

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 18, 2026	How Honey Bees Work Together	Dr. Chelsea Cook
March 18, 2026	Tiny Tigers: Introduction to the Fiercest Lepidopterans	Dr. Nicolas J. Dowdy
April 15, 2026	SOS Save Our Songbirds	Lisa Gaumnitz

WINTER PROGRAMS

February 18, 2026 -

How Honey Bees Work Together

*Presented by Dr. Chelsea Cook,
Behavioral Ecologist, Marquette University,
Cook Lab (<https://thecooklab.org>)*

Animals, including humans, use information from their world to make decisions. As a professor at Marquette, my research lab uses honey bees to understand what information is important, and how they communicate to work together. In this talk, I will share what we have learned about how bees work together, and what this can help us understand about our own complex society. I will also touch on the importance of science, the role public funding plays in science happening in Milwaukee, and of course, the importance of all pollinators.

I am a behavioral ecologist and professor at Marquette University where I split my time between my research lab and the classroom. I teach courses on Animal Behavior, Neurobiology, and Environmental Biology. I am passionate about making science accessible to everyone, and I have collaborated with programs at Marquette to teach Beekeeping and Environmental Biology in prisons in Wisconsin.



We engage in outreach with the Milwaukee Public Museum, local businesses, and schools. I earned my PhD in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from University of Colorado Boulder, and did a postdoc funded by the NIH to explore how individual differences in learning change

foraging behavior in honey bees. My research is currently funded by NSF and the USDA North Central Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



**UNTIL YOU SPREAD YOUR WINGS, YOU'LL
HAVE NO IDEA HOW FAR YOU CAN FLY.**

- NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

March 18, 2026 - Tiny Tigers: Introduction to the Fiercest Lepidopterans

*Presented by Dr. Nicolas J. Dowdy,
Head of Zoology, Milwaukee Public Museum*

Tiger moths (family Erebiidae, subfamily Arctiinae) are among the most colorful, diverse, and captivating insects. They also offer remarkable insights into how animals evolve diverse strategies for survival and communication. I will begin with an introduction to the major subgroups of tiger moths, their striking patterns and forms, and their global distribution.



A central theme will be the extraordinary ways tiger moths use chemicals obtained from their host plants. Many species hijack toxic chemicals from plants to defend themselves from predators such as birds and bats. These toxins make the moths distasteful, which they advertise with bright coloration and even sound. Some species have even taken sound production to such an extreme that they can disrupt, or “jam” bat sonar. These unique behaviors create a rich system for studying evolution, communication, and predator–prey interactions. I will review what scientific research over the past decade has revealed about how these moths use chemical and acoustic warfare to avoid predation.



I will also share ongoing tiger moth research at the Milwaukee Public Museum, including efforts to document global diversity and understand how complex

traits evolve. Finally, I will highlight Wisconsin’s native tiger moth fauna and discuss where to find these species, how to observe them, how community scientists can contribute to research, and what can be done to support these amazing insects in our state.

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**Wisconsin Metro
Audubon Society
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April 15, 2026 - SOS Save Our Song- birds: Three actions people can take at home to help songbirds. Plant natives, Use Bird-friendly Coffee and Chocolate and Prevent window collisions.

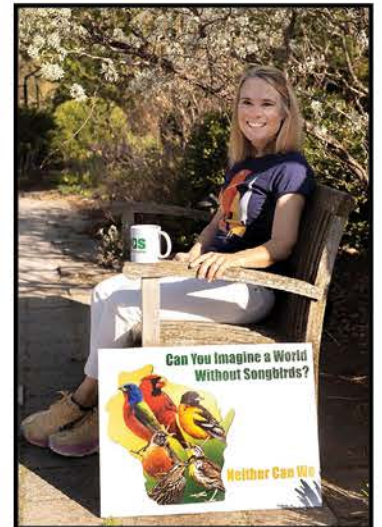
*Presented by Lisa Gaumnitz,
SOS Save Our Songbirds Coordinator*

SOS Save Our Songbirds launched in March 2023 as an initiative of the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Partnership to help bring a bird conservation message to Wisconsin communities at the same time interest in bird watching was increasing.

This volunteer-based, donation supported group has directly inspired over 22,500 people at 110 events to take action at home to save declining songbirds by sharing information and starter supplies.

SOS Save Our Songbirds is coordinated by Lisa Gaumnitz, who wrote about nature for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for 25 years and helped reporters do the same. Her appreciation for birds and concern over their decline spurred the creation of SOS Save Our Songbirds.

Through an engaging and interactive presentation, Lisa will focus on three actions people can take at home to help songbirds: planting native plants good for birds; protecting birds from hitting home windows; and purchasing coffee and chocolate grown on farms meeting the highest standards for preserving our migratory birds’ winter habitats.



Lisa will discuss how SOS volunteers have reached new and more diverse audiences by offering a “Porch Prairie” container gardening workshop using native plants; Bird-friendly coffee and chocolate tasting parties, and a bird crafting event in which attendees decorated fabric birds to contribute to a national art project raising awareness about window collisions. Partnerships with other bird organizations, Wild Ones chapters, and other conservation groups and businesses have been key to experimenting with these innovative outreach events and spreading the word about home bird conservation.

Attendees will receive supplies to jumpstart songbird conservation at home: a free native plant good for birds; samples of Smithsonian Bird Friendly certified coffee; and, for a \$10 donation, a Feather Friendly window treatment kit to prevent birds from hitting a problem home window.



Wehr Birders meets: Sundays at 8:00 am through October at the Wehr Nature Center in Franklin

November through February, we switch to 9:00 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 judgment. 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!

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

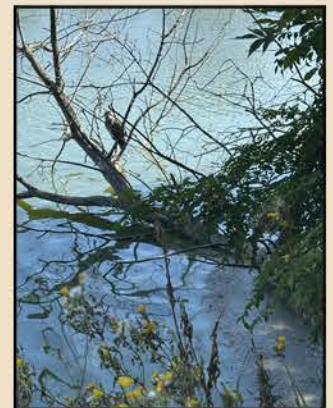
RESCUED!

This fall, birder Annette Jacobson was walking along the edge of a pond when she spotted a Great Blue Heron perched on a limb hanging over the water. Upon taking a closer look, she realized the heron was completely entangled in fishing line. Not only that, there was a lure stuck in its neck. Annette immediately called animal rescue agencies, but none could come to retrieve the bird.

Annette contacted other birders, and connected with Katie Fisher, who with her husband Doug, set out to rescue the heron. Katie was concerned about handling a bird with a potentially dangerous bill, so she and Doug went prepared with safety glasses, towels, and tools to cut the heron loose from the fishing line and the lure. When they got to the site, they found the bird was on a limb a distance out over the water. Katie waded into the slimy water, while Doug went out around the opposite side of the tree. Katie got to the bird first and covered its head with a small blanket. The bird was exhausted and did not struggle.

Katie was able to cut away the fishing line, and Doug used a utility tool to cut the barbs to remove the lure. They bundled the bird in towels and put it in their dog's cage. The heron lay still in the cage but watched them the entire time. They returned to their garage and made a nest of towels, propping up its head with another towel. They covered it with a large blanket for the night. When Katie went to check on it at about 5:00 AM, it was standing up. Their next move was to Wisconsin Human Society Wildlife Rehab, who cared for the heron until it could be released. By Monday the following week, it was eating minnows and smelt and even flying around in its enclosure. On Wednesday, it was released at a county park. Katie and Doug consider this one of their best couple's activities, plus it had a happy ending!

Help wildlife by picking up and properly disposing of fishing line and trash. If you find an injured bird (or animal), first try to contact an animal rescue agency such as the Humane Society or Wildlife in Need Center (WINC operates in Waukesha County). Please don't do anything that may leave you being the one in need of a rescue! And as we head into breeding season, remember that fledglings may just be learning to fly and if the parents are nearby, it's best to leave them alone!



Blue Heron Rescue
Photo credit: Annette Jacobson



: Bird Brief :

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*)

ORDER: Accipitriformes (4 Families)

FAMILY: Accipitridae (256 Species)

Text, photos and art by
Heidi Meier

December 15, 2025

One very cold January day, while searching for a recently sighted Snowy Owl along the boulders at Lakeshore State Park, I came across a marvelous sight. A Bald Eagle was standing on thick, jagged ice, so close I could hear the talons scrape the ice and the wind through the wings when it took flight. I was fortunate to be at the right place at the right time to witness this close-up view of one of the largest birds of prey.

Bald Eagles **are** one of the largest birds of prey. So, when I saw the eagle in the above photos fly, I had to wonder how a bird ranging from six to nearly fourteen pounds with a wingspan from five to over seven feet in length could take flight. The mere size of the Bald Eagle always makes me wonder how flight is even possible! One way lift is possible is by the wide distance between the outer primary wing feathers. This anatomical attribute allows the bird to fly without the formation of swirling, unstable air, or vortices, around the wings that can cause drag. Another way lift is possible is by wing flapping. The movement of the wings contributes to thrust, which propels the bird forward and diminishes drag. These are just a couple of ways flight is possible for the Bald Eagle.

This is the season when more breeding Bald Eagles are seen along the lakefront. Nesting usually begins in late autumn and lasts until May. They are usually seen perched on ice near the breakwater wall where open water is close by, where numerous waterfowl congregate, and fish are plentiful. More eagles are seen during this time of year because nesting pairs hunt close to their nests. Bald Eagles are also called Sea Eagles or Fish Eagles taken from the Latin translation for the genus name *Haliaeetus*, and they certainly prefer fish! However, when food is scarce, these opportunistic feeders will scavenge from other birds and will also consume waterfowl, birds, land and marine mammals, and carrion to name a few. One report even described Bald Eagles scavenging a whale carcass. Many people enjoy ice fishing at Lakeshore State Park, which is another reason eagles are seen more often as they search for fish left over from the fishermen.



Schlitz Audubon Nature Center
Eagles Nest Replica

There are many interesting facts about the Bald Eagle, and one of my favorites is the nesting behavior. Bald Eagles mate for life and reuse the nest every year during the breeding season. The pair will build a platform nest high in a tree or on a cliff. The site is chosen based on good visibility for the eagles to scan their territory for defense, ease for taking off and landing, and its close proximity to a water source. This typically means the nest is constructed 20-80 feet up in a tree. In northern climates, the nest can be placed even higher. In marsh territories, nests are constructed lower in trees, and island nesters will build nests on the ground. The breeding pair collects small twigs in their beak and large branches with their talons. The size of the nest begins around 6 feet high and 4 feet wide, which is roughly the size of a twin bed. The pair will make a central cup about 3 to 5 inches deep and line it with moss and grass to protect the eggs from falling out of the nest and to protect the eggs from predators and weather. The breeding pair will continually add reinforcing twigs and branches over the years. The size of the nest can become very large and heavy. In fact, the Great Lakes **Great Nest of Brownhelm**, near Vermilion, Ohio, grew to 12 feet high and over 8 feet wide and reached around two tons! This nest began in 1891 and was used by nesting eagles for 35 years. You can visit the Raptor Center to see a replica of the Great Nest that was commissioned in 2007. It was constructed at ground level for your enjoyment. Visit this link for more information: <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=262636>.

There are several ways you can enjoy **visiting locations** to see the nesting behaviors of Bald Eagles. Here is a nice list of options for eagle watching in Wisconsin:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/baldeagle>.

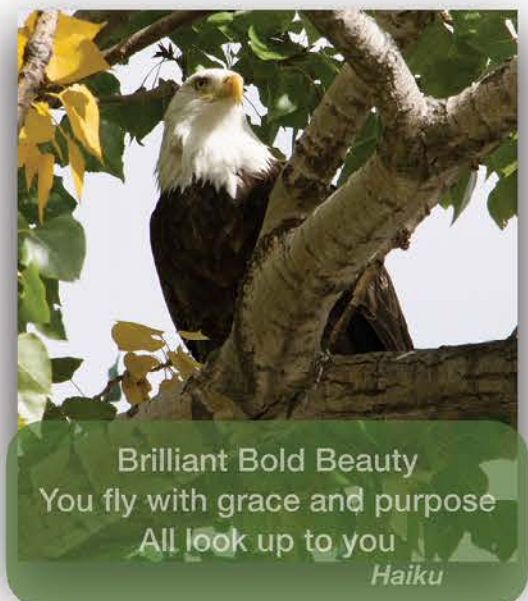
And for those who love **live bird cameras**, here is my favorite from Big Bear Valley:

<https://friendsofbigbearvalley.org/eagles/>.

At this site, you will be able to watch Jackie and Shadow during the breeding season. Jackie is the female. Female Bald Eagles are about 25% larger than males. Both are marvelous parents and take great care of their nestlings and nest. You will be able to see the pair tend to the eggs, watch the hatching of the altricial young, watch the parents coming and going with food and nesting materials, and watch until the nestlings fledge around eleven weeks of age. You can even hear the parents call to one another, hear the wind rustle their nest, and hear the babies squeak. At this live camera website, you can also read about the history of this project and receive recap reports. It is truly a delight watching every year.

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7. <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=262636>
8. <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/baldeagle>
9. <https://friendsofbigbearvalley.org/eagles/>



WHY DO WE LIKE BIRDS?

Art, Photography, and Text by Holden Van Dyke

Why? Seriously, why do we like birds? Of all the hobbies and pastimes you could do, you chose to like birds? One day you're listening to the song of a Baltimore oriole and next thing you know, you're standing in a harbor watching for a slightly paler gull to show up in the middle of January. I am surprised that I even still like birds in the first place. For me, my sister and I were listening to robins outside one spring morning and of all things to question, how do robins attract each other? I know, we were strange kids. We made consecutive efforts to blend in with the robins by wearing orange shirts under black jackets to obtain more information. Unfortunately for us, robins aren't stupid. Our mother supported our concerning quest and brought us some books about birds from the library. Though once I opened that field guide, there was no turning back. However, why was only I chosen to go down this absurd fate? Even at times where I thought I would give up on birding, I couldn't.



One reason I think we can't give up on birds is because they are always there. I have rarely ever gone a day without seeing a single bird. Most aren't nocturnal or live under logs in the forest. They are there often announcing their presence to you through song. Bird song time and time again has shown to help with mental health, mindfulness, and stress reduction. Not to mention all the health benefits included by being outside. This makes us crave to spend more time with these creatures in their natural environment. From past experiences of my own, I know that hobbies tend to die out when there's nothing new to fulfill. You'll often want to learn everything there is to know about a certain subject, especially as an autistic kid myself. But once everything's been learned, nothing feels new. Birding is always full of new things. There are over 10,000 unique bird species across the globe, most

are prone to vagrancy since they can fly, and while watching them we can notice small wonders that we never knew about. However, familiarity also plays a big role in the enjoyment of birding.

At its core, birding is the same experience. And that's a beautiful thing. You don't need to worry about the changes of everything that goes around in the world. It is still just you watching the birds you grew to love. I know friends who have gone years without birding, and yet returned to fulfill that need they never knew they needed. It's like trying to escape what shaped you as a person. Birds have inspired us to think, create, and express ourselves. Even myself included. I love creating art and I probably wouldn't be where I am today without them. Millions of people too enjoy birds, which brings us together as our own unusual community. It's like having a childhood bedroom. Your opinions and memories will change as you grow and age, but it's always the same place that you were raised in. Perhaps birding isn't trying to escape or grow out of it. It's just something that says who you are.

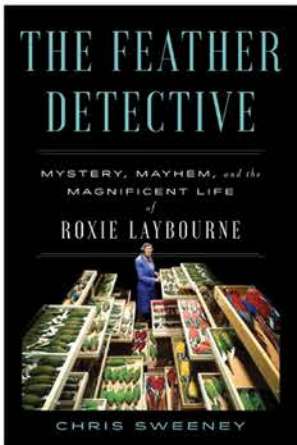
I have been birding for nearly seven years now, which is almost half my life (yes, I'm sixteen). I have changed a lot over those seven years as a person, but birding has always had that same excitement for me ever since I picked up that book. I don't know if I will always like birds, but I will be surprised if I don't. Nothing so far has replicated the feeling of birding. And I think that's why we like birds.





REVIEWED BY ROBIN LANGENBACH

"THE FEATHER DETECTIVE"
Mystery, Mayhem, and the Magnificent
Life of Roxie Laybourne
 By Chris Sweeney



I was looking forward to a good 'who done it' based on the title of the story. Maybe a nice mystery that also included some bird behavior or feature identification. Actually, this book is not a mystery at all – and not really even about feathers, unless you are considering them at a microscopic level. The 'feather detective' of the title is forensic ornithologist Roxie Laybourne, a remarkable woman whose passion for

birds and taxidermy skills landed her a position at the Smithsonian Institute to work with their enormous bird collection. In 1960, 15 years into her career at the museum, an airplane crashed as a result of a bird strike, killing all 62 people aboard. Air traffic at the time was poorly regulated and somewhat dangerous. When the FAA requested the help of the Smithsonian Institute to confirm the identity of the birds (read the book to find out!) Roxie was the only one at the museum who had the skills to sort through the birds' remains and identify the species. Knowing the species that cause bird strikes helps airports manage the property to reduce birds and by extension, reduce the risk of strikes. Another example was a Common Loon who crashed through a jet windshield, decapitating the co-pilot. After Roxie proved that such a relatively small bird could cause that level of damage, airlines began to bird-proof their aircraft.

In addition to investigating airplane crashes, Roxie was often asked to examine feathers that appeared at crime scenes, and archeologists brought her ancient bird fossils to identify. She played a significant role in preventing the extinction of Whooping Cranes by pioneering a method to determine the gender of captive Whooping Cranes. In doing so, they could pair birds in the same enclosures to mate.

It was bit TOO detailed at times and could have benefited from some editing. It wasn't what I expected, but I did learn a lot about the Smithsonian, how Roxie broke gender barriers (apparently without meaning to) and helped make flying safer, and how the airline industry manages bird strikes.

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 2025, WMAS has made donations to the Waukesha County Land Conservancy, Milwaukee Area Land Conservancy, Cornell Lab of Ornithology to support Merlin Bird ID to support birding for everyone and has pledged funding for 'birding backpacks' to BIPOC birding club to make binoculars and bird ID guides available at public libraries in our area.



Cooper's Hawk Young in a Milwaukee County Park
 Photo credit: Jeff Bentoff

WHO DO I CONTACT?

MEMBERSHIP

Diane Lembck | PHONE 414-425-9616
 EMAIL lembck6492@wi.rr.com

PROGRAMS

Pat Fojut | PHONE 414-839-0987
 EMAIL ptfojut@gmail.com

WEHR BIRDERS

Colleen Resendiz | PHONE 414-379-6741
 EMAIL Colleenresendiz@gmail.com

ALL OTHER INQUIRIES

Colleen Resendiz | PHONE 414-379-6741
 EMAIL Colleenresendiz@gmail.com

Wisconsin Metro Audubon
Society
6492 S. 121st St
Franklin, WI 53132

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