

# THE TRUMPETER: WISCONSIN METRO AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

*Our mission is to encourage wise environmental practices through education and awareness.*

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Welcome to Robin Langenbach!



# Wisconsin Metro AUDUBON SOCIETY

## Upcoming Wisconsin Metro Audubon Programs

Wisconsin Metro Audubon presents in-person programs at Wehr Nature Center, 9701 W. College Avenue. Join us at 7 pm. Zoom program available with registration. Send an email to [wimetrobird@gmail.com](mailto:wimetrobird@gmail.com)

### Program Date: February 21, 2024



Eric Manges, Fox6 Meteorologist will present a program, **"WHERE METEOROLOGY AND ECOLOGY MEET"** Gardening for biodiversity and mimicking native landscapes in your own yard can have

profound positive impacts even with a small area. And this talk is how he learned that firsthand.

Eric says "I've been a meteorologist in Milwaukee since late summer of 2019. Born and raised in Rochester Minnesota, went to Iowa State University for college. Worked in Tyler Texas for two years before coming here. My passion for meteorology all started with my love of trees growing up. But since moving to Wisconsin, I still love trees but I've certainly expanded to all forms of life."

### Program Date: March 20, 2024

Brian Russart, Natural Areas Supervisor for the Milwaukee County Parks will present **"WILDLIFE HABITAT PROGRESS IN RESTORING NATURAL AREAS IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY PARKS"**.

The Milwaukee County Parks Natural Areas Program has grown exponentially over the past decade to include robust scientific research and ecological restoration efforts put in place to manage the park system's 10,000-acre natural areas program. Come learn about recent wildlife habitat initiatives that are making meaningful progress in maintaining and restoring the ecology of Milwaukee County.

Brian Russart has been the Natural Areas Supervisor for the park system for the past 16 years, overseeing the Natural Areas Program which is investing millions of dollars of ecological restoration projects within the park system.



### Program Date: April 17, 2024

Join Patrick (PJ) Liesch for **"WISCONSIN INSECT TRENDS FROM THE UW INSECT DIAGNOSTIC LAB"**.



Insect Diagnostic Lab. PJ - the Wisconsin Bug Guy - is the director of the UW-Madison Insect Diagnostic Lab.

With an estimated 20,000 insect species in Wisconsin, we can see many different insect patterns each year. Join in as we learn about some of the most notable insect trends in Wisconsin of the last year, as well as some surprises from the UW

PJ is also a regular guest on Wisconsin Public Radio's Larry Meiller Show. This is a Zoom presentation with the audience meeting at Wehr Nature Center and the speaker on the screen.



# SPRING/SUMMER BIRDING EVENTS

Planning is under way for bird walks and field trips for spring & summer! Our next newsletter (planned for April) will include details for some of our favorite birding activities such as the Forest Home Cemetery walk and Seminary Woods hike. We may have a few surprises up our sleeve as well. And don't forget to watch our Facebook page (AudubonWMAS) for pop-up events and other opportunities.

## About BIPOC Birding Club

The club was formed in June of 2021 for people of color and anyone who shares and supports the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access for all. Its long-term goals are to encourage love of nature and birding for those who might not have considered it, to foster curiosity that might lead to life-long careers and hobbies, to offer the healing aspect of nature to all, and to encourage more people of color to become birders and nature enthusiasts.

To learn more, visit the club's website <https://www.bipocbirdingclub.org/>, follow on Facebook and Instagram, or contact Rita Flores Wiskowski, the Milwaukee area coordinator, at (414) 766-0760 or email [bipocbirdingclubmilwaukee@gmail.com](mailto:bipocbirdingclubmilwaukee@gmail.com)

## WHO DO I CONTACT?

### MEMBERSHIP

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### PROGRAMS

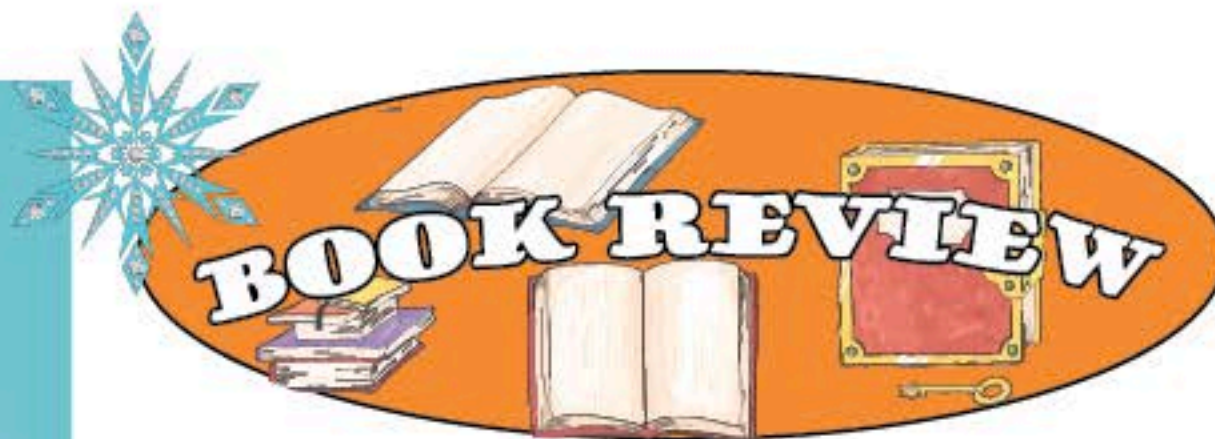
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### ALL OTHER INQUIRIES

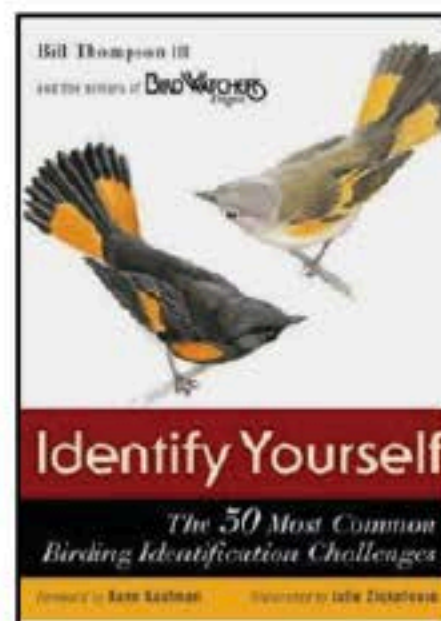
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BY ROBIN LANGENBACH

## "IDENTIFY YOURSELF - THE 50 MOST COMMON BIRDING IDENTIFICATION CHALLENGES"

By Bill Thompson III and the editors  
of Bird Watcher's Digest



When I first started reading this book, I thought I'd never get through it. All the details and so many nuances, from field marks to habitat, from seasonal plumage to flight behavior patterns made it seem impossible. But once I got into it, I wondered how I ever identified a bird without reading this first. The authors, who are birding experts at Bird Watcher's Digest, provide easy solu-

tions to help identify and differentiate the most challenging birds, such as soaring raptors and shorebirds. To reduce birding frustration, as experienced by most birders at one time or another, the book offers some easy to remember techniques. Take vireos and fall warblers, for example. The authors suggest separating bird species into subcategories. Vireos can be divided into groups of plain winged and "spectacled", and fall warblers can be grouped by plain warblers and streaky warblers. By combining these techniques with beautiful illustrations to show key field marks, it picks up where a field guide leaves off. The reader actually learns how to consider all the pieces of the puzzle to accurately identify those confusing and similar birds.

Although this book is intended for beginning to intermediate level birders, it's a good resource for all levels to have on hand, especially when we may need to refresh our memories as the seasons change!





## Periodical Cicada Fieldtrip

Location: Walworth County, Big Foot Beach State Park

Date: TBA, Tentative 5/25/24 OR 6/1/24

Time: 9:30 AM - 12 PM

Transportation: Meet at the park

Send an email to [wimetrobird@gmail.com](mailto:wimetrobird@gmail.com) to receive updates.



2024 is an especially exciting year for the 17-year cicada. In 2007 board member, Pat Fojut was lucky enough to visit Big Foot Beach State Park in Lake Geneva. We saw more than a thousand cicadas climbing up trees and emerging from the ground. I am planning a fieldtrip to explore the area including how birds take advantage of a rare food source (Every 17 years!). The insects emerge together for about a week and there is evidence that this occurs when the soil temperature is 64 F in the spring. The tentative dates will be determined with weather and potential scouting of the area. Saturday 5/25/24 or Saturday 6/1/24. We will meet at Big Foot Beach state park at 9:30 am. A park sticker is required. Bring water and expect mosquitos and flying insects, wear protective clothing, long sleeves, solid shoes and a hat. Partnering with Southern WI Butterfly Assoc. NABA

## IS IT TIME TO RENEW YOUR AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP?



Your renewal date is now printed on the newsletter above your address. Your renewal date is also on the magazine label of the National Audubon magazine.

Renew through WMAS! More of your donation will support local activities and conservation projects. Use the form in our newsletter or on our website,  
<http://www.wisconsinmetroaudubonsociety.org>

## eBird and Beyond!

Advanced eBird Class with Badgerland Birders

Date: March 16, 2024

Time: 12 PM - 2 PM (EventBrite)

Registration will be available in February – watch our website and FB page!



Embark on a journey into the advanced realms of eBird with our comprehensive class! Whether you're a seasoned eBird user or just starting out, this session is tailored to enhance your eBird experience. Explore how to optimize eBird for personal listings, contribute valuable citizen science data for research, and elevate your birding adventures. From uncovering top hotspots during your travels to creating detailed trip reports encompassing multiple locations, we'll guide you through maximizing the platform's potential. Learn how to seamlessly integrate media, delve into location-specific life list predictions, and more! It is optional to bring your laptop for a hands-on experience using Wehr NC WIFI to understand differences between computer eBird and mobile eBird. Weather permitting, join us for a short walk to showcase the functionality of the eBird mobile app. Elevate your birding journey with our advanced eBird class!

*Presented by:* Derek & Ryan Sallman of Badgerland Birders. Join us at the Wehr Nature Center, 9701 W. College Avenue, Franklin, WI

*Note - WMAS will cover attendee's parking fee to support Wehr Nature Center*





## : Bird Brief :

### *Eastern Screech Owl (Megascops asio)*



Photos & text by  
Heidi Meier  
December 9, 2023

**ORDER:** Strigiformes (2 Families)  
**FAMILY:** Strigidae (229 Species)

I was taking a nature walk on the Summerfest grounds overlooking Lakeshore State Park on a beautiful, crisp, clear, late, autumn day. While walking south near the lakefront by the boulders, I kept hearing a ruckus of cawing American Crows (corvids) coming from the top of some clustered Cottonwood trees. Usually, when there is a murder of crow jumping and cawing, it makes me think there is a raptor resting nearby. And to my delight, there was a fluffy, erect eared, robin-sized owl at the very top of the tree looking down at me from a branch concealing all but its head. I get so excited when I spot owls because I rarely get to see these stealthy, solitary, camouflaged, quiet birds on my walks.

When I see an owl, I always think of a few questions. Why do some birds, like corvids, pester these birds of prey? Is it because owls may have a better catch to steal in their talons? Or is the owl disturbing a crow's nest? This pestering behavior is called **mobbing**, and American Crow mob by aggressively calling while closely approaching the predator. The reason they mob is to alert other animals of a potential danger. The corvid ruckus can also bring other predators to the region, which typically is the reason small owls fly away! A final question I ponder is, do owls prefer the south side of trees to roost or nest in for optimal warmth during the winter? I usually spot Screech Owls in tree cavities on the southern side of deciduous trees or resting on a conifer branch in the sun on cold days. Studies *have* found that owls *do* prefer south to southeast tree habitats to protect themselves and nestlings from prevailing northerly winter winds.

Owls in our area are approaching the breeding season, which occurs in late winter. Eastern Screech Owls find lifetime mates unless one passes early, in which case, mate searching begins. Females respond to prospective males that jump along the branch they share while raising wings, and beak chattering. The male will offer her food while frequently blinking and bowing. The bonded pair often duet together with monotone trills. Both will search for nesting sites, but the female chooses the final location. The female will lay around four eggs and brood for a couple of weeks while the male delivers her food. The Eastern Screech Owl has a remarkable nesting behavior first observed by Gehlbach in Texas. He found that an adult owl will carry back a Texas blind snake to the nest in its bill. The snake will be dropped into the nest and then burrow to the bottom and feed on ants and fly larva that would otherwise attack the growing chicks. This is called a **sympiotic** relationship. Gehlbach found that this relationship greatly improved chick survivability and health.

Diet consists of insects, small mammals, small birds, and even fish. I often wonder if the regional diet causes different feather colorations because Eastern Screech Owls in northern and western habitats are more gray while owls in southern and eastern habitats are more red. Foraging is mostly at dawn and dusk.







One particular song bird that also forages early and late in the day is the Northern Cardinal, making this bird a common meal for Screech Owls. Unlike other raptors, which eat slowly, owls swallow prey whole to avoid predator interaction and regurgitate undigestible contents in the form of compact pellets. Owls have *zygodactyl* feet which means they can move the outer toe in front or in back which aids in capture of prey. Prey are caught off guard by owls in flight because of comb-like edging on the outer edges of the primary wings. This muffles all air sound traveling over the wings making them stealthy predators.



This is a great time of year to find a bird watching group to go out looking for owls. Owls are very difficult to see; however, they are more vocal during dusk and dawn. Use discretion when using any recorded owl sounds on your walk. If you play the "high horse whinny" Eastern Screech Owl song, this can alert Great Horned Owls to swoop in and take this small owl for a meal. Likewise, if you play a Great Horned Owl song, this can scare Screech Owls away from their safe habitat. Leave the playing of recorded sounds to your guide, hopefully before the walk. Study owl songs prior to venturing out. Avoid playing sounds on the actual walk.

Here is some additional information on providing nesting habits in your yard. In addition to native nests, Eastern Screech Owls *will* also seek artificial boxes for nesting. They prefer the following:

- Natural wood 8-10" square box - like a Wood Duck box
- Entrance hole of 3" at least 12" above the bottom of the box
- Coarse wood shavings for nest
- Face box towards the east or south
- Secure 10-20' in shaded area
- Add additional nearby boxes for the pair, nestlings, and food cache (this will increase the chance the pair will accept your boxes).

Enjoy the winter season!



#### References:

1. Gehlbach, F.R. 1994. *The Eastern Screech Owl*. Texas A&M University Press, College Station, TX.
2. Gehlbach, F.R., and Baldrige, R.S., 1987. Live blind snakes (*Leptotyphlops dulcis*) in Eastern Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) nests: a novel commensalism. *Oncologia*, 71:560-563.
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5. Peterson Reference Guide to Owls of North America and the Caribbean. 2015. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, New York, NY.
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# RARE BIRDS WELCOMED TO WISCONSIN!



Photo credit: Rita Flores-Wiskowski

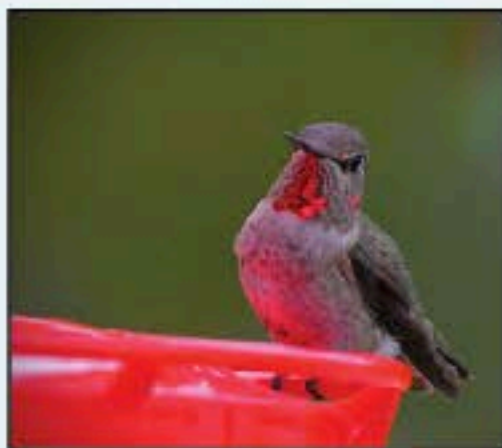


Photo credit: Anna's hummingbird - Russ Boushon

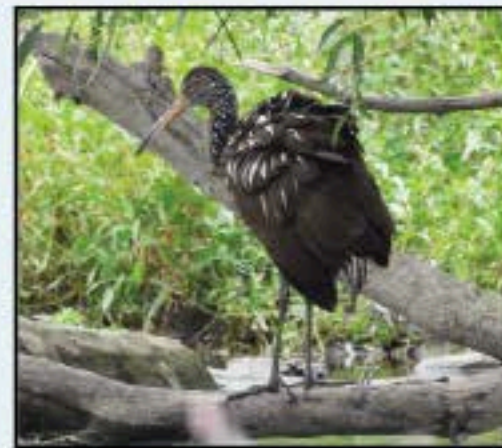


Photo credit: Limpkin - Colleen Resendiz



## BY ROBIN LANGENBACH

We welcomed numerous rare birds to Wisconsin in 2023, much to the delight of birders across the state. Hopefully they found their way home, but there are others who may be finding Wisconsin a hospitable place to live. Here are just a few.

**AMERICAN FLAMINGOS** – Never before has a wild American Flamingo been spotted in Wisconsin. After hearing about the ones in Ohio, we thought it couldn't get any crazier than that. And then, on Friday September 22nd, five flamingos graced the shores of Lake Michigan at South Beach in Port Washington! They hung around for a day, and then moved on to Lake Pentenwell in Adams County. It is believed they arrived here from the Yucatan when they were caught up in winds of Hurricane Ida. They haven't been seen in the state as of early October.

**ROSEATE SPOONBILL** – The usual range of the Spoonbill is from the southeast coast of the United States, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and even as far south as South America. Here in the U.S., they are moving northward out of their historical nesting grounds in the Everglades due to rising water levels and increasing salinity. This is forcing young spoonbills to venture even further north to scout for suitable nesting sites. Is that what brought the Spoonbill to Green Bay in July? It would be nice to imagine, but so far, the northern most successful nest was in Charleston County, South Carolina.

**FLAME COLORED TANAGER** – Spotted at Sheridan Park in Cudahy in late April, this is the first sighting of the species in Wisconsin, or anywhere north of Arizona and Texas. The Flame Colored Tanager is native to Mexico and Central America.

**PAINTED REDSTART** – This bird was also way out of its range, which is the canyons of south east Arizona and the arid woodlands of Mexico and Northern Central America. It was spotted in Wisconsin in mid-April at Spring Green Reserve near Sauk City.

**LIMPKIN** – Limpkins are native to Florida. In 2023, a limpkin was first spotted in Racine County in July. Since then, they've been spotted at Case Eagle Park, as well as in Dane County, Brown County, Sheboygan County, and in Milwaukee County at Estabrook Park and Wehr Nature Center. Based on plumage and other indicators, this was not a single individual.

Experts say that they are following food sources, which include the invasive apple snails and freshwater mussels. A limpkin was spotted in Dane County as recently as November 30th.

**KITES** – Three species of Kites were observed in 2023 - the White Tail, Scissor Tail, and Mississippi Kites. This is the only time that three species of Kites have been recorded in Wisconsin within the same year. The White Tail Kite is commonly found along the Pacific and Gulf coasts. This is the fourth time a White Tail Kite has been recorded in Wisconsin, this time in Door County. Scissor Tail Kites are common nesting birds in Florida, but also range from Texas to South Carolina and winter in South America. It was spotted in Wisconsin on July 7, flying about five miles north of Goose Pond Sanctuary, east of Poynette. The Mississippi Kite is generally found in the southern Great Plains, but are now expanding their range northward. It's even been confirmed that they are nesting in Wisconsin! This year, a Mississippi Kite was spotted in Janesville, as in previous years.

**ANNA'S HUMMINGBIRD** – This cutie hails from the west coast of North America, from southern Canada to northern Baja. It is a remarkably hardy bird, tolerating sub-freezing temperatures and even subzero for a few days. A well-known birder in Milwaukee hosted the Anna's Hummingbird at his feeders from late October to November 28th.

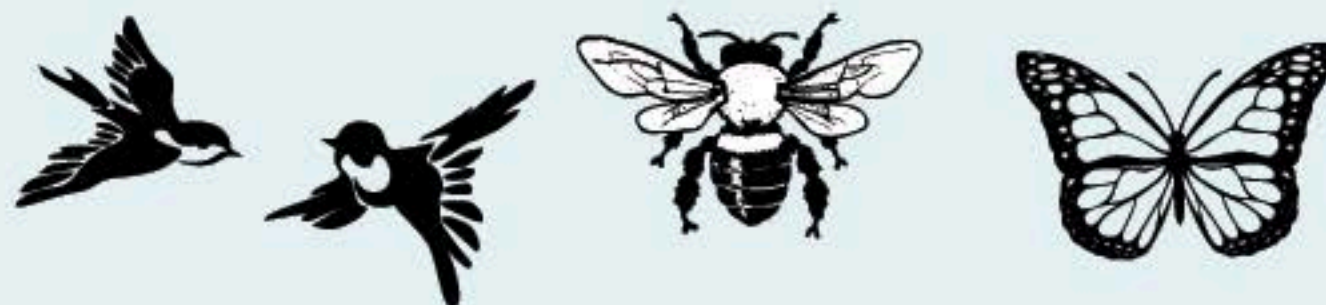
**SPOTTED TOWHEE** – Early November brought two spotted Towhees, a male and a female, to the feeders in Grant Park. They made the journey from the sunbaked thickets of the West and Southwest United States.

**CLARK'S NUTCRACKER** – This bird was spotted in Dane County in October. Native to the Western mountains of the United States, it typically does not stray into the Midwest.

**ANCIENT MURRELET** – This bird was spotted on November 24th in the waters of Green Bay near Sturgeon Bay. Its typical range is the Pacific Ocean including Alaska, British Columbia and Washington.

**BALD EAGLES** – Although Bald Eagles are not rare in Wisconsin, they have been rare in Milwaukee County... until 2023! Historical records indicate that for the first time in perhaps 130 years, Milwaukee County witnessed three Bald Eagles fledge from two different nests. Let's hope this year brings us even more!





## Gardening for the Birds, Bees & Butterflies

- Jim Cieslak

The pollinator garden at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church has been sprinkled with another batch of wildflower seeds, and a light covering of mulch to keep things from moving around for the winter. The fresh deer prints show continued browsing throughout the fall. We will give the deer (and my back) a break and leave everything up for the winter. Waiting to see what happens next spring and summer will be a true test of my patience. Every time I have been there, people have expressed their appreciation for the garden, and the birds, bees and butterflies have as well. Thank you to all who have helped and encouraged this project.



## BACKYARD BIRDING

– Jim Cieslak

As I stare out my window a gloomy winter day, looking at my feeders and birdbath, I encourage you to consider joining Project Feeder Watch (hosted by Cornell Lab) for the winter. If you are already reporting to E-bird, it is easy to do, and if you are not, well what are you waiting for? This is your chance to be part of citizen science and the changing bird movements with climate change. Learn more at <https://feederwatch.org>

## Find Us On Facebook



**Wisconsin Metro  
Audubon Society**  
@AudubonWMAS

## WINTERING EAGLES – Jim Cieslak

After the repeated sighting of eagles at the Franklin Landfill throughout November, I would like to encourage members to keep an eye out for these birds in your area. Eagles have over-wintered in western and central Wisconsin for as long as I can remember. Eagle Valley, near Cassville, and Ferry Bluff, near Sauk City, are both good examples. If they find enough food, they will stick around all winter. If we can identify some critical places the birds are using, we may be able to help protect the sites. The forested ravines along the shore of Lake Michigan and within other parks are worth keeping an eye on.

### WMAS Diversity Statement

Just as biodiversity strengthens natural systems, the diversity of human experience strengthens our conservation and education efforts for the benefit of nature and humankind. Wisconsin Metro Audubon Society is welcoming to all, providing educational and conservation programs that are free and open to the public. Yet we recognize that our open door policy is not enough to bring more voices and experiences to our Society. To that end, we strive to foster inclusivity by:

- 1) providing programming in, for and by diverse communities
- 2) continuing the discussion regarding diversity, equity and inclusion
- 3) welcoming ideas & viewpoints of all community members regarding meaningful inclusion



Wisconsin Metro Audubon  
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Franklin, WI 53132

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