

# Coulee Birder

Newsletter of the Coulee Region Audubon Society

Website: <http://couleeaudubon.org/>



September-October 2004

## Events

### **Coulee Audubon meetings**

Sept. 15 - Rick McGarry will show slides of his bird photography and discuss equipment and techniques.

Oct. 20 - Randy Hines, USGS wildlife biologist, will speak on the topic "Migration Super Highway: Neotropical Migrants of the Mississippi River".

Programs begin at 7 p.m. at the La Crosse Public Library, 800 Main St. on the lower level.

Suggestions for speakers or programs are welcome. Call Gretchen Skoloda at 781-7502 or [gskol@aol.com](mailto:gskol@aol.com)

### **Field trip**

Oct. 30— Meet at the Memorial Field Parking Lot, UW-L, at 9 a.m. Birders will visit Goose Island, Stoddard boat landing, Genoa and possibly Black Hawk Park to view Pool 8 migrating Tundra Swans and ducks and raptors. Participants can bring their own lunch or have lunch at Mamies. Tour leader is Fred Leshner.

### **President's notebook**

## Enjoy Coulee Audubon!

**BY BOBBIE WILSON**

Fred Leshner and I had the pleasure of being interviewed for "Coulee Conversations" on KQEG TV23. (No, don't touch that dial. By the time you read this the segment will have aired. Besides, it wasn't a very good hair day — except maybe for Fred.)

The fun part was being asked about the Audubon Society, and remembering what we enjoy and value about this organization. On the national level, Audubon is a strong voice for conservation and habitat protection, with a history that goes back to the days of fancy hats decorated with egret plumes.

Locally, we hold to the same values of preserving and protecting. We promote awareness and enjoyment of birds

and other wildlife through programs, field trips, and volunteer projects. And we have fun doing it! A little bird-listing competition aside, can you think of a better bunch of people than bird watchers?

That's why you can't go wrong joining the Coulee Region Audubon Society. It celebrates and protects birds and other wildlife, and brings together like-minded people to enjoy the outdoors in a thoughtful, gentle way. In this newsletter is a membership form which you can use to join Coulee Audubon. Please do! Your membership supports the club and keeps you informed of its activities.

And please join us at a meeting or field trip soon. We're always looking for a few more good people!

## New season! Bird photographer to give Sept. program

Join us for the first Coulee Region Audubon Society meeting of the new season. Rick McGarry will present a program on Bird Photography on Wednesday, Sept. 15.

Rick's dramatic photos earned prizes in the Oktoberfest photo contest last fall, the first year he entered. He will show slides of his bird photographs, explain the various techniques he used to get the photos and answer questions about the equipment used. Programs follow a short business meeting which starts at 7:00 p.m. at the La Crosse Public Library, 800 Main St. (lower level). Refreshments are served after the program.

The Oct. 20 program will be presented by Randy Hines. He is a wildlife

biologist with the US Geological Survey, Upper Midwest Environmental Sciences Center in La Crosse, and has studied many birds including neotropical songbirds, colonial waterbirds, waterfowl, loons, and raptors, researching reproductive/nesting success, contaminant effects, and radio telemetry research. His topic is "MIGRATION SUPER HIGHWAY? Neotropical Migrants of the Mississippi

River". The talk will discuss what neotropical migratory birds are (focusing primarily on songbirds), why they are important, what species are found migrating and nesting along the Mississippi River, and causes of mortality.

The presentation includes an extensive display of migrant birds discussed in the presentation.

*We need your contributions of material for the Audubon newsletter. Please send your suggestions for articles, news of events and other things birders need to know. Deadline for copy is the third Friday of the month preceding publication. The next deadline will be Sept. 20. Send information to: [dskoloda@earthlink.net](mailto:dskoloda@earthlink.net) or by mail to Newsletter, W6396 Riverview Drive, Onalaska, WI 54650.*

# Lakeside cottage may hasten birds' decline

**By University of Wisconsin information services**

In their desire to get close to nature by building lakeside cottages and homes in the woods, Americans may very well be hastening the decline of many native bird species that breed in forest habitats.

The development boom in the nation's rural areas is putting increasing pressure on forest ecosystems, and the resulting decline in native vegetation and the increase in human activity - ranging from all-terrain vehicle use to predatory pets roaming the woods - is putting more and more native birds at risk, according to research presented Aug. 4, at the annual meeting of the Ecological Society of America in Portland, Ore.

The research, conducted by a team of scientists from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the U.S. Forest Service, details broad patterns of birds' response to housing growth and land cover change in the lower 48 United States.

The bottom line, according to UW-Madison researchers Anna Pidgeon and Chris Lepczyk, is that as rural forested landscapes are developed and parsed by roads and openings for new houses, many native bird species are at risk as deep forest breeding habitat is perforated.

Using data from the Breeding Bird Survey, a broad-based effort to monitor bird populations across North America, the researchers looked at changes in the

abundance of species. Comparing that data to U.S. census data and the National Landcover Dataset, a satellite survey of land cover in the U.S., the Wisconsin and Forest Service team was able to sketch a broad picture of human pressures on native forest bird species.

"We have found in the Midwestern United States that as land cover becomes more human dominated, the number of species declines," says Lepczyk, who led a team that examined the roles of land cover and housing density on 137 species of birds, native and exotic. Of those, 37 species were affected negatively by humans, while 13 species had positive relationships and 23 species exhibited a mix of adverse effects and benefits from human shaping of the landscape.

"This mirrors nationwide results previously reported by Audubon," says Pidgeon.

Now, Pidgeon has expanded the study to begin to examine how the pressures of housing growth and land cover change have altered bird populations during the past 30 years across the 48 contiguous United States. "We are seeing geographic clusters within the U.S. where some species populations are increasing, which we suspect is due to increases in both generalist and exotic species," says Pidgeon.

While human population has grown significantly across the continental United States since the 1970s, Lepczyk says the number of houses sprouting up in previously undeveloped areas is likely having a greater impact than the raw number of

humans inhabiting the landscape.

"Houses, we think, may represent a better indicator of impact (on native bird species) than human population," Lepczyk explains.

The study results portray an increase in exotic bird and generalist species, such as European starlings, pigeons, crows and jays, as a consequence of increased housing density on the rural landscape.

What clearly puts some native forest species at risk is the outright loss of wooded habitats as roads and lawns replace native vegetation, says Pidgeon. Not only does such development shrink available breeding habitat, but it also opens corridors for bird predators such as raccoons and skunks. Lawns also provide foraging areas for brown-headed cowbirds, parasitic birds that lay eggs in other birds' nests.

"Roads provide access and increased edges that nest predators including jays and crows use," Pidgeon says, "and we know from the work of others that an increase in predation accompanies an increase in housing density" as the domesticated animals that accompany humans, cats and dogs in particular, exact a heavy toll on native forest bird species.

What's more, human activities, such as the growing use of all-terrain vehicles and the replacement of native vegetation with exotic and ornamental plants, reduces cover and food resources for native birds.

Native species like house wrens, robins and catbirds can benefit from human changes to the landscape, but species like the scarlet tanager and some warblers depend on large, contiguous tracts of forest to successfully reproduce.

Humans, according to Pidgeon and Lepczyk, can benefit some birds by establishing feeding stations, sources of water and nesting boxes. But the increased density of housing, especially in northern deciduous forests, is having a net negative impact.

"Whole species, like the Cerulean Warbler, could be in jeopardy if we don't preserve enough large tracts of mature deciduous forest. The \$64,000-question is how much is enough?" says Pidgeon.

## **Morning on the Marsh campout offered**

BABCOCK, Wis. — People can get a close up and personal view of thousands of sandhill cranes, geese and other waterfowl that stage at the expansive Gallegher Marsh complex in Sandhill Wildlife Area at the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center's annual "Morning on the Marsh" camp-out on Oct. 2 and 3.

Participants should plan to arrive by 2 p.m. on Saturday and will depart by 11 a.m. Sunday

Campers must provide their own sleeping bags, sleeping pads, and warm,

dry clothing and foot gear, and should bring binoculars, cameras and tents if they have them. The Skills Center can provide binoculars, tents and associated camping gear upon request, and will provide Saturday supper and Sunday lunch.

Registration is limited to 20 people on a first-come, first-served basis and is confirmed by mailing in a registration fee of \$25 per person by Sept. 24.

Checks should be made out to DNR-

See **MARSH**, page 4

# Major birding effort gets Coulee support

Coulee Region Audubon stalwart Lennie Lichter, who maintains our website, has received recognition from leading Wisconsin birder Noel Cutright for helping Cutright with his 30-day birding and fund-raising event this summer.

Cutright, who spent the entire 30 days of June birding, said that he wouldn't have exceeded his goal of raising \$30,000 without his web site that Lichter designed and operated. "Sending Lennie almost daily updates wasn't always easy; I was in some pretty remote areas," commented Cutright.

Cutright was attempting to conduct 30 North American Breeding Bird Surveys (BBS) in celebration of his more than 30 years of participating in the BBS - with a goal of personally raising \$30,000 to help bird conservation. Cutright succeeded in this endeavor, christened the "Quad 30 Campaign," raising more than \$36,000 to-date.

Cutright - who serves as chair of the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative's Important Bird Areas committee and is immediate past-president of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology - covered 33 BBS routes in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and Minnesota. The first route was completed in Ohio on May 30, and a Wisconsin BBS on July 1 concluded the field effort - 33 consecutive BBS routes!

The three "extra" routes were to provide some protection against problems that were likely to be encountered. Throughout the "Campaign" he paid all his expenses out-of-pocket, and all of the money he raised goes toward bird conservation, specifically the Important Bird Areas program.

"I wanted to do this to raise awareness of the value of long-term bird monitoring projects like the BBS and the critical need to do more for bird conservation; I did it for the birds," Cutright remarked. "In my wildest dreams I never imagined completing all 33 routes consecutively, with all the potential pitfalls that are out there - rain, wind, impassable roads, car problems, oversleeping, and others."

The Breeding Bird Survey roadside routes conducted by Cutright are part of a Federal program started in 1966 to monitor the status and trends of North American bird populations. The survey relies on participants skilled in bird identification. Each route is 24.5 miles long, with stops at 0.5-mile intervals. At each stop a 3-minute count is conducted; every bird seen or heard within a 0.25-mile radius is recorded. Surveys start 30 minutes before sunrise, must be done under suitable weather conditions, and take almost 5 hours to complete. Over 4,100 BBS routes are located across continen-

tal U.S. and southern Canada. More information about the BBS can be found at <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/index.html>.

Most states now have Important Bird Areas (IBA) programs. IBAs are sites that provide habitat essential for breeding, feeding, wintering, or migration of one or more bird species. IBAs may be large or small and either publicly or privately owned, sharing characteristics such as high bird diversity, threatened or endangered species, or the presence of unusually large numbers of birds. To be designated an IBA, a site is nominated and then evaluated based on standard scientific criteria to ensure its significance to birds. Audubon chapters, scientists, and the general public may nominate sites. Recognition of an IBA does not confer any legal or regulatory status and is entirely voluntary.

The Important Bird Areas Program is directed in the U. S. by the National Audubon Society and is coordinated internationally in more than 120 countries by BirdLife International. There are more than 1,500 IBAs identified throughout the U.S.

To read about Cutright's unique experience or to contribute to his Quad 30 Campaign, please visit <http://www.quad30campaign.org>.

## Planning begins for 2nd Mississippi Flyway Festival

Based on the success of the first Mississippi Flyway Birding Festival, a committee has started planning for a second event next May.

Craig Thompson, chair of the committee that planned the first festival held April 30-May 2 this year, said that the committee would welcome additional volunteers. Contact Bonnie Koop at the local Audubon office (784-2992) if you are interested in helping to build the reputation of the La Crosse/Upper Miss region as a premier birding area.

Thompson said that the planners are studying a proposal to hold the 2005 event the second weekend in May, thus placing it in the peak period of the spring

migration.

Coulee Region Audubon was one of the major partners in the first event, providing both volunteers and financial oversight for the committee.

Gretchen Skoloda, co-chair of the fund raising subcommittee, praised the local tourism community for strong support of the event. Sponsor donations and fees from this year's registrants has left the event in a strong financial position to continue its mission of providing an excellent birding experience for participants and raising the awareness of the importance of birding and bird habitat among the residents and communities along the river.

The 2004 festival attracted nearly 100 participants from seven states. About 30 volunteers donated their time to making the event a success.

The festival included guided field trips all three days, a picnic and speaker on Friday evening and a social event at the Pump House on Saturday evening that included live music, a nature photography show and slide presentations. Birding sessions by motor boat and a canoe and kayak birding tour were offered in addition to guided hikes.

A similar format is likely for the 2005 event. Suggestions as to changes or additions would be welcome. Send them to Bonnie Koop <[bkoop@audubon.org](mailto:bkoop@audubon.org)>.



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## **MARSH** from page 2

Skills Center. Include the name of each participant, and the address and daytime phone number of one person in each party. Send your registration fee to: San-

dhill Outdoor Skills Center, PO Box 156, Babcock, WI 54413.

Inquiries on the status of registrations may be sent via e-mail to:

<Sandra.Green@dnr.state.wi.us>. More information on the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center can be found on the DNR Web site.

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YES, please enroll me as a member of the Coulee Region Chapter (Z19) of the National Audubon Society at the introductory rate of \$20 for one year or \$35 for two years. Membership benefits include The Coulee Birder and Audubon Magazine.

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ St \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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