

THE TRUMPETER: WISCONSIN METRO AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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

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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

■ February 19, 2025	Waukesha County - Excellent Nearby Birding	Tim Hahn
■ March 19, 2025	Birds of Spring	Charles Hagner
■ April 16, 2025	The Nature Conservancy's Program in Milwaukee	Lamont Smith

WINTER PROGRAMS

February 19, 2025 - Waukesha County - Excellent Nearby Birding

Presented by Tim Hahn



While Waukesha County is a heavily populated area, with many urban areas and sprawling subdivisions, there are also many excellent natural areas to explore and find birds. Within a thirty-minute drive from Milwaukee, birders can

be in places like the Kettle Moraine Forest, Vernon Marsh, Paradise Valley, Monches Woods and many other hotspots. In these locations and many others in between, birders have many great opportunities for birding in the county.

Warblers are one of the more captivating and sought after families of birds, and while 30 or so warblers pass through in migration, 10 or more warblers can still be found in the county during the summer breeding season. As we spend time covering the top hotspots and the birds they host, we will highlight the warblers and other unique birds that make their summer home in Waukesha's natural areas.

Tim Hahn is an avid birder from Waukesha, having lived in the county since 2010, and resided in southeastern Wisconsin his entire life. He has been an officer of the Benjamin F. Goss Bird Club for 10 years and served on the board of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology for four years. During the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II, Tim was the county coordinator for both Waukesha and Marinette Counties and served on the WBBAll Training & Support Committee. He has been a member of the eBird review team in Wisconsin since 2018, serving as lead reviewer for Waukesha, Washington, and Walworth Counties, and as backup reviewer for Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Jefferson and Marinette Counties. He leads many bird hikes throughout the year, including field trips for the Goss Bird Club and Horicon Marsh Bird Festival.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



A WISE OLD OWL SAT ON AN OAK. THE MORE HE SAW, THE LESS HE SPOKE. THE LESS HE SPOKE, THE MORE HE HEARD. WHY CAN'T WE ALL BE LIKE THAT BIRD?

- UNKNOWN

March 19, 2025 - Birds of Spring

Presented by Charles Hagner

In this presentation, Charles Hagner will tell where “our birds” are now, during the non-breeding season, and describe when we can expect them to come back, how high and how fast they will fly while migrating, and the threats they will face en route to their breeding grounds. Chief among these are collisions with windows. Hagner will describe new research into the mortality associated with window collisions and discuss readily available products that have been proved to reduce collisions.

Charles (Chuck) Hagner is a writer and editor who lives and watches birds in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, his hometown.

From 2001 to 2017, he was the editor-in-chief of nationally distributed BirdWatching magazine, which he joined after a successful thirteen-year career as a staff writer and editor with Time Life Books. He served as the state director of Bird City Wisconsin for five years and was a founding director of the Lake Michigan Bird Observatory. He is the author of the American Birding Association Field Guide to Birds of Wisconsin and two other books about birds and is a frequent speaker at meetings and festivals. He has birded in over a dozen countries.



April 16, 2025 - The Nature Conservancy's Program in Milwaukee

Lamont Smith

In his time with the Wisconsin Metro Audubon Society, Lamont will share with us the early directions of TNC's Milwaukee Program, which include supporting neighborhood-based efforts to replenish Milwaukee's tree canopy, accelerating natural and engineered storm water management solutions for water quality and flood resilience, and naturalizing Milwaukee's under-used land parcels. With these collective efforts, Lamont shares the vision with many in the environmental community that Milwaukee will be a national leader in urban conservation and environmental justice for years to come.

Lamont Smith is a native son of Milwaukee, with a couple decades' worth of experience as a nonprofit professional in youth programs and institutional philanthropy. Currently, Lamont serves as the Milwaukee Program Manager for the Wisconsin chapter of The Nature Conservancy. His work there spans all levels of Milwaukee's civic landscape, forging partnerships that support, amplify, and add momentum to local efforts to decrease climate vulnerability and to achieve environmental justice. Under his leadership, the Milwaukee Program emphasizes activating everyday residents to get involved in environmental conservation efforts in ways that are meaningful to their communities and as a critical pathway to climate resilience. Lamont is an alum of UW-Madison's La Follette School of Public Affairs.



NOCTURNAL BIRD CALL RECORDINGS - By Robin Langenbach

As I check e-bird rare bird lists, I've noticed that some entries are simply audios of bird calls obtained at a field station. To get more information about how these calls are collected, I contacted Sam Corbo, a birder who has reported many of these audios. He has been birding for about 15 years, and was curious about what flies over head in the night-time skies.

I initially assumed that the data was being used in a special study with specialized equipment. Actually, it's much more simple than that. It's basically a manual process where all that's needed is a microphone, a recorder with a memory card, and a software package called “Night Hawk” to help identify the collected audios. After recording the night-time calls, the information can be uploaded to your computer from the memory card. There, you can listen to the calls, make identifications, and if there's a call you're not confident in identifying, the software will help you out. If you're really stuck, the WSO records committee can help.

Sam does make an e-bird list, but e-bird has asked that nocturnal listeners create a separate account which is specialized for data.

Collecting nocturnal calls has been going on for about 5 years. Some collectors are amateurs, some are curious birders, but some listeners are doing research. There's even a Facebook page called “Nocturnal Flight Calls”, which is a good resource for getting set up.

The most unusual call Sam has recorded was that of a Smith's Larkspur, an uncommon and mysterious bird, according to the Audubon Field Guide. He's most surprised by the number of calls from birds we usually don't see in this area, such as Whimbrels, Upland Sandpipers, Barn Owls, and King Rails.

If you're curious about the nocturnal birds flying over your house, Sam is happy to be a resource. He can be reached at skcorbo@gmail.com.



SPECIAL EVENT!

BUTTERFLIES OF THE CATHOLIC ECOLOGY CENTER Saturday, May 25, 2025 10:00 a.m. to Noon



The Catholic Ecology Center in Dodge County is part of a 225 acre preserve including prairies, forest, the Rubicon River, Otter Creek, a pond and organic gardening areas. Donna Williams-Richter and Ethan Brown will lead us in spotting the butterflies. Some butterflies that we are likely to see include Eastern Comma, Gray Comma, Question Mark, Red Admiral, American Lady, Painted Lady, Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Black Swallowtail, Giant Swallowtail, Peck's Skipper, Hobomok Skipper and Mourning Cloak. Harvesters have been seen in numbers in the past, as well as colonies of Woolly Aphids, the host for this carnivorous caterpillar. Other exciting possibilities include Arctic Skipperling or one of the Tortoiseshells.

Long pants and long shirt sleeves, a hat, insect repellent, and hiking shoes are recommended. Bring binoculars—the closer they focus, the better!

If you would like to be contacted in case of cancellation or other changes, please register your intent to attend with Donna Williams-Richter (dowin124@gmail.com).

ACCESSIBILITY: Trails are easy to travel, but rain may cause them to be muddy so proper footwear is encouraged.

DIRECTIONS: Estimated travel times are 1 hour from Madison and 45 minutes from downtown Milwaukee. Meet in the parking area.

The Catholic Ecology Center is located at W1468 County Road NN Neosho, WI 53059. More information can be found at their website: <https://catholicecologycenter.org/the-center-and-land>

GUEST PHOTOGRAPHER

The photos shown here were taken by our guest photographer, Robert Slattery. Robert is a high school student in Milwaukee who began birding with his father two years ago when they joined the WMAS Sunday bird walks at Wehr. It was amazing to see his interest and his ability to identify birds grow over these past couple of years. Thank you Robert for this fabulous contribution to birding!



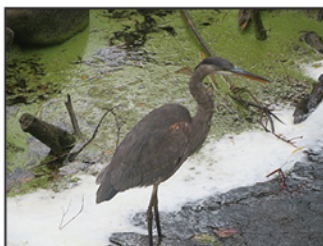
Snow Buntings at Lakeshore State Park



Hairy Woodpecker on the right and Downy on the left. Note the difference in body sizes and beaks.



Tufted Titmouse, looking down at us



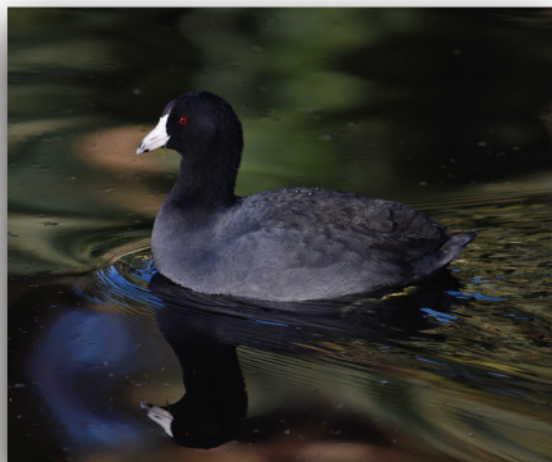
Great Blue Heron



Female Cardinal

IS IT TIME TO RENEW YOUR AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP?

Your renewal date is now printed on the back of the newsletter above your address. Renew directly through WMAS by using the form! More of your membership funds will support local activities and conservation projects. In 2024, WMAS made donations to support Wehr Nature Center; to Milwaukee County Parks to add 'bird dots' on windows at Holler Park; and the Brew City Bird Festival. Membership dues and donations also help to fund this newsletter, keep our 6 annual programs free, and maintain our website.



: Bird Brief :

American Coot (*Fulica americana*)

ORDER: Gruiformes (5 Families)

FAMILY: Rallidae (156 Species)

Photos, drawing & text by

Heidi Meier

January 15, 2025

Have you ever wondered why American Coots (*Fulica americana*) are routinely seen on the lakefront during the early spring and late summer instead of when other waterfowl commonly migrate? Have you ever wondered why they congregate in groups close to the shoreline? Have you ever wondered why they have peculiar feet? Are these birds considered ducks? Are they grebes? Inquiring minds want to know.

Many large flocks of coots have migrated to warmer lakes and wetlands for the winter. However, a few linger along the lakefront foraging for viable algae. American Coots stay in shallower water because they can dive up to six feet to feed on aquatic vegetation and small invertebrates. While the coots are feeding, the rich vegetation they capture is often stolen by dabbling ducks that are not able to dive for food. Aggression towards the food pirate does not occur because the coot does not want to spend time or energy grooming after an aggressive encounter. Instead, the coot just dives again to satiate its need for food. However, small groups of *young* coots have also been known to pirate food from diving ducks while they are learning to forage for their own food.

Since coots seem to behave as a diving duck, are they ducks? Actually, the American Coot belongs to the Rail family. Members of this family are **opportunistic omnivores** which means they will eat a variety of aquatic vegetation, small invertebrates, and even berries. Other common characteristics of rallids are that they prefer dense marsh habitats, are usually heard and not seen, they are “thin as a rail,” and have complex vocal repertoires. For example, the American Coot has over a dozen vocal songs that range from loud croaking to clear nasal sounds depending on what type of situation the vocalization calls for. Rallid chicks are **semi-precocial** which means they have open eyes, downy feathers, and can leave the nest for short periods of time when they are just a few days old. Some unique species characteristics of the American Coot include that they are the only divers in the family, they are more gregarious and prefer to flock in large groups on open water compared to other rails, they are plump, they have thick triangular bills compared to other species, and they have remarkable feet.

The **feet** are one of my favorite features of the American Coot! First, the chicks' feet **grow faster** than their bodies. This allows the young to walk in wetland habitats, preventing them from sinking in the mud. Rails will walk one foot in front of the other, so you will see a straight line of footprints in the mud. Second, coots **use their feet to defend their territory** against intruders by leaning back in the water to help raise up their feet, they then grasp the offender with one foot and slap it with the other. American Coots are also

called “**splatters**” because they flap and splash the water to confront intruders and to get airborne. Third, compared to other rails, coots have **large, lobed toes** that allow them to walk on mud without sinking and to dive under water. Finally, coots are able to withstand warm temperatures and **adjust body heat** by simply submerging their feet in water which will quickly dissipate heat out of their body. I am amazed at how some birds acclimate to their habitats with simple actions and by having unique anatomical features.



Specimen found along lakeshore.

There is one more adorable aspect of coots that is sure to bring a smile to your face. Coots are able to take their young for a ride while swimming. Some other water birds, including some species of swans, grebes, and ducks, are able to chauffeur as well. The coot chicks climb on to the parent’s back for a ride, but they can also dive under water by grasping a parent’s feather in their bill. Bravo, little coot!



Hey Cutie Cootie
Can you show me how to dive
And not sink in mud?
Haiku

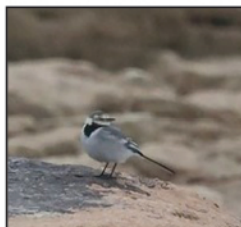
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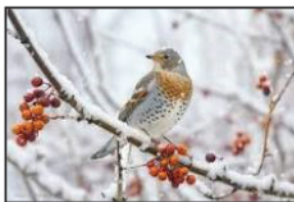
VAGRANT BIRDS IN WISCONSIN IN 2024

This past year, Wisconsin "hosted" many birds that were far out of their normal range. Most birds were from the south, southwest, Mexico and Central and South America. However, this year there were also vagrants from the Palearctic Zone, which refers to the Eastern Hemisphere, including Europe, Asia north of the Himalayas, and Africa, north of the Sahara. The list below states the location and the month of the observations.

White Wagtail – Sturgeon Bay in December. This is the most recent vagrant to visit our state. In fact, this is the first recorded appearance of this bird in Wisconsin. The White Wagtail breeds in the Palearctic zone. It also has a toehold in western Alaska as a scarce breeder, where this bird probably originated. Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski



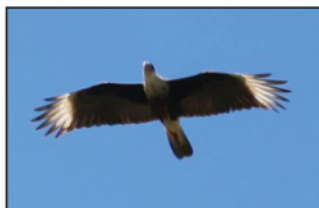
Fieldfare – Ashland County in February. Like the White Wagtail, the Fieldfare is very much out of range, as it breeds in northern Europe as well as the northern Eastern Hemisphere. It winters in the United Kingdom, Southern Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. Photo Credit: Classroom Clipart



Blue Grosbeak – Waukegan Park, Milwaukee County in May. It breeds in northern Mexico and the southern United States, and winters in Central America. Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski



Crested Caracara – This bird has been seen three times in separate locations. The assumption is that it's the same bird, first seen in May in Ashland County, then in Iron River in September, and last in Clark County in November. This bird of prey can be found in some southern states, throughout Texas, and Mexico and Central America. Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski

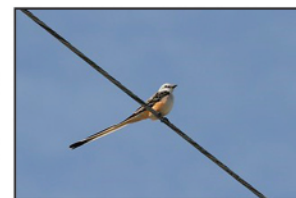


Varied Bunting – Ozaukee County in May at Lion's Den Gorge. These birds are a mostly a Mexican species whose breeding range barely reaches across the border into Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski



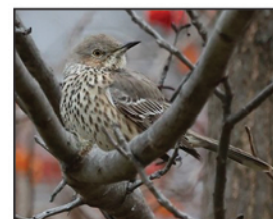
Scissor Tailed Flycatcher – Racine County, April. It briefly flew in while several birders were looking for the Say's Phoebe near the Windpoint lighthouse. After the initial sighting, it was not seen again at this location. However, another one was recorded near Algoma in June. This bird's normal range is in south central U.S. but has been known to wander. Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski



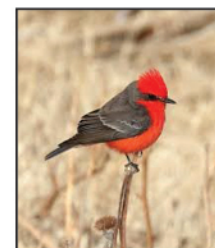
Say's Phoebe – Racine County, April. Observed near the same location as the Scissor Tailed Flycatcher, on the same day! This bird's usual range is across Western North America, from the Alaskan tundra to central Mexico. Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski



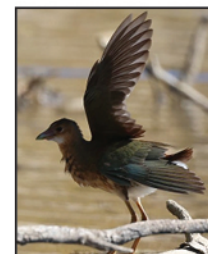
Sage Thrasher – Sturgeon Bay, November. This bird breeds in western North America. In winter, they migrate to the southernmost United States and Mexico, including the Baja Peninsula. Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski



Vermillion Flycatcher – First recorded in Milwaukee County in October, then in Bayfield County in November. Their range barely reaches into the southern U.S., but it is common all the way through Central America and much of South America. Photo Credit: Public Domain Pictures



Purple Gallinule – Grant Park, Milwaukee County in October. Purple Gallinules can be found in dense freshwater wetlands in the extreme southeastern U.S. and farther south. Photo Credit: Rita Flores Wiskowski



OTHER VAGRANTS LANDING IN WISCONSIN IN 2024:

Bar Tailed Godwit – near Hartford in May. This is the first of this species to be recorded in Wisconsin.
Glossy Ibis and White Ibis – Winnebago County in May
Black Bellied Whistling Duck – Trempealeau County in July and in Dane County in August
Lark Bunting – Bayfield County in May
Ruff – Two sightings in 2024. One was in April at Horicon Marsh, the other in Walworth County in May.
Fish Crow – Bayfield County in May



Wehr Birders meets: Sundays at 9 am through February at the Wehr Nature Center in Franklin.

**March through October,
we switch to 8 am.**

NOTE: We will not meet if there is excessive snow (or rain) or if temperatures fall below 0 with the wind chill. Otherwise, use your judgement. We typically walk 1 – 1.5 miles although if bird activity is good, we may go further! Open to birders of all experience levels. Most walks are 90 minutes – 2 hours, feel free to come and go as you need to!

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**Wisconsin Metro
Audubon Society
@AudubonWMAS**

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

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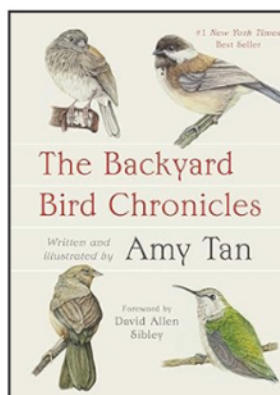
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REVIEWED BY ROBIN LANGENBACH

"BACKYARD BIRD CHRONICLES"

By Amy Tan



This is a wonderfully descriptive book, featuring author Amy Tan's keen observations and musings about the birds in her backyard, over a period of about 6 years. As if her words do not suffice, each dated entry in her chronicle is accompanied by beautiful illustrations, where she not only captures the image of the bird, but also brings each bird to life. She weaves tales around their activities – feeding, nesting,

courtship, problem solving, playing, and humor. Lots of humor! There are quite a few show-downs between birds, especially when it comes to food and courting. She described a particular incident at the feeder as if it was a boxing match – “in the right corner, we have Scrub Jay standing 11 inches tall. In the left corner, we have California Towhee at 9 inches tall”. Who will be the victor and win the prized suet? Dramas like this are sprinkled throughout the book. Her drawings include speech bubbles, almost like a comic book to help decode the birds' conversations.

Ms. Tan is convinced (as am I) that birds play. As she observed birds waiting to eat at the meal worm bowl, she noticed that they would wait their turn by swinging on the nearby wire swing. They would intentionally thrust their body back and forth to create motion. Juncos, Titmice, Pygmy Nuthatches and Anna's Humming Birds all engaged in this activity.

With each turn of the page, a joyful observation, another bird drama or bird comedy is revealed. But there's also some sadness, when it comes to window collisions, predators - particularly roaming cats, and poison that filters through the food chain. I'm glad she brings awareness to these issues.

This is a book that should be read by all those who love birds and nature, or even if you want to bring a little joy into your life. It presents an opportunity to learn more about birds, even details like how Hermit Thrushes stuff themselves with so many live meal worms that their bellies undulate from side to side. Take this opportunity! You'll enjoy every page you read.

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