



Topeka Audubon Society

Our mission: To inspire people to appreciate birds and other wildlife and to encourage conservation of natural habitats.



President's Message: Birding & the Pandemic



Debby McKee
President

I know we are all so tired of this pandemic and ready for it to be put behind us. For me, going birdwatching has been my saving grace. Because I can always go for a drive in the country or to a lake, I can go birdwatching. I can be distanced from people- even if I bump into them when I'm out and about.

I was lucky enough to recently see the first Kansas state record of a Royal Tern. There were about 15

other birders there looking through scopes- which were all spaced around 6 feet apart. It did help that we were outside- but we were all comfortable being together- but not too close.

Continue to keep birding in your schedule. You will feel better because of it. Even watching your bird feeders is good for your soul.

Included with this newsletter is the calendar for the coming months. Keep watch for

Google email or Facebook page updates concerning these scheduled activities. We will try to hold as many as possible.

Debby McKee
President



Discover Bird-friendly Plants from National Audubon Society

Go to the National Audubon Society website and enter your 5-digit zip code to use Audubon's native plants database. Explore the best plants for birds in your area, as well as local resources and links to more information. By entering your email address, you'll receive an emailed list of the native plants you've selected, get additional tips on creating your bird-friendly habitat, and help NAS keep track of your contributions to efforts to get 1 million native plants for birds in the ground. <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>

The Kansas Native Plant Society can also help you discover native plants to attract birds and other wildlife. Here is their website: <https://www.kansasnativeplantsociety.org/>



Butterfly Milkweed
Asclepias tuberosa

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Yellow-breasted Chat, 06-26-21,
Shawnee State Fishing Lake,
photo by Carol Morgan

The **Annual Brochure** is enclosed with this newsletter. It includes a calendar of events for the coming year, but remember that all events may be cancelled due to the pandemic and social distancing requirements. If you receive your newsletter by email, you may want to print the trifold calendar and keep it handy for future reference for TAS field trips, programs and other activities.

Calendar of Events

Come birding with us!

Watch for an email notification or check the TAS website for information on field trip departure locations and times, or for possible cancellation of any event. The pandemic makes it uncertain if events will go forward as scheduled, so **watch for updates!**

Field Trips leave promptly at the noted times in email messages and on the website. It is suggested you arrive at the meeting place 10 minutes early. Binoculars are available for lending if needed (advance notice is appreciated).

Plan on joining our monthly bird walks cosponsored by the Topeka Audubon Society and TSCPL. The walks will be held the 2nd Saturday of each month beginning at the McDonald Baseball Field (2620 SW Murrow Court, 66614) on Shunga Trail starting at 8:00 a.m. The weather can vary, so please dress accordingly. There will be no walk in December.

September 2021

- 11 Saturday Field Trip/Bird Walk: Meet at McDonald Baseball Field for a stroll around Shunga Park & Warren Nature Area. 8:00 am.
- 16 Thursday Program: "Ducks of Kansas" by Janeen Walters at TSCPL 7:00pm.
- 18 Saturday Field Trip: Melvern Reservoir.
- 27 Monday evening Field Trip: Chimney Swift viewing at Topeka Bible Church (11th & Mulvane), 7:00pm. Bring a lawn chair!

October 2021

- 9 Saturday Field Trip/Bird Walk: Meet at McDonald Baseball Field for a stroll around Shunga Park & Warren Nature Area. 8:00 am.
- 16 Saturday Field Trip: Marais des Cygnes NWR, Linn County.
- 19 Tuesday Birds & Beer: Blind Tiger Brewery 6:00pm.
- 21 Thursday Program: "Snakes of Kansas" by Kelly Haller, TSCPL 7:00 pm.

November 2021

- 5-7 Audubon of Kansas "Celebration of Cranes" at Quivira NWR. Watch email for more information.
- 6 Saturday Seed Sale at the Wild Bird House, Brookwood Shopping Center, 10am-5pm.
- 9 Tuesday Program: "Be a Better Birder" by Chuck Otte, TSCPL 7:00pm.
- 10 Saturday Field Trip/Bird Walk: Meet at McDonald Baseball Field for a stroll around Shunga Park & Warren Nature Area. 8:00 am.
- 16 Tuesday Birds & Beer: Blind Tiger Brewery 6:00pm.

December 2021

- 21 Tuesday Birds & Beer: Blind Tiger Brewery 6:00pm.
- 23 Saturday Topeka Christmas Bird Count Contact Carol Morgan at crxmorgan@gmail.com to participate. Potluck dinner will be at the home of Carol Morgan, 2607 Westport Drive, Topeka, KS 66614, starting at 5:30pm.
- 27 Sunday, Holton Christmas Bird Count, meet at 7:30am at Burger King in Holton. Contact Carol Morgan for more info. crxmorgan@gmail.com.



Dillons Fundraiser

Thank you to everyone who has signed up with Dillon's on behalf of the Topeka Audubon Society! Dillons continues their program in 2021, allocating \$2 million to assist local schools and non-profits. The Community Rewards program is a wonderful opportunity because you can easily donate to Topeka Audubon Society (or another charity of your choice) just by doing your normal grocery shopping.

If you have not participated before, please create an account and begin making your purchases count! Customers will need to sign in and confirm the non-profit selection using either this number, JN667, or by searching for the name of our organization, Topeka Audubon Society.

Go to this website: www.dillons.com/communityrewards

1. Sign in to your online account, or create a new account if you don't have one.
2. Scroll down to the bottom of the page to *Community Rewards*.
3. Click on *Enroll Now*.
4. Find and select Topeka Audubon Society by name or by our number, JN667.

TAS Membership

Membership Dues \$20. Chapter membership runs from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31. Dues sent after Sep. 1 will carryover through the following year. Send your check payable to the **Topeka Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1941, Topeka, KS 66601**. A membership in TAS makes a great gift for friends and family members! TAS is a 501-c-3 nonprofit organization. Gifts to TAS are tax deductible to the extent provided by law..

Chapter members receive this color newsletter in the mail, or may choose to receive it by email only. Members can also view the newsletter on our website.

Program Meetings, general information:

All programs will be presented at the Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 SW 10th Street (10th and Washburn), at 7:00-8:30 pm. All programs are free and open to the public. Everyone is welcome!

Ducks of Kansas

By Janeen Walters

Thursday, Sep. 16, 2021

The program will be about Ducks in Kansas and their waterfowl relatives. Facts on behavior and identification will be the focus.

Janeen was a science teacher at Washburn Rural Middle School for 34 years. She is now retired and hoping to do more birding and scuba diving. Janeen has been a Topeka Audubon Society member for nearly 30 years.

Snakes in Kansas

By Kelly Haller

Thursday, Oct. 21, 2021

The presentation will give tips on the identification of the various species of snakes in the State with photos of each snake taken in the field by the presenter, along with range maps and additional natural history information on each species.

I have been interested in the natural history of snakes since the age of about 12. Have taken college level courses in herpetology while at the University of Kansas, along with additional field research on venomous snakes. Also have been travelling extensively throughout the State of Kansas over the last 40 years, finding and photographing snakes in their natural habitats. While I have a strong interest in all snake species within the State, my particular interest is with the venomous species that occur here.



Garter snake, photo by Carol Morgan

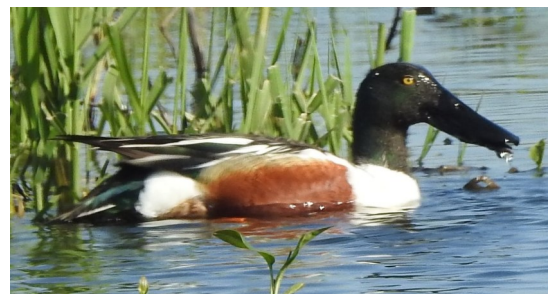
Be a Better Birder

By Chuck Otte

Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021

Whether you are a beginning birder or have been birding all your life you have likely been challenged, stumped and confounded trying to identify certain birds. Some of those challenges are caused by the situations we are birding under, and others are brought on by ourselves and how we approach bird ID. A birder since the age of 4 Chuck has had plenty of opportunity to mess up bird ID. Chuck will discuss the common issues that birders find themselves in when stumped by a bird identification, and will discuss ways to work through some of these challenges as well as some of the pitfalls to avoid in your birding adventures.

Chuck has been employed by the Geary County Extension Office/KSU Research and Extension since January 1982. He is responsible for programming and educational efforts in the areas of agriculture, horticulture, and natural resource management including wildlife damage control. Chuck has been an avid birder and naturalist since early boyhood. He is a member, and current secretary, of the Kansas Ornithological Society (KOS) as well as the newsletter editor of the KOS quarterly newsletter, *The Horned Lark*. Chuck was President of KOS from 2010-12. His hobbies include not only bird watching, but also computers. He provides technical support and management to over a dozen Internet discussion groups including BirdChat and KSBIRD-L, and serves as webmaster for several web sites.



Northern Shoveler, photo by Carol Morgan

New Federal Bill Will Help Bring Birds Back

Legislation introduced in the U.S. House will strengthen the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

WASHINGTON - (July 29, 2021, from the National Audubon Society Press Room) - "As Congress looks to build toward America's future it should also help bring birds back," said Sarah Greenberger, senior vice president of conservation policy, National Audubon Society. "The Migratory Bird Protection Act will strengthen baseline protections for birds at a critical time. We have lost 3 billion birds in North America since 1970 and climate change threatens extinction for two-thirds of bird species. Birds are telling us they are in trouble and we are running out of time to act."

In an effort to strengthen the century-old Migratory Bird Treaty Act, a bipartisan group of co-sponsors in the U.S. House of Representatives, led by Rep. Alan Lowenthal (D-CA) and Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), introduced the Migratory Bird Protection Act today. The new bill will reinforce longstanding bird protections that have been under attack while creating more certainty for business and creating incentives for innovation to protect birds. It was also introduced in the last Congress where it passed out of committee and gained more than 90 Democratic and Republican co-sponsors.

The bill would secure protections for birds and direct the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to develop a permitting process for "incidental take" through which

relevant businesses would implement best management practices and document compliance, further driving innovation in how to best prevent bird deaths.

If passed, the MBPA would establish a new fee paid by industry that will increase funding for the conservation of birds impacted by these industrial hazards and an additional fund to establish a new federal research program that will study industry impacts on birds and best management practices.

The Biden administration is also pursuing a rule-making process that similarly aims to reinstate "incidental take" protections stripped away by the previous administration. The change by the Trump administration was aimed at limiting the MBTA's protections only to activities that purposefully kill birds, exempting all industrial hazards from enforcement. Any "incidental" death—no matter how inevitable, avoidable or devastating to birds—became immune from enforcement under the law. If this change had been in place in 2010, BP would have faced no consequences under the MBTA for the more than one million birds killed in the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The reversal by the Trump administration generated widespread and bipartisan opposition. More than 25 states, numerous tribal governments, scientists, sportsmen, birdwatchers, and 250,000 people submitted comments opposing the proposed rule change, and several conservation organizations and eight attorneys general filed litigation to challenge the rule change.

"Over the last century the MBTA has been critical to protecting birds, including spurring the recovery of the Snowy Egret, the Sandhill Crane, and the Wood Duck," said Erik Schneider, policy manager for National Audubon Society.



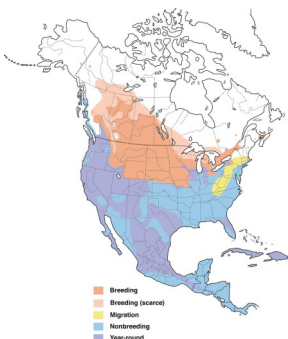
Photo by Carol Morgan

Featured species: American Coot (*Fulica americana*), excerpted from All About Birds.org

The waterborne American Coot is one good reminder that not everything that floats is a duck. A close look at a coot—that small head, those scrawny legs—reveals a different kind of bird entirely. Their dark bodies and white faces are common sights in nearly any open water across the continent, and they often mix with ducks. But they're closer relatives of the gangly Sandhill Crane and the nearly invisible rails than of Mallards or teal.

Although it swims like a duck, the American Coot does not have webbed feet like a duck. Instead, each one of the coot's long toes has broad lobes of skin that help it kick through the water. The broad lobes fold back each time the bird lifts its foot, so it doesn't impede walking on dry land, though it supports the bird's weight on mucky ground.

The American Coot eats mainly aquatic plants including algae, duckweed, eelgrass, wild rice, sedges, wild celery, waterlilies, cattails, water milfoil; when on land they also pick at terrestrial plants and sometimes eat grains or leaves of oak, elm, and cypress trees. They're not exclusively vegetarian. You may also see them eating insects (beetles, dragonflies, and others), crustaceans, snails, and small vertebrates such as tadpoles and salamanders.



Paul Willis 1929-2021



It is with sadness that the family of Paul M. Willis announces his passing on July 11, 2021 at the age of 92 in Salina, Kansas.

Paul was born April 25, 1929, in Cherryvale, Kansas, the son of Ulysses Grant and Josephine Atwater (Rairdin) Willis. He was a 1946 graduate of Elk City High School. He graduated with an Associate's Degree from Independence Junior College, Independence, KS in 1949 and received his Bachelor's Degree from Kansas State Teachers College at Pittsburg, KS, and Master's Degree from Kansas State University. He was drafted into the U.S. Army during the Korean War.

Mr. Willis was a Biology Teacher for Highland Park High School and Shawnee Heights High School for 32 years, retiring in 1989.

He was a life-long member of the United Methodist Church. He a member of Topeka Audubon Society (Past President 1980-82 and 1998-99), Kansas Wildflower Society, Shawnee and Saline County Master Gardeners, participated in the Silvertones Singing Group in Salina, Senior Olympics, and many other groups. He had also served on the Shawnee Heights USD 450 School Board. Paul loved spending time with family, especially his grandchildren. He enjoyed bird watching, gardening, wildflower studies and humbly sharing his knowledge with people.

Paul married Lillian Maxine "Lil" Curry on August 12, 1951 in Prescott, Kansas. She preceded him in death on June 17, 2010. He married Barbara Harris on November 26, 2011 in Salina. She survives in Salina. Other survivors include his children, Karen (Tom) Sim of Topeka, Robert (Teresa) Willis of Mt. Sterling, IL, Kent (Deb) Willis of Leon, KS and Sheila Sumpter (Michael Omatsu) of Olathe, KS, Brent (Shellie) Billau, Overland Park, KS, Gwen McClenton, McPherson, KS.

A celebration of life ceremony was held July 15 and a memorial service at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Topeka was held on August 18, 2021.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Topeka Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1941, Topeka, KS 66601, or to Highland Park United Methodist Church, 2914 SE Michigan Ave, Topeka, KS 66605. Cards of sympathy may be mailed to the Family of Paul Willis, c/o Dove Cremations & Funerals, 2843 SE Minnesota, Topeka, KS 66605.

eBird Taxonomy Changes, aka Splits and Lumps

August is always an exciting time of year for eBird, because records are updated with the latest scientific advances in bird taxonomy. As the changes roll through on 17 August and subsequent days, you may see some species names appear in unexpected ways and may notice your life list numbers jumping around. This is expected as eBird updates millions of records. Once complete, you can expect stability again.

Splits, lumps, and additions are always most exciting. Worldwide, about 71 species will be split (resulting in an increase of 94 species), lumps result in the loss of eight species, and seventeen (!) new species will be recognized, for a net gain of 103 species that brings the global species total to 10,824. Other changes include revisions to some scientific and common names, overhauls of the genera and sequence in hummingbirds and some other families, along with other minor sequence changes,

as well as some additions of some new taxa for data entry (e.g., new hybrids etc.)

In the US and Canada, most people are most likely to notice these changes to subspecies group with Sedge Wren *Cistothorus platensis* being shown as a subspecies group called Sedge Wren (Sedge) *Cistothorus platensis stellaris* before changing to Sedge Wren *Cistothorus stellaris* when the taxonomy update goes through. This particular change will not affect your life list, but if you have also seen Grass Wren *Cistothorus platensis* somewhere from central Mexico south, this taxonomic update will give you a new lifer! Other widespread North American taxa that may temporarily change to subspecies include Mew Gull (American), Rufous-capped Warbler (Chestnut-capped), and Scrub Euphonia (Godman's),



Topeka Audubon Society

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Topeka Audubon Society

An affiliate of the
National Audubon Society

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Buy Duck Stamps: Put Your Stamp on Conservation

Buying a Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as the Duck Stamp, is among the simplest ways that anyone can participate in wildlife and habitat conservation. Duck Stamps are a required annual purchase for waterfowl hunters 16 and older, and a current duck stamp grants the bearer free entrance into any national wildlife refuge that charges an entry fee. But whether you are a hunter, birder or other outdoors enthusiast or you simply want to help preserve our natural resources for future generations to enjoy, you can contribute to conservation by buying Duck Stamps.

Birders and wildlife photographers have played a key role in helping to generate revenue for habitat protection. Your purchase of Federal Duck Stamps means that the national wildlife refuge system can continue to acquire and protect important areas for birds and other wildlife.

Refuge visitation is now approaching 46 million people per year, and according to recent USFWS figures, more than 80 percent of these visitors engage in wildlife watching, specifically birds. Just as importantly, these visitors are part of the millions of Americans increasingly interested in wild birds and birding.

Buying a Federal Duck Stamp gets you free admission to any national wildlife refuge that charges an entry fee. Each stamp is valid from July 1 through June 30 of the following year.

Purchase your stamp today! The new stamp (\$25) is available for purchase online from the post office, at many retail sporting goods stores, and at some community post offices and national wildlife refuges. It may also be purchased online through the American Birding Association; such a purchase allows those organizations to document to the federal government that birders support conservation.

