

THE SNIPE

The Newsletter of the
Audubon Society of Central Arkansas



Charles Mills

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Bird-watchers Continue to Thrive

Samantha Holschbach

A recently released report reveals that bird-watching continues to thrive as a popular hobby for Americans, even more so for Southerners. According to this U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report, an estimated 33 percent of Southerners bird-watch as of 2006, compared with 20 percent of Americans nationwide participating in the pastime.

"I think people have an innate desire to connect with nature," said Karen Rowe, AGFC bird conservation biologist. "Birding is an easy way to do that."

Particularly in The Natural State, an abiding interest in the outdoors seems commonplace. "Around Arkansas, we have lots of hunters and fisherman, said Jim Allen, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited in Little Rock. "People [here] are conscious of nature."

Allen's store specializes in bird feeders and seeds. The report showed that backyard birding is the most popular way to watch birds, with 88 percent of birders claiming to observe birds at home. Arkansas birders can also see birds in a plethora of local natural areas.

"There are so many amazing places for birding in Arkansas," Rowe said. "We tend to think of those places [e.g. wildlife management areas] for traditional hunting, but they're excellent for bird-watching, too."

Several Arkansas towns have harnessed the power of birding, drawing birders to their streets via birding events and customized accommodations. Clarendon hosts The Big Woods Birding Festival, which offers bird programs and hikes. Hoping to attract eco-tourists, Stuttgart is converting unused land to prairie habitat for birds around Stuttgart Airport. The airport already lures

birders, who walk the grassy spans between runways to find specialty winter birds like Smith's Longspur and Sprague's Pipit. As of April 2008, Stuttgart Airport's birder registry has documented birders from 23 states, two Canadian provinces and Great Britain.

Still, there's room for other Arkansas towns to adopt birder-friendly standards to generate income from tourists. "Tourism departments need to recognize there's a birding element and recognize birders' needs," Rowe said. "Local towns need support, and birders can fill it. They don't realize birders are out there."

At the same time, birders need to identify themselves. "I leave a birder calling card with the tip at restaurants," stated Dr. Dan Scheiman, bird conservation director for Audubon Arkansas. "It lets businesses know that birders contribute to their local economy. Because we birders don't always have binoculars around our necks, we also should be more vocal about who we are and why we are visiting."

According to the report, most birders are middle-aged and older. In contrast, only eight percent of birders are between 16 and 24 years of age.

"We've got to get the youth involved," Rowe said. "AGFC is working hard to recruit young hunters and anglers. To the same extent, we need to recruit young birders. But more than that, we need to recruit conservationists."

Through kindling a passion for nature within youth and communities, Arkansas will ensure that its natural heritage is preserved through birding and other outdoor activities.

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A Single Voice, A Lasting Effect

At about forty minutes before sunset on a February evening we heard them. A pair of Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, an endangered species with populations in Arkansas, were returning to their nesting cavity. For nearly half an hour the birds treated us to beautiful views of their contrasting black and white coloration and a wonderful demonstration of their behavior as they removed portions of the pine bark around their home's entrance so as to release the tree's sap, an activity meant to keep predators away.

I was in the Pine City Natural Area with a member of the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission. To avoid disturbing the woodpeckers, I had asked this individual for advice in viewing the birds and he graciously invited me to join him as he went about his work and observed them. After thanking the worker for the opportunity to see this species and all the information he had taught me that day, I left for home. While driving, I considered how many afternoons this man had gone to this somewhat remote area alone to care for the habitat and record his observations with no one to personally thank him for his work.

Consider how many workers in Arkansas go about their daily duties of conservation, habitat improvement, and education. When these men and women go to work each day their time is spent caring for the habitats and the creatures that depend on the existence of those habitats. These are the birds and other animals we enjoy when out on a field trip with fellow birders or watching our feeders from a kitchen window.

As citizens who enjoy birding we can support the work of professionals by letting our voices and opinions be heard on issues regarding laws and policies in The Natural State. Sometimes issues directly related to the activity of birding appear in the news, such as searching for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker or the SWEPCO coal plant. At other times, there is activity behind the scenes as with the Red-cockaded

Woodpecker, the petition regarding turtle harvesting in Arkansas, and so on. Remember, the professionals carry out the policies of the government for which they work, but all of us play a role in the formation of those policies. No one is neutral, for our silence can have a negative effect just as our active participation can have a positive result.

Before becoming involved with this local Audubon chapter I had enjoyed birding for many years, but did not know all the work which individuals, both professional and amateur, put in so that I might enjoy the birds of Arkansas. I was also quite ignorant of how some who do not enjoy birding and related activities have goals and ideas for land use which could easily jeopardize the waterfowl we scope on Lake Maumelle or the bobwhites which scamper across the road.

If you are reading this publication, you most likely have some interest in birding or nature. I would like to encourage you to simply pay attention to the news when matters arise which hit close to home for you. Take the opportunity to attend an occasional Audubon meeting to stay informed on activities and developments. Consider what skills you do have and how you can use those skills to aid in the effort of habitat and species conservation. This might be nothing more than composing a letter to an elected representative, but such seemingly small gestures can have a very tangible effect on our state's natural heritage now and in the future.

And so, as you read this issue of The Snipe, those faithful workers around the state are going about their quiet business of caring for woodpeckers, maintaining forests, and helping to preserve species for that next generation of birders who will stand in the crisp winter air marveling at the inheritance they have received from our generation. Support them with your encouragement, with your activities, and with your voice. Then go out and enjoy the birds.

Conservation News

Barry Haas

Update on BFI Landfill in Little Rock- Raising a Stink

Earlier this year the Little Rock Board of Directors voted to ban the disposal of shale drilling waste in the BFI landfill on Mablevale Pike just south of Asher Avenue. Imagine a major garbage dump almost in the middle of Little Rock.

Residents in that area filed complaints with the City and Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality over odors in surrounding neighborhoods that were suspected of coming from shale drilling wastes being trucked into Little Rock and dumped at the BFI facility. At one time the BFI facility was taking in garbage and other waste from at least eight Arkansas counties. BFI sued the City over the shale drilling waste ban and recently prevailed in a local circuit court that ruled Little Rock had

exceeded its authority. At this time it is not known if the City will appeal that ruling.

One factor in Little Rock's decision whether to appeal is that BFI may reach its permitted capacity for this landfill sometime next year and an appeal might not be heard before that time. A strong argument can be made that this landfill should never have been permitted to operate in the first place inside the Little Rock city limits and in a wetlands area near the confluence of Rock and Fourche Creeks. Audubon Arkansas has been working for years to rehabilitate the Fourche Creek watershed and turn it into a premier urban wetland almost unparalleled anywhere else in the country.

Update on Lake Maumelle & Your Drinking Water

In late April the Pulaski County Quorum Court approved new regulations affecting the Pulaski County portion of the Lake Maumelle watershed. Lake Maumelle provides 60% of the drinking water for 400,000 central Arkansans, more than any other single source in the state.

Hoped for county protections did not include essentials like 5-acre minimum lot sizes and other protective measures that were fundamental protections in the Lake Maumelle Watershed Management Plan developed by a wide range of community groups working with Central Arkansas Water. The new county regulations started a process to develop a stormwater management plan which should help control, but not eliminate, construction runoff laden with pollutants from draining into Lake Maumelle. Also to be developed is a computer model called the Site Evaluation Tool (SET) that will help predict damage to the watershed during construction of new houses. The SET can then be used to determine how much forested land must be left intact or establish maximum limits on impervious areas to reduce surface runoff. Pulaski Co. is also working on a countywide land use plan that, when completed next year, will hopefully lead to zoning in the Lake Maumelle watershed for more direct control over development and its impact on the lake and our drinking water quality.

The Lake Maumelle watershed, the area surrounding the lake that drains downhill into it, is over 90% forested, which offers the highest level of protection. As that forest protection is

destroyed during development, great care must be taken to ensure Lake Maumelle does not become overly polluted. The lake averages only about 25 feet in depth, making it very sensitive to nutrients/pollutants like phosphorous. Too many nutrients flowing into the lake can lead to things like algae bloom, and the end result would be water that has either taste or odor problems. With more pollution flowing into the lake, water treatment must be increased, and some water treatment methods produce nasty byproducts like carcinogens. By far the safest and cheapest protection for our primary drinking water supply is to keep pollutants from getting into the lake in the first place.

ASCA, along with a number of other community groups, has continued to monitor and help spur progress in developing and implementing the necessary protections for Lake Maumelle. This is far too important to leave to chance or to those who hope to profit from developing the area around the lake. Development will occur, but it must not be allowed to ruin our drinking water supply.

Clean, safe, affordable drinking water is becoming more and more critical all across the United States. Fifty years ago here in central Arkansas we had visionary community leaders who created this incredible drinking water supply with both ample quantity and very high quality. It is our responsibility to make sure we adequately protect Lake Maumelle not only for ourselves but for future generations.

Bird Profiles

White-eyed Vireo: Spectacled Songster from the Bush

Voicing a shrill burst of fast, garbled notes, the White-eyed Vireo sings unseen from within a tangle of branches, placing the “children should be seen and not heard” proverb seemingly on its head. Though common, this ‘unruly child’ of a bird truly is difficult to see—to the dismay of wildlife watchers—in its favored habitat of dense shrubs and scrubby wood edges and pastures.

“Hoping to see one of these birds, I stood perfectly still while one individual sang in a thicket so close I could see the leaves tremble every time the bird produced his snappy little song,” Arkansas Audubon Society President Jack Stewart said. “After a few minutes the vireo’s curiosity over this unusual human behavior brought him out of hiding and into the top of a bush where he scolded me with raspy call notes. In this way I discovered the secret to spotting a White-eyed Vireo—listen for the song and stand still until the bird comes to you.”

Should you happen to catch a glimpse of this vireo, you’ll see a stocky songbird with a hodge-podge of olive-green and yellow hues, the yellow concentrated on the flanks and around the eyes to form vivid ‘spectacles.’ True to its name, the White-eyed Vireo possesses white irises, the only vireo species in the U.S. that has this feature. Of the 15 vireo species found in the U.S., seven are found regularly in Arkansas. All vireos have a chunky build, short legs and slightly hooked bills to feed on insects, berries and larvae.

Look—or rather listen—for this secretive vireo between mid-March and September in shrubs along park paths as you walk with your family. Its song often contains imitated call notes from a slew of backyard birds like the Great-crested Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Summer Tanager and more, adding interest and mystique to this seldom-seen songster.

Northern Harrier: Hunting by Grazing

Like a large moth pumping delicate wings, the Northern Harrier, or “Marsh Hawk” combs a field for rodent prey, drifting slowly across the expanse just inches from vegetation, propelling forth with gentle wing strokes. This raptor’s patient sweeps to find food might seem like relaxing endeavors—even grazing—but in actuality the harrier is employing both concentrated sight and sound, an unusual trait for a hawk.

“This hawk is equipped with owl-like facial disks to enhance hearing,” said Karen Rowe, AGFC bird conservation biologist.

A serious hunter, the Northern Harrier dines on rodents, other small mammals and birds, but will sometimes strike larger animals and drown them.

Another unusual quality of this harrier concerns its coloration. Normally the sexes can’t be differentiated,

but in this raptor’s case the male and female plumages are strikingly different. The female possesses dark brown back feathers edged in tawny hues, while her underside is barred in white and tan streaks. In contrast, the male is 50 percent smaller and marked by a gray back, black wingtips, and clean white on the breast and under the wings and tail.

“Both sexes harbor a characteristic white rump that screams ‘I’m a harrier,’ making identifying this bird doable from a distance,” Rowe said.

A farmer’s friend, this harrier is best seen between late August and early April floating over Arkansas agricultural fields, marshes and prairies. Look for them meandering through meadows seemingly without a care, and then realize that this intense predator is hard at work, about to snag a meal at any moment.

--Samantha Holschbach
Bird Profiles continued on page 6

Upcoming Programs

The ASCA meets at 7:00 PM the second Thursday of each month at the John Gould Fletcher Library (except where noted), located at 823 Buchanan Street, on the corner of Buchanan and H Streets, just off North University Ave. Programs are free and open to the public.

September 10, 2009 – Birds of Arkansas and Louisiana

Speaker: **Robert Herron**

Program: **Arkansas and Louisiana Bird Slideshow**

Robert Herron will present a slideshow of the many colorful birds he has photographed throughout Arkansas and Louisiana over the years.

Robert, a retired computer operator, is now a full time amateur photographer. He is a member of ASCA and the Arkansas Outdoor Photographers Club. While birds and waterfalls are among his favorite subjects to photograph, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee is one of his favorite places to visit.

October 8, 2009 – Arkansas State Parks

Speaker: **Jay Miller**

Program: **Arkansas State Parks and What Makes Them Unique**

Back by popular demand, Jay Miller will present a program featuring several Arkansas State Parks and what makes each of them unique to the six natural divisions in Arkansas.

Jay Miller has worked for the Department of Parks and Tourism for over 30 years, for the past twenty-five years as Chief of Park Interpretation for Arkansas State Parks. As head of the Program Services division, Jay is responsible for interpretation, publications, and exhibits, and oversees training and direction for the interpretation and education programs within Arkansas's 52 state parks and museums.

November 12, 2009 - Watching Birds with Radar

Speaker: **Jeff Short**

Program: **Watching Birds with Radar**

Concentrations of migrating birds reflect radar's electromagnetic energy. Thus radar can be used to "see" a phenomenon that is often difficult to study. Jeff Short will discuss how radar is an important tool in studying bird movements and developments to help reduce bird-human conflicts.

Over the last 42 years, Jeff has flown with birds as a civil and military pilot. In his engineering work with the US Air Force, he also became an expert on bird hazards to aviation and new technologies to improve flight safety. He has a BS and MS in Zoology from U of A; and a MS in Environmental Planning from Florida State University.

Arkansas Audubon Society Fall 2009 Call to Meeting

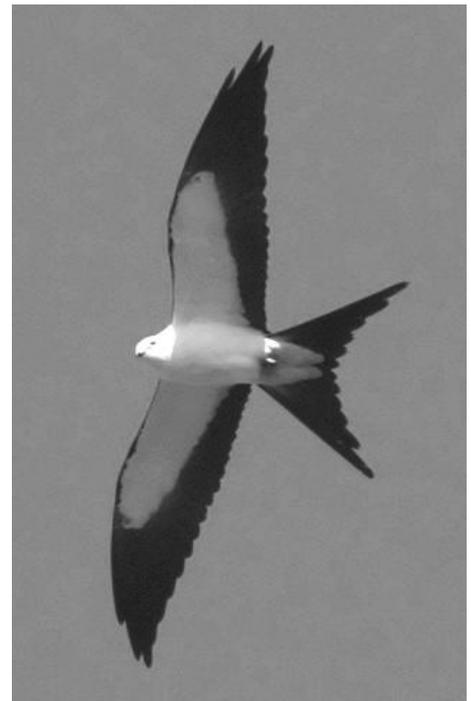
The 2009 fall meeting of the Arkansas Audubon Society will be held September 25-27 at Forrest City, AR. Friday registration (4:00 - 6:00 pm) will be held in the breakfast area of the Hampton Inn. To make reservations at the Hampton Inn, call 1-870-630-9000 and use confirmation number #82106348.

Friday field trips start at 1:00 p.m. A new format is in place for this meeting. There will not be a Friday evening dinner or speaker. Instead these events have been replaced by a Trust/Camp reception, a member's slide show, and a discussion of field trips.

Saturday field trips include: Village Creek State Park, Ensley Bottoms (Memphis, TN), St. Francis National Forest, Native Prairie Areas, and Wapanocca National Wildlife Refuge.

Saturday night's dinner and evening program will be held at the Forrest City Convention Center. Theo Witsell with the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission will speak on the flora and ecology of the Grand Prairie.

To download a registration form, agenda and field trip schedule, visit the Arkansas Audubon Society web site at: <http://www.arbirds.org/>.



This Swallow-tailed Kite, a first for Pulaski County, was photographed by Jim Dixon at Two Rivers Park in Little Rock on August 23, 2009.

Mississippi Kite: Mini yet Mighty Raptor

Continued from page 4

Diving and dodging, hovering and spiraling, the aerodynamic Mississippi Kite pierces the sky like a miniature fighter jet in full view of both city and country dwellers.

This small, sleek raptor features an overall gray body with a dark tail and wingtips and a white head, the latter causing it to sometimes be mistaken for a Bald Eagle according to AGFC bird conservation biologist Karen Rowe.

Though a Bald Eagle can easily weigh 16 times as much as a Mississippi Kite, kites exude the same fierce boldness, most expressly seen when they dive-bomb people whom the kites perceive as a threat to their nests in urban settings. Due to this defensive territorial behavior, at least five western U.S. states have contended with management and public relation issues when it comes to educating the public about this bird.

Despite their somewhat tainted image, Mississippi Kites pose no harm in most circumstances and are a joy to behold as they lazily swirl in kettles, large numbers of raptors that collectively ride thermals (rising bubbles of warm air) to save energy in flight. While soaring they capture their predominant prey, medium-to-large insects.

Kites are found from April through September across Arkansas in localized populations. Look for their elegant silhouettes gliding over woodland edges as you tend to your garden or bike around the city in the afternoons or evenings.



Mississippi Kite
Jim Dixon photo



ASCA Field Trip Schedule

ASCA sponsors numerous field trips throughout the year. The trips are open to all and carpooling is available for trips outside of Little Rock. This is a great opportunity for novice birders to meet and learn more about birds from experienced birders, or perhaps a chance to see a life bird for those more dedicated. For more information visit www.ascabird.org or contact Karen Holliday, ASCA Field Trip Coordinator at karenh@arkleg.state.ar.us or (501) 920-3246.

September 19, 2009

Bona Dea Trails and Sanctuary

Bona Dea Trails and Sanctuary, in Russellville, is 186 acres of wetlands and woodlands in the Prairie Creek floodplain. The trails are paved and level for easy walking. Our target birds will be fall migrants.

We will meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Mayflower commuter lot off I-40 West at Exit 135. We will arrive at the Bona Dea Trails parking lot around 8:15 a.m. for anyone who would like to meet us there. There are picnic tables at Bona Dea, or several fast food restaurants nearby. Depending on time and current bird sightings, the group may choose to take side trips to Holla Bend or Lake Dardanelle.

From Little Rock, take I-40 west to Russellville. Take Exit 81. Turn left off the exit ramp, then left at the light to go south on Hwy 7. Cross over the interstate, take a right at the second stoplight (Lakefront Drive). The trails parking area will be on your left in less than a mile.

October 24, 2009

Millwood Lake

Our target birds will be gulls, waterfowl, and fall land birds. We will meet at 7:00 a.m. at the commuter lot at I-630 and Shackelford Road in Little Rock. We should arrive around 10:00 a.m. at the observation deck at the Beard's Bluff Public Recreation Area for those who would like to meet us there. Bring your scope, water, and lunch. Very little walking will be involved. Drive time from Little Rock to Millwood Lake is three hours each way. This will be an all-day trip.

November 21, 2009

Lake Dardanelle

Target birds for Lake Dardanelle will be ducks, mergansers, gulls, and other waterfowl. We will meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Mayflower commuter lot off I-40 West at Exit 135. Very little walking is involved. Be sure to bring your scope. Lunch will be on your own. Members may wish to stop at Holla Bend to look for sparrows and eagles before going home.

For those who wish to meet us there, we will stop at the Taco Bell (across from McDonalds), located on the corner of Hwy 7 and Hwy 22 in Dardanelle. We should arrive around 8:45 a.m.



Field Trip Reports

Central Ozark Highlands

June 20, 2009

Leif Anderson graciously guided 16 other birders along various roads off Scenic Highway 7 in the Ozark National Forest. We located most of our target breeding warblers. Along Sulphur Road near Pelsor, we found 5 CERULEAN WARBLERS, 4 Ovenbirds, 4 Hooded Warblers, and 2 Kentucky Warblers. Along Page Hollow Road we added another Cerulean plus a cooperative Yellow-throated Warbler and an uncooperative Black-throated Green Warbler. Two Prairie Warblers were another easy find on Granny Gap Road. Worm-eating Warblers kept quiet. Other notables included: Broad-winged Hawk, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, and Blue Grosbeak. We encountered 38 species in all. Thanks, Leif, for contributing to yet another successful ASCA outing! --Dan Scheiman

Bois d'Arc Wildlife Management Area

July 11, 2009

Thirty birders sheltered in the shade as much as possible as we ooo'ed and aww'ed at the adult and young PURPLE GALLINULES and COMMON MOORHENS creeping among the lily pads at Bois d'Arc WMA. Several Anhingas and two White Ibises were other treats. We did well with Ardeids: Cattle Egret, Snowy Egret, Great Egret, Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Little Blue Heron (including two nestlings), Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, and a LEAST BITTERN. We saw 38 bird species plus a sizable AMERICAN ALLIGATOR. --Dan Scheiman

Bald Knob National Wildlife Refuge

August 22, 2009

Twenty-five adults and four youths participated in the field trip to Bald Knob NWR. With the temperature in the mid 80s and low humidity, it made for an extremely pleasant day of birding for August. We were greeted, just inside the refuge, by a Green Heron, perched high on a wire, the first of many good birds for the day. Only one pond had decent shorebird habitat. Highlights included: 1 BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER, 3 WILSON'S PHALAROPES, several STILT SANDPIPERS, Semi-palmated Plovers, Short-billed and Long-billed Dowitchers, dozens of Black-necked Stilts, 3 NORTHERN PINTAILS, Northern Shovelers, and Blue-wing Teal. In a wet shrubby area, approximately 15 adult and 2-3 juvenile BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERONS were found, a lifebird for several on the trip. While Wood Storks and Roseate Spoonbills were absent, the group still enjoyed watching a coyote hunting in the field.

Several in the group continued on to Treadway's fish farm where 1 CASPIAN TERN and 2 Pied-billed Grebes were seen. At 1:15, Delos McCauley called to report he had relocated the SWALLOW-TAILED KITES in Pine Bluff. With that, the remaining 14 birders headed to Lock and Dam #4, where on Knott's Island Road, we had our first glimpse of 2 SWALLOW-TAILED KITES circling with 5 Mississippi Kites and a Turkey Vulture. We then moved to a field beneath the Hwy. 79 overpass where we were again able to spot the kites soaring over an open field and swooping down to the treetops. The kites were lifebirds for several in the group!

On the way back to Little Rock, on Hwy 13 we stopped to look at 2 SNOW GEESE in a field, one was a blue phase and the other white. These birds are a very early arrival. We tallied 45 species for the day. --Karen Holliday

Audubon Society of Central Arkansas

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Northern Bob White
Dale Provost photo

Audubon Society of Central Arkansas

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The Snipe is published quarterly by the Audubon Society of Central Arkansas. Our mission is to encourage programs and activities supporting all things natural, wild, and free, especially birds, bird habitat stability and improvement, as well as to promote fellowship among members, educate and inspire the public, and champion the highest standards of ethical outdoor conduct.

Find an Injured Bird?

For a listing of an AR Game & Fish Commission authorized Migratory Bird Rehabilitator in your area, you can visit their website at:

<http://www.agfc.com/wildlife-conservation/rehabilitators.aspx>
or
http://www.agfc.com/pdfs/rehab/migratorybird_rehablist.pdf

*****Arkansas Rare Bird Alert (RBA)*****

The RBA lists rare and unusual birds found throughout the state and if possible directions to these birds. **To report or hear the latest sightings**, call (501) 753-5853. The number is listed as J.J. Audubon in the phone book. It is the only white page listing with the last name Audubon.