



Topeka Audubon Society

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

From the President: Spark Encounter Starts Passion



Debby McKee
President

People talk about their spark bird—a bird that peaked their interest in birds and started them on their birding journey. I don't actually have a spark bird but I have what I am calling my spark encounter. I began birding by feeding birds in my backyard. I thoroughly enjoyed it and was excited to get new birds to my feeders. But I felt there could be more—so I attended the 2006 Kansas Birding Festival held in Wakefield, Kansas. The first evening there was a bird walk and I joined the one led by Chuck Otte. Oh boy, were my eyes

opened to birding with knowledgeable, enthusiastic, fun birders that loved finding birds. They were great at helping those in the group see what they found. I ended that weekend with 12 new life birds—flock of new birding friends and more knowledge in how to bird than I would have ever gotten on my own. Now with several birding festivals, group trips to other states and numerous local field trips under my wing—that first trip was the spark that lit a burning passion for birds and birding. Whether you have a spark bird or a spark encounter consider en-

riching your birding experience by joining with others that share your interests.

A local option is the TAS monthly birding walks held on the Shunga Trail every 2nd Saturday of the year (except December). All information can be found on our website

www.topekaaudubonsociety.org

Oh, yes—a heartfelt thanks to Chuck Otte who enthusiastically continues his lively and informative monthly bird walks at Milford Lake.

*Debby McKee
President*



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Topeka Audubon Society
An affiliate of the National
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Beginner's Luck

I spent a fun afternoon with Tracey Zimmerman and her four home-schooled children on May 14. We walked in the Grand Oaks neighborhood (northeast of 45th Street and Topeka Blvd). There is a small pond in the neighborhood, and a segment of the Landon Trail is also nearby. We found a pair of Canada Geese and six goslings at the pond, as well as a Spotted Sandpiper and a Pectoral Sandpiper. Another nice species that was a lifer for these beginners was a Western Kingbird. We had 20 species total, and let's hope the family is hooked on birding!

By Carol Morgan



Pectoral Sandpiper, above,
Spotted Sandpiper, below.
photos by Carol Morgan



Calendar of Events

Come birding with us! TAS is slowly resuming group field trips.

June 12, 8:00am, Shunga Trail. Meet at McDonald Field. This is one of our monthly bird walks. Approximately a 2 hour walk.

June 26, 7:00am, Echo Cliff and Skyline Drive in Wabaunsee County. Meet at McDonald's at 21st & Belle for carpooling. Approximately a 5 hour field trip/drive.

If you enjoy watching birds regardless of your skill level or age, 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 Field on Shunga Trail beginning at 8:00 a.m. The weather can vary, so please dress accordingly. Dates are as follows: 6/12, 7/10, 8/14, 9/11, 10/9, and 11/13. There will be no walk in December.

If you are not receiving TAS group email updates, please contact John Zempel to be added to the group. vhfjazz@yahoo.com

Welcome New Members!

(Since January 1, 2021)

William Brannan Bartlett Ramsey
Pete Huston Francis Weyrens
Lorelei Logan

It's Breeding Bird Season!

If you have a nest in your yard, it's okay to visit it every few days, but not every day. Give the birds their distance, or get a spotting scope and watch from a safe distance. Same goes for nests anywhere in the great outdoors; give the breeding birds space and don't stress them.

Raising Eastern Bluebirds

On May 13, I was invited to the home of Stan and Sue Wilch, who live south of Lake Shawnee. Stan has been tending bluebird boxes on their 5 acre property for the last 10 years. Stan said he became interested in bluebirds from stories he heard from Paul Willis, a past president of TAS (1980-82 and 1998-99), and he said he has had lots of advice from Todd and Melody Weller at the Wild Bird House.

Stan maintains 5 bluebird house. He can recognize the difference between neat twigs of a bluebird nest from the messy nests of House Sparrows. He clears out nest material of the House Sparrows to discourage them. Stan said that he usually has at least three successful Eastern Bluebird nests annually. This year has been discouraging because the bitterly cold weather we had in March and April that killed many bluebirds. Stan had two active nests on May 13 when I visited, but one nest had no eggs and when we checked the other found that the nestlings were dead. Stan suspected that the severe May thunderstorms in may have killed them.

Stan regularly feeds mealworms to his bluebirds and includes some shelled sunflower during the winter. Dishes are placed



near a window of the house so that he and Sue can watch and enjoy their beauty. Stan said that he feeds his bluebirds year-round. His advice if you want to start tending bluebirds is "Don't get discouraged! Bad things can happen but if you stick with it you will be rewarded."

By Carol Morgan

Random Act of Kindness at Wendy's

The McDonald's drive-thru line was too long at lunch today (May 24) and I really only wanted a shake, so I drove ahead to Wendy's in the Gage Shopping Center. In that drive-thru line I heard bird vocals above me and looked up to see two dead and two trapped frantic birds inside the perforated metal covering the light fixture over the menu board. It was awful listening to the distressed birds and I asked for the manager when I got to the window. She said she would "call maintenance" and I said I would stay to help.

She (the manager) came out with a long rod and I held open the platform but the two birds wouldn't fly out. The manager then carried out a ladder (she was persistent!) and was able to release a large section of the covering, and the two House finches flew out immediately. The two dead birds remained, one was a male House finch and I'm not sure about the other one. The two survivors are female House finches or maybe immatures. I didn't see a nest, but there's a small opening they must have used to get inside

that space. The whole structure looks like a cage that unfortunately became a death trap. I praised the manager and thanked her profusely--the drive-thru was busy and she took the time to free the birds that most likely would have died. What a kind person!

After that I sat in the parking lot and ate my Frosty and looked up in time to watch a Mississippi Kite soar and linger over the neighborhood. At least two Cedar Waxwings were picking fruit/berries off of a tree across busy Gage Blvd. Common Grackles were flying low and avoiding the traffic and disappearing into thick vegetation in the neighborhood, maybe taking food to a nest or fledglings.

A memorable lunch hour spent with our urban birds and a caring person who I called and talked to the next day—Shandi Hernandez, Area Coach at Wendy's. Thank you Shandi!

By Kim Sain, TAS Member

Two Bald Eagle Chicks Die after Storm Topples Tree in Blue Rapids

Two juvenile bald eagles were killed and one adult was seriously injured when their nest tree blew over during a severe thunderstorm in Blue Rapids, Kansas.

Marshall County Game Warden Grant Duncan was called to an area outside Blue Rapids around 8am Thursday (May 20) on reports of an injured bald eagle in a field. Duncan said the location is along the Big Blue River.

The Game Warden said two chicks, estimated to be about 8 weeks old were both found dead in the downed tree debris. Duncan said the adult bird appeared to have hobbled a short distance away from the tree but was too injured to fly. He said the nesting pair were well known to the residents of Blue Rapids, as their nest could easily be seen from US-77 highway.

Michele McNulty, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service out of Manhattan, transported the injured bird to K-State Veterinary Medical Center for evaluation. She said the eagle was likely a female based on size and that the eagle suffered a fractured clavicle, and only needed some "cage rest." She said the eagle will likely get transferred to the Milford Nature Center for rehab, and if all goes well, she will be released outside Blue Rapids in due time.

McNulty said the male Bald Eagle was likely unhurt but was nowhere to be seen while they were tending to the female.

Happier news is that 182 bald eagle nests were documented in Kansas by April 20, 2021. The number of recorded active nests in Kansas has increased annually since the first nest was discovered at Lake Clinton in 1989.



This is a photo of the Blue Rapids Bald Eagle nest prior to the tree being toppled in a storm. Photo 4-27-2020 by Carol Morgan.



Topeka Audubon Society

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Chapter members receive this color newsletter in the mail. Both chapter and national members can view the newsletter on our website. Chapter renewal is now an annual calendar year action.

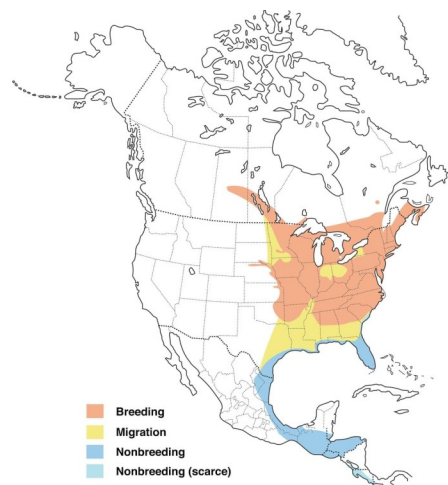
Membership Dues \$20. Chapter membership runs from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31. Dues sent after Sep. 1 will carryover through the following year. Send your check payable to the **Topeka Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1941, Topeka, KS 66601**. A membership in TAS makes a great gift for friends and family members!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



Featured Species: Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferous*), excerpted from All About Birds.org



Made famous in folk songs, poems, and literature for their endless chanting on summer nights, Eastern Whip-poor-wills are easy to hear but hard to see. Their brindled plumage blends perfectly with the gray-brown leaf litter of the open forests where they breed and roost. These common birds are on the decline in parts of their range as open forests are converted to suburbs or agriculture. You can help conserve declining Whip-poor-will and other nightjar populations by participating in surveys; go online to the Nightjar Survey Network to learn more.



The female Eastern Whip-poor-will lays her eggs directly on the leaf litter of the forest floor, usually on the north or northeast side of a small herb, shrub, or seedling that will shade the nest from the hot afternoon sun. She lays the eggs in phase with the lunar cycle, so that they hatch on average 10 days before a full moon. When the moon is near full, the adults can forage the entire night and capture large quantities of insects to feed to their nestlings.

Eastern Whip-poor-wills feed exclusively on insects. They start foraging 30 minutes after sunset and continue until it gets too dark to see their prey. At first light they resume feeding, stopping about 40 minutes before sunrise. When the moon is bright enough, they may hunt all night long. During cold, rainy weather they will not try to forage. Whip-poor-wills perch in trees (or sometimes on the ground) and make short sallies to snag insects up to 15 feet off the ground, or they may stay out on longer insect-catching flights. Their enormous mouths allow them to swallow insects up to two inches long.