service.

If you attend the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival this spring, you can see Terri receive her award at the keynote address. Please join us in congratulating her!

In the same announcement, IAS listed the recipients of this year's Mumford and Keller grants. One of the Central Indiana grants went to our friends at Red-tail Land Conservancy to restore habitat at Dutro-Ernst Woods. And a second grant went to RCAS, to help fund an interpretive sign for the Chimney Swift tower we erected at Dutro-Ernst this spring. The signage design has been a bit delayed, but we hope to see it in place before too long.

Friends of the Limberlost also received an IAS grant—read about it on page 7.

A Summer of Turkeys

Text and photos by Elizabeth Ploog



Wild Turkey hen and poults on the Ploog property this summer

I have seen the occasional Wild Turkey on my property since moving here in 2021. This year, however, has been exceptional. Much to my pleasure, my backyard native grasses, woods, and the mowed lane bordering my prairie became a turkey brood's thoroughfare. It really should be no surprise, I suppose, as a combination of fields and trees is their typical habitat.

"My" brood started out with two hens (females) and ten to twelve poults (babies). By July, that number was reduced to five. My guess is that predators were responsible. Hawks, coyotes, and raccoons are plentiful here and are natural enemies of turkeys. Weather can also be a factor, and our spring was exceptionally cold. It is not unusual for more than one hen to be in charge. The tom (male) goes off to do his own thing after mating. This leaves all of the parenting to the hens, who often join forces and combine their broods.

I observed the brood traveling along the same path throughout the summer and have since learned that this is typical when food is plentiful. Leaves, clover, native grasses, berries, and bugs are a common diet, and all were readily available here. As an added benefit, the grasses were tall enough to provide cover for the poults but short enough for the hens to navigate their surroundings, scanning for predators as well as finding food.

One last note—I was very excited for my son and his wife to witness the turkeys during their visit last August. But after their arrival, not one turkey showed itself. A few days after they left, the hens and poults were back! I have since learned that turkeys are hypervigilant and will not take risks when they are raising poults. My son's car in the driveway was unfamiliar to them. Perhaps they perceived it as a threat and changed their route in order to keep the poults safe.

RCAS Takes a Position on Data Centers

By Brian Wolfe, Annette Rose, Catherine Kubo, and Barb Stedman

Artificial intelligence, or AI—we are almost all using it now, intentionally or unwittingly. Its uses range from beneficial to benign to nefarious, and it is becoming ubiquitous, as are the data centers required to support it.

According to the Wall Street Journal, an amazing $10.2 trillion is projected to be spent on new data centers in the U.S. between 2025 and 2032, an amount that dwarfs the country's spending on building out the railways or electrification a century ago. Local governments across the country are being asked to permit new facilities, facilities that will have large impacts on citizens' lives, both now and in the future.

Data centers, as has been widely reported, are resource-intensive. Before a municipality decides to permit one, the environmental impacts that should be considered include:

- Wetland protection
- Water usage
- Electricity usage
- Noise levels
- Pollutant generation
- Effects on ratepayers and taxpayers
- Tax incentives and job creation

Local ordinances are needed to guide such decisions. The RCAS board has

(Continued on page 7)

Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve Grant for Habitat Restoration

By Terri Gorney Lehman

In March of 2026, East Central Regional Ecologist Ryan Smith oversaw the prescribed burning of 85 acres at the Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve (Adams County) along the east side of Deacon's Trail. The Friends of the Limberlost (FOL) paid for native seed to be planted later that spring on 35 of those acres. With support from an Indiana Audubon Society for a Mumford-Keller Project and Community Support Grant and funds raised by Creek Run, LLC, of Montpelier, FOL is now in a position to fund the next 35 acres, work that is planned for November. Habitat restoration is important for birds who nest in this area and those that migrate through. The area planted this spring has already hosted three Little Blue Herons this year, and we hope many more to come. A big thank you to Indiana Audubon for sponsoring these grants for habitat restoration. It does make a difference.







During, immediately after, and just nine weeks after the burn at Limberlost Swamp Nature Preserve Photos by Ryan Smith and Terri Gorney Lehman

Data Centers . . . *continued from page 6*

voted to support moratoriums in our seven counties on data center construction until effective regulations can be developed and put in place. Both the development of regulations and the permitting of individual projects should be publicly transparent processes, with sufficient time for citizen input.

You can read our full position paper from a link on our website, cooperaudubon.org. We will share this position with local officials as these decisions arise. Since the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) board is currently in negotiations with a broker to purchase the AMA property south of Muncie for a data center, we have started with the Delaware County Metropolitan Planning Organization, the County Commissioners, and the Muncie City Council.

Please take the time to inform yourself on this important issue, then make your views known to your local officials.

Make Your Voice Heard—Some Ways to Get Involved in Delaware County

* *Download and print out a petition, collect signatures, then scan and email the completed petition to datacenterfight@gmail.com.*

* *Monitor the Delaware-Muncie Metropolitan Plan Commission for proposed planning and policy changes. When proposals are considered, provide public input.*

* *Ask for yard signs, T-shirts, and stickers from the "Protect Delaware County" group. See their Facebook page for details or write to ProtectDelawareCounty@gmail.com.*

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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:	Annette Rose

Directors

2025-2027	Julie Bruner	
2026-2028	Kristy Tuttle	Kelly Miller

Committee Chairs

Programs:	Kamal Islam
Field Trips:	Barb Stedman
Membership:	Martha Hunt
Education:	Diana Bowman
Conservation:	Jeff Ray and Jim Schowe
Advocacy:	Brian Wolfe
Hospitality:	Doris Cheney
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

Havin' Fun on the Bayou



Jim Flowers took this photo of a Bald Eagle dining at Lake La Pointe, St. Martin Parish, Louisiana, during a trip to the coast in October

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