

LAKELAND AUDUBON SOCIETY



The Chat



February 2024

CHAPTER MEETING

Tuesday, February 27

7:00 PM

Lions Field House - 270 Elkhorn Road (Hwy 67), Williams Bay, WI

Free and open to the public!

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Then and Now: Is it Still Working?

By Stanly Temple

In 2016 we marked the centenary of the “Convention between the United States and Great Britain (for Canada) for the Protection of Migratory Birds” (the Migratory Bird Treaty, for short). The 1916 treaty became the cornerstone of our national commitment to conserve birds. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 implements the landmark 1916 treaty, and together the treaty and act form one of the oldest and most enduring bird conservation measures in the world. But threats to migratory birds today challenge the effectiveness of these milestones. Loss and degradation of habitat, collisions with human-made structures, predation by cats, pesticide poisoning, and oil spills cause the deaths of hundreds of millions of migratory birds each year. Are these century-old actions up to the task of protecting birds against 21st century threats? Professor Stan Temple will recount the first century of migratory bird protection and speculate about the future.

About the speaker:

Stanley (Stan) Temple is the Beers-Bascom Professor Emeritus in Conservation in the Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology and former Chairman of the Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development Program in the Gaylord Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW–Madison. For 32 years he held the academic position once occupied by Aldo Leopold. He is currently a Senior Fellow with the Aldo Leopold Foundation. He has received major conservation awards from the Society for Conservation Biology, The Wildlife Society and the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology. Among other recognition of his achievements, he is a Fellow of the American Ornithologists’ Union, Explorers Club, Wildlife Conservation Society, American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. He has been President of the Society for Conservation Biology and Chairman of the Board of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin.



Stanley Temple in front of the Leopold Shack. Baraboo, WI

2023 Christmas Bird Count Report

Count yields lower numbers compared to prior years.

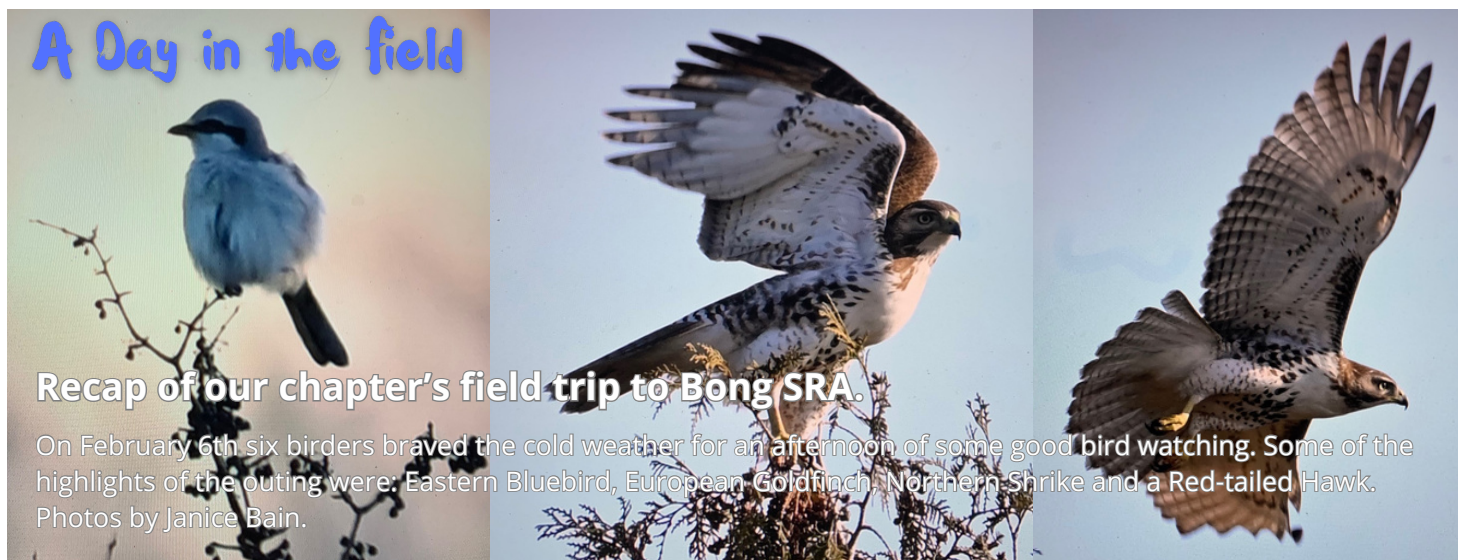
By Kyle Cudworth, Citizen Science Chair - Lakeland Audubon Society

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) in our local Lake Geneva circle was held on Saturday, Dec. 16, 2023. Our count circle of 7.5 miles radius is centered near the southwest corner of Lake Como. Weather on count day brought rain with temperatures in the 40's and southeast winds 5-15 mph. There was no snow on the ground and plenty of open water.

This year about 17 local birders spent some or all of the day driving and hiking their assigned areas keeping careful track of how many birds of which species were seen, while 9 birders watched their feeders and yards. Some did feeder watches as well as covering an area. Cumulatively, we spent about 80 hours birding, driving nearly 350 miles, and hiking nearly 20 miles, counting over 6000 birds. In all, 46 species were found on count day, plus one more during count week. Both the number of birds and the number of species were lower than usual.

The low numbers at feeders and in the field were presumably due to the rain. I suspect many birds were holed up sheltering from the rain, maybe wondering why these people didn't have enough sense to get out of the rain. Often, Canada Geese are the most common species counted but we saw only 1159 this year, compared to around 3000 the past two years. European Starlings were the most common birds seen with 1582. In recent years we have usually seen at least a few Bald Eagles on count day, with 4 showing up this year. A few other birds of note included a Great Blue Heron, 2 Red-winged Blackbirds, a Wilson's Snipe, a Red-headed Woodpecker, and 2 Pileated Woodpeckers. One Eastern Screech Owl and 6 Great Horned Owls were seen or heard. Much of Wisconsin had a record warm December, which probably affected migrations both of local birds going south and birds from further north coming here.

Lisa Granbur organized things before the count and Kyle Cudworth compiled the data and submitted it to Audubon. Counters included Wayne Rohde, Jim Black, the Mark Blacks, Jim Killian, the Brockmans, the Cudworths, Pat Parsons, Lisa Granbur, Beth Rendall, the Haases, the St. Peters, and Lynne Carpenter; as well as Kevin Dickey, Joe Jacyna, Beth Goeppinger, the Martins, and Doug Mohr. I humbly apologize to anyone I left off this list or whose name I spelled wrong. Participation in the CBC was a good day of birding in spite of being wet and we would love to have some additional birders join the fun next year.



Rio Grande Valley, TX

Destination Birding #3

February - 2024

By Janice Bain

Photos by Janice Bain



There is a long string of World Birding Centers in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. They are parks that protect vital habitat for the benefit of birds and wildlife. Many host visitor centers, educating visitors with informative displays, relevant book selections, artwork, and assorted nature themed gifts.

Many of the parks, refuges, and World Birding Centers have feeding stations which offer a variety of seed feeders, hummingbird feeders, water-drips, fruit, and man-made pools. Most provide viewing benches and some offer blinds to help you achieve an unobtrusive approach. Water is at a premium in Texas, so water-drips and man-made pools are sought out by all wildlife. A short stay at such a feeding station rewards one with sightings of many of the Texas woodland birds.

Within 10 minutes at Resaca de la Palma State Park, a World Birding Center, I viewed: a buff-bellied hummingbird, plain chachalacas, green jays, Altamira orioles, clay-colored thrush, and other songbirds. Seeing and hearing such bird activity in the dead of winter is invigorating.

I spotted many raptors while driving on backroads en route to various birding destinations. The road shoulders are wide and allow bird watchers to safely scan areas with binoculars or take photographs. While I saw 105 species on this trip, seven of which were lifers, I was delighted with the realization that there were many species left to discover (FUTURE ROAD TRIP - yay!). Here is a small selection of the species found on this trip and a little information about each.

Harris's hawk



Harris's hawks are the most social of North American raptors. This hawk forms groups with up to seven members, making hunting more efficient and increasing overall safety. A common danger is colliding with unprotected electrical poles, which commonly kills or maims birds. Were this to happen, another of the group might bring food to the injured hawk as it heals. They hunt as a team: One flushes out prey while another captures it; sometimes they take turns chasing the prey. Harris's hawks are popular among falconers and in educational programs because of their social nature and relative ease with humans. Falconers have a term called "feak," it is the act of a bird cleaning its beak, usually by rubbing it against an object like a perch or branch. Feaking is usually done after eating, to remove

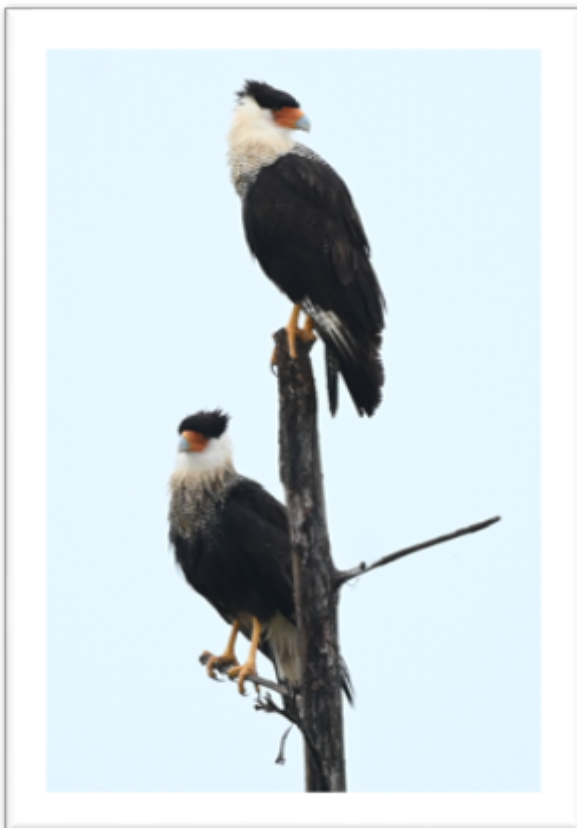
any remaining pieces of food from the beak. I was fortunate to catch a Harris's hawk feaking the beak on this trip. The hawk's blood-tainted feet in the photo attest to a successful kill and a full belly.

White-tailed hawk (light morph)



“I found a new hawk!!!” was the thought that ran through my mind as I observed the tail of this hawk. Its unique tail coloration and short length is diagnostic of the white-tailed hawk. It is known for “kiting,” hanging suspended, watching for prey over the treeless habitat, the grasslands. Their overly broad wings are specially built for kiting. If there is a brush fire, expect to find them hunting the critters fleeing the flames. If you happen upon a nest with an unusually long protruding stick, you may have stumbled upon a white-tailed hawk’s nest. They add this embellishment to their nests for ... wait for it ... no apparent purpose. Investigate the same bush for other nests. Mockingbirds and other songbirds may choose it in hope of some extra protection. In a different nearby bush, you might find a scissor-tailed flycatcher nest. They too seek protection by proximity. Ironically, they will turn around and harass the very same bird they received the protection from. Neighbors, ugh.

Crested caracara



This is a large tropical black-and-white falcon that looks like a hawk and acts like a vulture. It is commonly found walking on the ground on its long orange legs. According to Central and South American folklore, the crested caracara is sometimes called the “Mexican Eagle.” It is the only falcon that collects material to build a nest. The others use a scrape in the ground, or use an old nest built by others. Locals I met on the trip pointed out that if you find one caracara, look around, there will be more; finding a lone crested caracara is unusual.



Roseate spoonbill

To feed, roseate spoonbills move their bills side to side underwater and snap them closed when prey enters. They are tactile feeders, meaning they respond to the prey's touch inside their bill. Spoonbills are able to breathe while their bill is underwater because their nostrils are at the base/top of their beak. They have a 4-foot wingspan and stand just over 2 feet tall. Just as humans bald with age, so too do spoonbills, losing feathers from the top of their heads. Spoonbill species worldwide are white, but the Americas are fortunate to have spoonbills that can turn flamboyant pink. This coloration is due to pigments called carotenoids found in crustaceans and other aquatic invertebrates that form their diet. They often nest, roost, and feed in flocks of four to 400 members. Hawks, racoons, coyotes and alligators all pose danger to this species. Historically, spoonbills have been over-hunted for their beautiful feathers. While their population numbers are still recovering, habitat loss and pollution have become their greatest threats.



Buff-bellied hummingbird



Buff-breasted hummingbirds outsize most of the North American hummingbirds. While our ruby-throated hummingbirds range from 2.8-3.5 inches in length, the buff-breasted is nearly an inch longer. They use their bulk to scare off smaller hummingbirds at the feeders. These hummers like to build their nests in the forks of small trees or bushes usually about 10 feet off the ground. Nests have been found as low as 3 feet and as high as 23 feet. Curiously, this is one of the rare species that migrates northward rather than to the south. From Southern Texas, where they breed, many will migrate northeast into Louisiana to spend the winter.



Great kiskadee

This is an easy bird to find in southern Texas because they are extroverts. They are the most boisterous of the tyrant flycatcher family. They are aggressive, chasing larger animals that attempt to raid their nests—raptors, snakes and in Central and South America, even monkeys. They are built like a kingfisher but are bold like a jay. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, early naturalists had fits trying to classify it. In 1776, it was categorized as a shrike. By 1920 the naturalist William Henry Hudson wrote that the bird “seems to have studied to advantage the various habits of the Kestrel, Flycatcher, Kingfisher, Vulture, and fruit-eating Thrush; and when its weapons prove weak it supplements them with cunning.” It is an omnivorous eater. It sports a black mask that works like the eye-black that athletes smear beneath their eyes. An adaptation to help while hunting in bright light or when dealing with reflections off water. The great kiskadee earned its name for its three-syllable call – kis-ka-dee.



Plain chachalacas



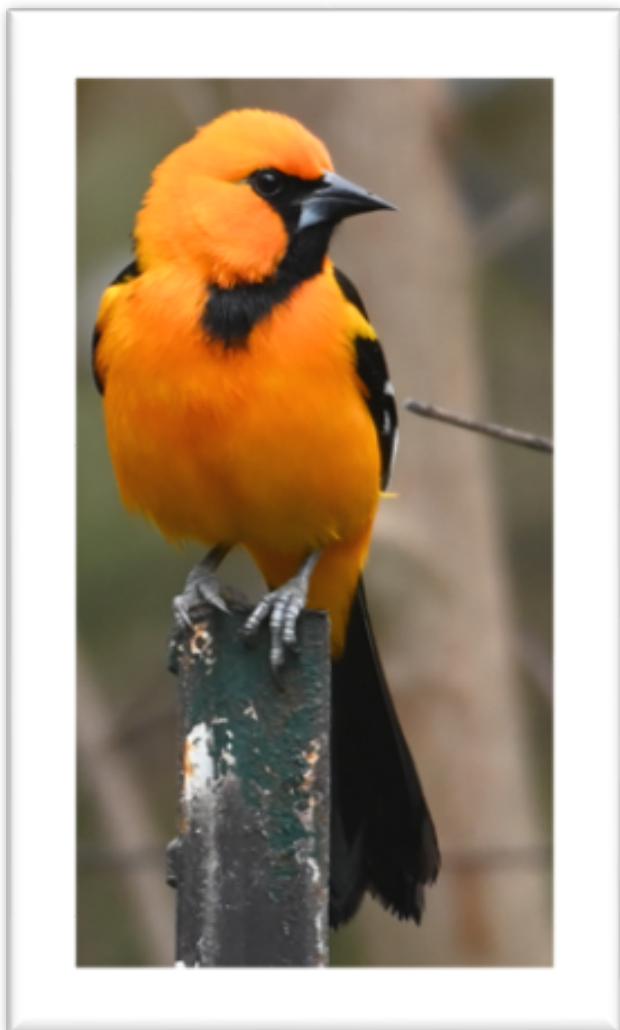
Plain chachalacas belong in the Galliformes order. The order consists of about 290 species of fowl-like or chicken-like birds. Examples include grouse, quail, pheasant, and turkey, most of which are ground dwellers. Plain chachalacas, on the other hand, are at home in trees. Right after hatching, once dry, the young chachalacas can cling to branches with both wings and feet. If you stumble upon a pair of chachalacas in the early morning or early evening, you are likely to hear their loud chatter (cha-cha-lac!). It will help you zero in on their location. Look high, they perch and forage high in the bushes and small trees. They feast on fruits, flowers, buds, and insects. They are easy to find at the various feeding stations as they often come in for the birdseed and/or fruit.

Green jay

This is a bird of the tropics. Its range into the U.S. barely covers the southern tip of Texas. It is exciting to find because it is colorful, noisy, large, and busy. Green jays are one of the rare birds known to use tools. They use sticks to pry up loose bark to expose insects. Like our blue jay, they are excellent mimics. They even imitate the calls of various hawks to scare away other species from the food they want for themselves. Plain chachalacas are common victims of this ruse. A nesting green jay pair will keep last year's offspring as part of their flock and task them with defending the territory. Once the current year's nestlings fledge, the 1-year-olds are ejected from the family flock. While sharing my excitement over finding this colorful species with a local, he responded, with envy in his voice, "Yeah, but you get the *blue jay!*" I have discovered that the joy found in finding specific birds is relative. What we take for granted is often coveted by those who are not lucky enough to live in the north and vice versa.



Altamira oriole



We have the lovely Baltimore oriole, while Texas flaunts the Altamira oriole. Like the green Jay and the crested caracara, it is a tropical species with a tiny portion of its range reaching Texas's Rio Grande Valley. Their woven pendulous nests can be over 2 feet long and are often found hanging from high branches. If you visit the feeding stations offered in various parks and national wildlife refuges, you are likely to find them. At the parks, you see them eating the provided orange halves, but elsewhere, they have been observed eating dead grasshoppers off the grills of cars. Humorously, this must be their idea of a savory snack.

Information gathered from:

- <https://www.audubon.org>
- http://www.theworldbirdingcenter.com/buffbellied_hummingbird.html
- <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/animal/galliform>
- <https://www.animalspot.net/roseate-spoonbill.html>

Field Trip

Tuesday, March 12, 2024

10:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Edgewater Park – E Geneva Street, Williams Bay, WI

Open to the public!

Join us on an outing of birding at Edgewater Park in Williams Bay. We will do some stationary scanning for Waterfowl on one of Wisconsin's largest natural lakes. Lake Geneva is known as an ebird hotspot and primer destination for outdoor recreation. Spending time on or around this body of water is always time well spent.

From Edgewater Park, we will proceed to other good bird watching locations in the area. Such as: Lake Geneva's Library Park, Fontana Lakeshore, Delavan Inlet and Lake Como.

Please contact us and let us know if you are interested in attending this field trip.

<https://lakelandaudubon.com/contact> Call or Text: +1 (262) 729-9702

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Bird Walks

Saturdays

11:00 AM - 1:00 PM

Big Foot Beach State Park

N1550 S Lakeshore Drive, Lake Geneva, WI

Meet in the main parking area to the right of the entrance station a little before 11:00 AM. A state park sticker (\$28, \$13 if age 65 or older) or daily pass (\$8, \$3 if age 65 or older) is required to enter Big Foot Beach State Park.

Sundays

11:00 AM – 1:00 PM

White River County Park

6503 Sheridan Springs Road, Lyons, WI

Get out and enjoy one of the best parks Walworth County has to offer. We'll walk the trails and be on the lookout for birds and other critters. We'll also watch for plant blooms and other interesting elements of nature. Meet at the kiosk by the parking lot a little before 11:00 AM.

Please contact us to let us know you are interested in attending a walk.

<https://lakelandaudubon.com/contact>

Call or Text: +1 (262) 729-9702

The Chat is the newsletter of the Lakeland Audubon Chapter of the National Audubon Society, P.O. Box 473, Elkhorn, WI 53121. Subscription is \$15 per year for printed copies sent by US mail.