

Stockbridge Audubon



<http://stockbridgeaudubon.org>

Representing Northeast Indiana

P.O. Box 13131, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46864

March Meeting at U. of St. Francis: “Making your Yard Photo Friendly for Birds”

Date: March 14, 2010
Time: 2:00 PM (Sunday)
Location: Achatz Hall
University of St. Francis
Speaker: Jeff Moore

Jeff has been a birder for over 40 years, ever since Mark Weldon invited him to help with a Stockbridge Christmas Bird Count. When not birding, Jeff is an engineer at GM. He lives near Roanoke on two acres of pond and restored prairie. He loves to travel the U.S. and now has photos of over 600 species of the birds of North America. He maintains a website to share many of these photos at www.moorenaturephotography.com. His presentation will show how he makes the area around his feeders aesthetically pleasing.

All are welcome!
Presidential Words

By Gary Tieben

Midwinter weather encourages people to keep their feeders full. Birds keep those feeders busy when days and nights are cold. Suet makes feeders even more attractive than seed alone. Homemade or commercial suet blocks draw Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, Carolina Wrens, both Red and White Breasted Nuthatches, Eastern Bluebirds and others to backyards. If you serve up suet in rectangular wire mesh containers, you may end up with small, partially used blocks of suet. These can be saved and dropped in a plastic mesh onion sack to put out for birds until they are completely eaten. Enjoy the flocks of common birds that come to your winter feeders, and keep your eyes open for the unique species that may be

attracted by your "free lunch."

By the time that this newsletter gets to you, the severest part of winter will be over and we will be in the very earliest stages of spring. Many birds will be singing, and the very earliest of migrants may be arriving as a result of over two months of days with longer periods of daylight. Do get out and enjoy the birds during the cold early pre-spring. There are always new things to see at this time of year. I look forward to seeing you in the field.





BIRD NOTES

By Jim Haw

October 16, 2009-January 31,
2010

Fall migration brought very poor waterfowl numbers, but all regular species of geese were found. Eight Greater White-fronted Geese were at Pigeon River Nov. 6 (Leland Shaum et al), one was at Lake Clare Huntington, Nov. 26 (Jim Haw), and probably the same bird was at Salamonie Res. Dec. 6 and 8 (Haw, Sandy Schacht). The only Snow Goose was one in Allen Co. Dec. 11 (Ed Powers). Fifteen Cackling Geese were at Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center, Noble Co. Oct. 17 (Stockbridge field trip; earliest fall record by 14 days) and one was at Clear Lake, Steuben Co. Nov. 24 (Haw, Schacht). The only Tundra Swans reported were 12 at Hurshtown Reservoir Nov. 1 (Haw). No Canvasbacks were reported all fall or winter, which is unprecedented.

Late Turkey Vultures were singles at Salamonie Dec. 6 and

8 (Haw, Schacht) and in Allen Co. Dec. 23 (Chris Burris). Thirty Am. Golden Plovers in Huntington Co. Oct. 20 (Haw) were late and the only ones of the fall. A Franklin's Gull was at Huntington Res. Oct. 27 (Haw, Schacht). Record-late songbirds included an Eastern Wood Pewee at Pine Knob Park, Lagrange Co. Oct. 22 (Haw, Frannie Headings) and an Am. Redstart at Franke Park Oct. 18 (Jerry Brown). Five Brewer's Blackbirds in Steuben Co. Oct. 22 (Haw, Headings) were a good find. Rusty Blackbirds peaked with a flock of 300 in Steuben Co. Nov. 24 (Haw, Schacht).

Irruptive species did not come south this winter. Red-breasted Nuthatches were scarce, and the winter finches stayed in Canada. Rough-legged Hawks were also in low numbers, and Northern Harriers absent. On a positive note, single Golden Eagles were at Pigeon River Nov. 6 (Shaum et al), Nov. 10 (Haw, Headings, Schacht), and Jan. 19 (Haw, Schacht).

Outstanding was a Northern Goshawk that briefly visited Bob Walton's yard in Allen Co. Jan. 13. A Wilson's Snipe at Eagle Marsh Jan. 12 (Ed Powers) was most unusual in midwinter.

Northern Shrikes were found at Salamonie Res. Nov. 12 (Haw, Schacht), in Steuben Co. Jan. 1

(John Winebrenner, Lisa Silvey, Bev Richardson) and at Chain O' Lakes Jan. 16-19 (Haw, Schacht, Sam Plew et al; probably wintering). A Brown Thrasher at the Salamonie nature center feeders for about a month ending Dec. 8 (Reservoir personnel, Haw, Schacht) did not look very lively by its last date. The Salamonie feeders also hosted a wintering Eastern Towhee from Dec. 20 on (Lynnanne Fager et al). Chipping Sparrows were in Allen Co. Dec. 12-13 (Don Ryan) and at Pigeon River Dec. 17 (Haw, Schacht). A Dark-eyed (Oregon race) Junco in Lagrange Co. Jan. 19 (Haw, Schacht, Windell) was notable.

The largest reported flock of Lapland Longspurs was 200 in Lagrange Co. Dec. 17 (Haw, Schacht), and the largest Snow Bunting flock was 200+ in Steuben Co. Jan. 5 (Holly Meyers). Wintering Eastern Meadowlarks included 3 in Allen Co. Jan. 8 (Powers) and 15 in Wabash Co. Jan. 12 (Haw, Schacht).

**LATE NEWS FLASH:
Junior Master Naturalist
Course will be given by Allen
Co. Parks for kids 9-13,
starting in March. Info at
www.allencountyparks.org.**

**Hey! Whitey Is Back!
By Gary Tieben**

In the late fall and winter of 2008, an interesting House Finch was seen at our feeders. One of the juvenile birds in the flock had a pure white crown. The top of its head was as white as snow. Instead of a somewhat poetical name like Sugartop, Sugarbird, Snowflake, or Snowball we simply called it Whitey. Off and on in the winter of 2008 Whitey appeared at our feeders. Whitey wasn't a weak "feeder bird." It appeared to get along well with other members of the House Finch flock and with members of the mixed winter feeding group of Slate-colored Juncos, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Tufted Titmice that moved from feeder to feeder in the neighborhood. After two or three visits, Whitey was no longer seen.

This wasn't a surprise. Whitey was a partial albino. Albinism is normally due to lack of the pigment melanin brought about by changes in the genes of the cells at the base of the feather follicles. Yes, feathers have follicles that are somewhat like hair follicles. Melanin is the pigment that gives people their color. It colors birds various shades of tan, brown and black. In some cases, an injury or physiological change in the follicle feathers may inhibit the formation of melanin, producing white feathers.

Albinism has a number

of forms. Complete albinos lack all melanin and have all white feathers and pink eyes. Complete albinos rarely survive in nature. They are a clear target for predators and the lack of eye pigment causes them to have poor vision. Incomplete albinos lack pigment in one or more of the following: feathers, skin or eyes, but not all three. If pigment was missing in all three, they would be a complete albino. In the imperfect albino, pigment is reduced in feathers, skin, eyes or all three. This causes the bird to be lighter colored. An imperfect albino female House Sparrow that I saw in the 1970's was uniformly beige. Whitey is an example of a partial albino, in which only a given region of the feathers, skin or eyes lacks melanin. The region lacking normal coloration can vary in size from a few feathers to a very large region of the animal. In any case, a unique area of albinism can be a unique natural way to identify a given animal.

During December of 2009 and January of 2010 our normal feeder birds were joined by a white crowned female House Finch. It was certainly the same bird that had been seen the previous winter. It was a real thrill to see that bird again. The juvenile bird was now seen to be a female. Whitey, or perhaps more appropriately Whitney, was

back.

**WONDER WHERE
THE CHRISTMAS
BIRD COUNTS
ARE? CHECK
OUR WEBSITE**
www.stockbridgeaudubon.org

A blast from the past: Bobolinks come to Noble County

**By Jane Hine, reported
by Terri Gorney**

In the spring of 1884, while visiting friends ten miles to the west, we saw Bobolinks. They were new birds there the year before [1883]. The next year a pair summered two miles west of us. In 1886 we had them on our farm. According to reports their progress east was about four or five miles each year. A middle aged man has told me that there were Bobolinks on the Steuben openings when he was a boy.

Source: *The Biennial Report of the Commissioner of Fisheries and Game for Indiana*, George William Miles, commissioner, 1911, "Game and Land Birds of an Indiana Farm" by Jane L. Hine, p. 378; also in Jane's personal

birding journal.

Note: The Indiana Academy of Science in 1896 gave Jane L. Hine credit for the first Bobolink sightings in Noble County.

Bird Listing

By Ed Powers

(Warning: this can be addictive)

So, you're starting to identify the birds you see in your yard, in the park, and around town. So what do you do next? You probably write them down. Thus, you move into the wonderful world of listing.

Nearly all birders keep lists, most of them more than one. Each list is defined by two things: a geographical area and a period of time. Some lists have a third defining characteristic – I'll get to that later.

The most inclusive list is the "world life list" – every species of bird you've identified anywhere in the world during your whole life. Since most of us are not frequent world travelers, what most birders mean when they say "life list" is birds identified within the "ABA Area". ABA is the American Birding Association and it is the arbiter of bird listing in North America; it has defined the ABA Area as North America north of Mexico, and

off-shore waters up to 200 nautical miles off the coasts.

In addition, many birders maintain lists of other areas, such as a county, a favorite park or other birding area, and their own residential lot.

You can, of course, keep a list for any conceivable time period, combined with any conceivable area: Fox Island County Park for the month of May, or the area you can see from your office window between the vernal equinox and the summer solstice. Most birders use life and annual periods, some keep month lists, and nearly everybody keeps a day list when they go birding. When they go traveling, many keep a trip list, which automatically defines both time and area.

I said there is sometimes a third characteristic for a list. One of these is "birds photographed." You could also keep lists of birds you see engaged in some activity – nesting, for example, or copulating, or defecating (some people actually do this). There is also something called "total ticks" – this is the sum of all your state and provincial lists. If you see an American Robin in each of 48 states, the District of Columbia, and nine provinces, it would count as 58 ticks.

I should also mention "Big Years" and "Big Days." A Big Year is annual listing on amphetamines. It is a deliberate attempt to find as many bird species in one calendar year as you can. The first Indiana Big Year record was held by a Stockbridge member from Columbia City, Jeff McCoy. In 2002 he saw 306 species in this state.

A Big Day is usually a team effort. A group of usually three to five people make a highly organized effort to find birds between midnight and midnight, usually subsisting on junk food. There are actually competitions for this, such as the World Series of Birding. Each team solicits sponsors to contribute some amount for each bird the team finds, which goes to a conservation cause.

Why keep lists? It's partly just an impulse to collect, as other hobbyists do. But reviewing my lists helps me recall some of the wonderful times we've had out in the world seeking these fascinating creatures, the birds.