

Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

November 2008, Volume 7, Number 3

Website: www.savingbirds.org

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Looking Back on Seven Years

by Executive Director Kay Charter

Every so often, it's a good exercise for a nonprofit organization to look back and measure progress over its history. For Saving Birds, that progress has been nothing short of remarkable. Within two years after we were established, our Habitat Discovery Center was finished; two years after that our property certification program was in place. At the same time, we began developing our Prairie Demonstration Garden and our Friendly Garden Club Woodland Walk. We now have self-guiding brochures, which include photos of every tree, shrub flower and grass species on SBTH property. Included in the brochures is our message about the importance of native plants in supporting the insect biomass required by our migrating and nesting birds. These brochures will allow visitors to have a rich experience without a docent or guide. If you haven't been here for a while, stop by and check us out. You will be amazed at the changes.

And our newest project is to develop a Cliff or Barn Swallow nesting structure which, if used the birds, will help control aerial insect pests in vineyards. This is one of our most exciting and potentially far-reaching projects to date. L

Message From the President

by Gina Erb

Let me introduce myself: My name is Gina Erb, and I am the new President of the Board of Saving Birds Thru Habitat. My husband John and I moved to Leelanau County 10 years ago after visiting and vacationing with friends for the prior 25 years. We were both raised in big cities, but the allure of the County brought us here to stay. It didn't take long before we both became involved in many of the fine local charitable organizations. I have always had a love for animals and the environment, so when I was asked to join the Board of Directors for SBTH six years ago, I thought it a great opportunity to fulfill my passions for both. What did I know about birds? Not much. Cities are full of pigeons, robins, house sparrows and an occasional cardinal. What did I know about bird habitat? Absolutely nothing. I didn't even own a pair of binoculars! What was I thinking? That has changed. I'm still a novice when it comes to birding and habitat. It's a challenge, but I love it.

SBTH has grown to be a mature organization under the strong leadership of Marlin Bussey, our first President. Marlin was there to oversee the rigorous planning necessary to make the organization the success it is today. Thank you, Marlin, for your guidance and the high standards you have instilled in the Organization.

The mission of SBTH is to educate people young and old about the importance of habitat for our Neotropical birds. We are developing new programs to reach out, especially to young people, for they are our future. For 2009, our Board is dedicated to continuing our strong membership growth. Memberships to SBTH are the lifeblood of support for us to accomplish our mission.

As the last of the migrants are passing through and we at Saving Birds have completed our programs for this year, the

Author/Entomologist Doug Tallamy Visits SBTH



Doug Tallamy leads a group in search of insects in our Prairie Demonstration Garden.

In early September, Dr. Douglas Tallamy and his wife, Cindy, traveled from their home in Pennsylvania to Leelanau County. It was their first visit to our spectacular corner of the world and they were duly impressed, in spite of soggy weather.

Although they appreciated the beautiful sites of Leelanau, they actually made the trip in order for Doug to be a featured speaker at a seminar in the Traverse Area District Library. His program to educate people on the importance of native plants was attended by more than 80 people. Craig Rautiola, Director of Environment, Health and Safety for Fairmount Minerals, Inc., rounded out the day with a presentation on Sustainable Development.

Doug also attended our Nest Builders' reception as a special guest, where he addressed the need to return personal landscapes to native plants. After the reception, he pointed out insects in our prairie garden. L

Board and Executive Director are gearing up for an exciting 2009 seasons. Look for programs in our spring newsletter.

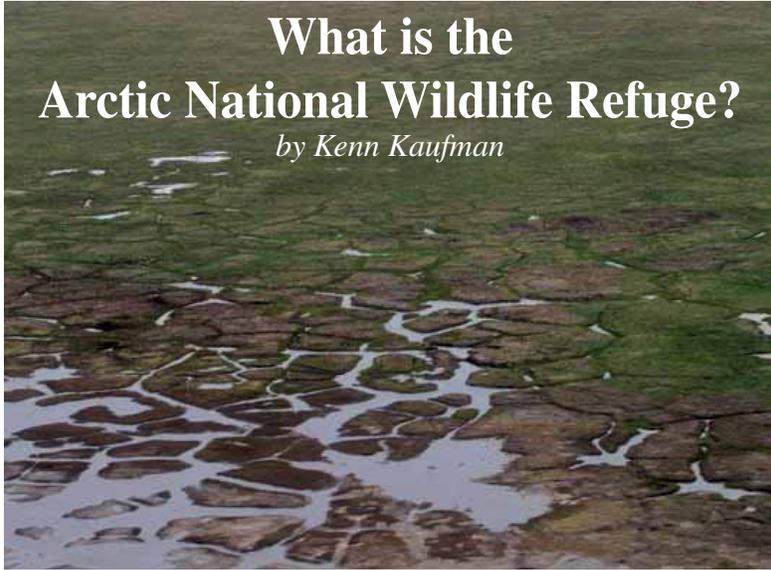
Encourage your friends and neighbors to become members, and then come join us for a bird walk or special program. I look forward to seeing you in the spring.

May the last bird you see be your favorite bird. L

Noted birder and writer Kenn Kaufman wrote the following several years ago. A shortened version appeared in a leading birding magazine in 2002. Kenn, who has visited ANWR, generously granted permission for our use.

What is the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

by Kenn Kaufman



Arctic Tundra, USGS Photo

As I write this, there is debate as to whether we should drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in far northern Alaska. Now, don't get me wrong: I'm convinced there are good and decent people on both sides of the debate. I'm not anti-oil. I drive a car that burns gasoline, albeit not in very large amounts. I have friends who work for oil companies, and these are honest individuals with a professional and personal commitment to wildlife conservation. I believe the debate could be carried on with honesty and integrity.

But I also believe that neither side should twist the facts to bolster their arguments. And there's one huge falsehood that I've heard too many times in the last few weeks—enough to make me drop the light-hearted column that I'd been writing and settle on a more serious topic. The lie being fostered by the pro-drilling elements is the idea that the coastal tundra—the area of the refuge where the drilling would take place—is essentially worthless.

I heard it again today, in a discussion on talk radio, from a woman representing the oil industry. "Of course the polar bears are CUTE," she said in a condescending tone, making it obvious she'd never had a close look at the huge iron-jawed meat-eating machine that is a real polar bear. "And the caribou are nice animals. And we know that the refuge has some pristine mountains. But that's not where the drilling would be done. The drilling would be on the coastal plain, and there's nothing there. There aren't even any trees. It's nothing but frozen tundra."

Nothing but frozen tundra? I've heard oil-company spokespersons say this over and over. And it would be true, more or less, in January, that far above the Arctic Circle, with constant darkness and temperatures far below zero. Not much moving out there at that season. Or so I've heard; I haven't been there in winter. But I have been up there in summer, and I can close my eyes and go back there in vivid memories...

It's late evening but the sun is still high in the southern sky, and it will not set any time this month. We're standing on a little rise by the edge of a tundra pool, with reflections of evening light in the cold clear water, but our attention has been caught by a bird that is flying in wide circles overhead. Trim and stream-lined, the bird is moving with oddly slow and exaggerated wingbeats, as if it has far more flying power than it needs to stay aloft. Its flight is punctuated with a wild rich whistle that echoes across the tundra. We watch for a minute or more, and then the bird swoops down to land nearby.

It's a male American golden-plover. He stands poised, elegant, a study in crisp pattern, black with white trim below, spangled with gold above. This bird is a powerful flier indeed. When he left here at the end of last summer he would have flown thousands of miles to the east and south, perhaps touching down in the maritime provinces of eastern Canada or on the coast

of New England, then arrowing south across a wide expanse of the Atlantic to the northern coast of South America, continuing on to the pampas of Argentina. Then, two or three months ago, he would have left that southern outpost to come back, flying on swift strong wings across the Amazon Basin, across the Caribbean, and up through the corridor of the Great Plains, traveling thousands of miles to come back and announce his claim to this patch of supposedly worthless frozen tundra



American golden-plover by Peter LaTourette

Maybe this golden-plover already has a mate, hiding somewhere among the matted tundra plants. But even if not, he is not alone: There are other birds all around us. The ridge where we stand is only a few feet higher than

the surrounding country, but from here the land stretches out for miles to the flat horizon under a wide pale sky. The land is covered with tussocks of grass, clumps of reindeer moss, boggy low spots, the occasional snowdrift, but broken everywhere by innumerable and nameless little ponds. There's not a tree in sight. Birds that want to sing from elevated positions must take wing, and they have: the sky is alive with birdsong.

On the other side of the nearby pond, a small bird is fluttering high. Slim, long-winged, patterned in subtle browns, the bird is hovering with odd slow wingbeats, singing a short trilled song that it repeats over and over, on and on. The endurance displayed in this song-flight seems incredible ... but then again, perhaps not. This is another champion flyer, a Baird's sandpiper. He will have spent the winter far south of the equator, perhaps around lakes of the high Andes in Bolivia or Chile. Like the

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golden-plover, he will have flown thousands of miles to be here. Other long-distance migrants are adding to the chorus. The pectoral sandpipers—what odd birds they are, or at least the males are odd, as they gather on a nearby rise and seek to outdo each other in courtship displays. One of the males will puff out his chest unbelievably with air, the feathers bristling out so that he looks like a cross between a balloon and a porcupine. He takes off and flies in a circle, giving a series of low booming hoots and sounding like anything in the world but a sandpiper. Odd indeed—although, if female pectoral sandpipers are attracted by this, they must be rather strange themselves. These birds have flown back here from as far away as Australia or South America to take part in this annual mating ritual.

There are other sandpipers and plovers here as well. Though we call them shorebirds, most of them are really tundra birds in summer. A white-rumped sandpiper, another small species, flutters and glides overhead while he makes odd honking and rattling sounds. Not very musical but definitely champion migrants, white-rumps concentrate in southernmost South America in winter, with many in Tierra del Fuego, and they have even been seen in Antarctica.

Stilt sandpipers, bigger birds but not quite so ambitious in their migrations, are doing flight displays off in the distance, repeating a guttural song as they glide down on set wings. There are also buff-breasted sandpipers, beautiful with their soft colors, standing about on the tundra. They do their displaying mostly from the ground, the males quietly stretching out one wing and then the other to show off the white underwing. High above all the other birds, Wilson's snipes are zooming about, making their hollow winnowing sound.

The tundra in summer is at least half water, so it is no surprise to see that ducks are everywhere. Pintails and green-winged teal are on all the small ponds, just as they could be in the Dakotas, but the stars are true Arctic species like eiders and long-tailed ducks. Here and there we'll find a small group of king eiders resting on a pond. The males are unbelievably ornate, with their orange bill-knobs contrasting with the pale powder blue of their heads.



Green-winged teal by Peter LaTourette

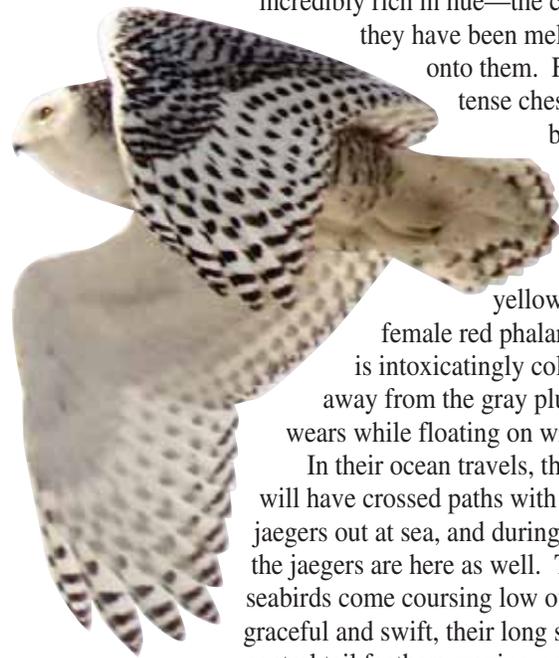
Along the coast itself we might see the eiders passing in flock after flock. Eiders of three or four species, big hardy sea-ducks of cold waters, stick to the Arctic Ocean as long as they

can before peeling off inland to their nesting grounds. Many of these eiders (and their cousins, the long-tailed ducks) will have spent the winter in open leads of the shifting pack ice, as far north as the Arctic Circle. Now they cross paths with flocks of brant, small sea-going geese that may have wintered along the west coast of Mexico, or with red-throated loons that have come from the California coast.

But there are other birds here whose wintering grounds are on the open seas. Consider the silvery, long-tailed Arctic terns, hovering lightly over tundra pools. They are not nearly as delicate as they appear. For much of the year they live the life of true seabirds, far out over the ocean. During the past nine months they may have traveled some 25,000 miles, to the edge of Antarctica and back, out of sight of land for weeks at a time, somehow finding their way back to this spot for the brief Arctic summer.

Also in from far oceans are Sabine's gulls, seemingly too petite and beautiful to be real gulls. Their striking white wing triangles are visible at long distances, but we need to get closer to appreciate how their charcoal gray hoods contrast with their red eye-rings and yellow-tipped bills. However, no birds here reward a close look as much as the red phalaropes, also just arrived from a winter on the ocean. The females, brighter than the males, are

incredibly rich in hue—the colors look as if they have been melted and poured onto them. From the intense chestnut red of the belly to the deep creamy buff stripes on the back to the rich chrome yellow of the bill, a



*Immature Snowy Owl
by Deb Harp*

female red phalarope in summer is intoxicatingly colorful, a world away from the gray plumage she wears while floating on winter seas.

In their ocean travels, these birds will have crossed paths with long-tailed jaegers out at sea, and during the summer the jaegers are here as well. These piratic seabirds come coursing low over the tundra, graceful and swift, their long streamers of central tail feathers waving up and down with each wingbeat. There are actually three kinds of jaegers here, and the largest, the

pomarine jaegers, are among the major predators of the region. In most summers the pomarines are not common, which is just as well for the smaller birds on which they often prey. But in big lemming years—summers in which these little brown rodents are at a population high—the pomarine jaegers move in and become lemming specialists, competing with the resident snowy owls.

Ah, yes, the snowy owls. These magnificent, powerful birds, white with glaring yellow eyes, are perfectly at home out on the coastal plain. They are perhaps as numerous here as they are anywhere in the world. Some may even stay through the harsh winter. If they do, in spring they will get to watch one of the most remarkable transformations in the world, as the deep

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freeze and darkness of winter give way to an explosion of life. The summer is brief, but with constant daylight the grasses, mosses, and wildflowers grow. Butterflies skim low over the tundra along with myriad other tiny insects, lemmings scamper about, and birds make feverish haste in raising their young before autumn sets in. A year's worth of living is crowded into a few weeks, and the skies ring with the cries of birds that have traveled thousands of miles to be here.

If oil drilling comes into this magical place, of course it will have an impact. No matter how much the oil companies try to minimize the effects of their operations, large areas will be destroyed or degraded. And the birds that lived on those areas cannot just move to another spot. It simply doesn't work that way. The land has only a certain carrying capacity, and the good

spots are already taken. Destroy a bird's habitat and the bird is dead, for all practical purposes, just as if you had shot it.

These are sobering things to consider as we stand on this tundra ridge, deep in the wonderland of the Arctic coastal plain. The golden-plover is up there again, flying wide circles in the sky, sending forth that haunting whistle that rings with wilderness and freedom and vast distances. Sad to think that it might come back here next year, after braving another long migration, to find that its own special place on the tundra has been taken away forever. If we're going to drill in the Arctic refuge, we should not do it under the pretense that "it's all worthless tundra" or that "there's nothing there." We should go into it with the full knowledge of what we will be destroying. L



Hug a Hunter

by Lisa Strobel

(Reprinted, with permission, from birdingcoupleblogspot.com)

The November (2007) issue of my favorite piece of mail, *National Geographic*, has a piece on hunters and the part they play in wildlife management.

The article features a picture of the first Duck Stamp, an ink drawing of Mallards by J.N. "Ding" Darling. (Dang! I wish this inaugural stamp was part of my Dad's collection of Duck Stamps)

In February, we blogged about a similar article in the *The Washington Post* that discussed the decline of hunters in Virginia. The decline in hunting in Virginia is mostly due to the loss of open space for wildlife, which also means less open space to safely fire a gun without hitting a Walmart or a subdivision.

The decline in hunting was also due to cultural shifts in how we spend our free time. In the last few decades the sport of hunting has also been heavily criticized by animal rights advocates.

According to National Geographic, "The great irony is that many species might not survive at all were it not for hunters trying to kill them." There are over 12 million hunters in the United States and the revenue generated by these 12 million hunters is essential to wildlife management and the purchase or conservation of habitat.

Since 1934, the Duck Stamp (which serves as a hunting license) revenue has added 5.2 million acres to the National Wildlife Refuge System. Hunters also pay excise taxes on guns and ammunition. Some of this excise tax revenue is used to buy new public game land, thereby preserving habitat.

Hunters also contribute \$280 million yearly to non-profits such as Ducks Unlimited who focus on restoring and conserving habitat. Habitat that benefits the game, but also other indigenous plants and wildlife.

Ethical hunters understand our connection to the land. They understand our connection to their prey. They understand the impact of habitat destruction and are often the first to speak of declines in certain species. And, they are paying for the privilege of hunting.

As the number of hunters decline each year, the revenue generated by their sport is also declining. On the other hand, the number of wildlife watchers continues to grow, with bird watching being one of the most popular. As birders, perhaps it is time we pay for the privilege of enjoying our sport.

You can do that by purchasing a hunting license (the Duck Stamp) and supporting non-profits who are dedicated to conservation.

About Lisa and Warren Strobel, aka "BirdCouple," in their own words: She's a nerdy CPA. He's an award winning journalist (for McClatchy Newspapers). But mostly they love birds, the outdoors and each other. Their blog is a celebration of nature, the environment and conservation. And, the birds.

The Strobels live in Maryland. They are members of SBTH. Their blog includes engaging writings about their lives, their birding experiences and many photos. L

David Dister: SBTH Technical Advisor

Some years ago, SBTH member Bob Johnson of Suttons Bay brought then Dayton resident, David Dister, to visit Charter Sanctuary. Bob said at the time that Dave is a dedicated and able birder. Over time, we found that Dave is much more than that: He is an all around naturalist who understands the relationship between the native flora and fauna around us. Because of his expertise, particularly in botany, we have come to depend on Dave for identification of plants that stump us. We asked Dave for a biography in order to introduce him to our members. We learned that he is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio, who spent his youth exploring the natural history of southwest Ohio, with ornithology and botany his primary passions. Subsequently, he earned a BA in Botany at Miami University (Oxford, Ohio) and a secondary education Teaching Certificate in Earth Science and Biology from the University of Cincinnati. He applied his training and field skills in environmental education for some five years, which took him to Albany, New York; Fort Myers, Florida; Dingman's Ferry, Pennsylvania; and finally to Jamestown, New York the boyhood home of Roger Tory Peterson. At Jamestown, he was the assistant director at the Burgeson Nature Sanctuary.

A career change took him to join the staff of the new Birder's World magazine in Holland, Michigan in 1986. After two years as assistant editor, he pursued freelance work as a proofreader for The Journal of Economic Botany. For seventeen years prior to his recent move to Ludington, Michigan, he was a field ecologist for Woolpert, Inc., a consulting firm based in Dayton, Ohio. His professional work involved research, field studies, and writing of environmental documents for federal, state, and private projects across the eastern U.S. Presently, Dave is a seasonal botanist for the U.S. Forest Service in Manistee, and he also writes a monthly natural history column for the Ludington Daily News. He anticipates initiating a two-year study of the vascular flora at Ludington State Park in 2009-2010, in addition to other contract work.



Dave has conducted numerous plant surveys and bird censuses resulting in the discovery of many rarities and has participated in more than 100 Audubon Christmas Bird Counts since 1970. He is a former member of the Ohio Bird Records Committee and the Audubon Ohio Important Bird Areas Committee.

Welcome aboard, Dave! We deeply appreciate being able to tap into your wealth of knowledge. L

Ann McInnis Honored as SBTH Volunteer of the Year

by Kay Charter



Ann McInnis leads a group of youngsters on a bird hike.

It's always great to see a dedicated volunteer, without whose efforts an organization would not reach its full potential, honored for his or her hard work. Thus it was with our own Ann McInnis when she was honored with our first Volunteer of the Year Award.

Ann has been a valued trail docent for SBTH from the time our organization was established. She is a knowledgeable naturalist who knows precisely how to connect with children. In more recent years, Ann has taken over the responsibility of managing our scheduled events as a Volunteer Coordinator. In that role, she works with schools and adult groups in assuring that dates are entered into our calendar. Then she lines up the appropriate number of docent/trail leaders to assist.

Her background as a science teacher at Cranbrook Institute makes her a valued member of our Conservation Education Committee, where her suggestions will help us to continue to move our mission forward, especially regarding reaching the next generation. Congratulations, Ann! L

Memorial and Honorary Gifts:

Carol Ross made a generous donation in honor of her mother, **Barb**. Carol said she made the donation because her mother has always loved birds.

Vicki Flier, of St. Louis, Missouri, honored founder, docent, long time member and dedicated supporter **Bobbie Poor** with a donation.

Kari and Chris Jarmuz, and **Jim and Barbara Fowler** made donations honoring **Leslie Fowler** on her birthday

Claudia Goudschaal honoring **Jim and Bobbie Poor's** anniversary.

John and Judith Hoeffler honoring **Kay Charter**.

Habitat in the City

by Ron Cammel

When an unfamiliar weed props up in my yard, I leave it go. Sometimes it turns out to be an invasive nuisance that I pull, sometimes a native beauty I keep. Either way, I learn.

Years ago, a plant I didn't recognize shot up in the back yard. Beautiful purple flowers bloomed. I learned it was a swamp milkweed; I was one lucky guy.

Seeds spread, and now 4-foot plants grow yearly where I hang laundry – some in the cracks of concrete. Masses of bees, purple wasps and other insects buzz around the flowers on warm days. Monarchs, two at a time, flutter to them. I have less room for laundry, but what a show! And the busy pollinators never bother me.

Though I live on a city lot just two miles from downtown Grand Rapids, I find a lot of room for native plants, without sacrificing much space for my vegetables and herbs. I benefit from them because of the birds and other interesting wildlife they attract.

When I moved in four years ago, the yard already had natives such as viburnams, dogwood shrubs, hemlocks, liatris, obedient plant, enchanter's nightshade and spiderwort. In a quest for even more useful flora, I tore out myrtle and put in black-eyed Susans and purple coneflowers. I removed pachysandra for wild strawberries and blue-stemmed golden rod. Surprisingly, I've had fewer weed problems since then.

I've added trillium, blue lobelia, thimbleweed, a bottle-brush buckeye, fern, lupine and blackberries (a cultivar, yes, but

caterpillars are sharing it and birds seem to go for the insects, leaving me the berries).

I cut down a Nishiki willow bush that I never saw a bird use in my four years here, and replaced it with a blue false indigo. This native perennial is good-looking, grows rattling seedpods and is useful to native fauna. I've let asters, Virginia creeper, boneset and other "cool" weeds find their places in the beds. (I also let chipmunks plant sunflowers that re-direct all my landscape designing.)



Female rose-breasted grosbeak by Dave Brunelle

It's wonderful to see goldfinches feed their young in the yard. Cardinals sing every summer evening. A pair of rose-breasted grosbeaks visited last year. A lot of non-native house sparrows and some house finches live up the yard. But a good variety of birds have made at least brief yard. But a good variety have made at least brief stays.

I expect the lawn to continue shrinking and the bird population to grow as I add new beds for natives.

Sometimes I wish I had acres for prairies, meadows and woods to help restore native wildlife. But I'm finding I can do a lot for the cause on my city lot.

Ron Cammel stopped by the Habitat Discovery Center several years ago. This past summer, he visited again during a camping trip to Leelanau. During a tour of our prairie garden and woodland walk with our Executive Director, Ron spoke of his native plants efforts in his own yard. As he is a writer for the Grand Rapids Press, our E. D. asked him to provide a piece about his gardening. L



IN-KIND DONATIONS

John Scott
Ken Scott Photography
Omena Sunset Lodge B&B
Mark Voight

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(\$250.00 and up)
Marlin and Pat Bussey
Roy Church
Laura Deibel
Bob and Kay Doyle
Gina and John Erb
Rick and Judy Evans
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Candace Gorman & Christopher Ross
Carl and Mary Lou Griffin
Debby and Ade Igleheart
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Ann Leugers and Elmer Lipp
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Chateau Grand Traverse
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Saving Birds Thru Habitat Membership List 2008-2009 *Continued...*

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Thank You All!

**Saving Birds Thru Habitat gratefully accepts gifts in honor or in memory of others.
When making such a donation, please let us know who should be informed of your gift.**

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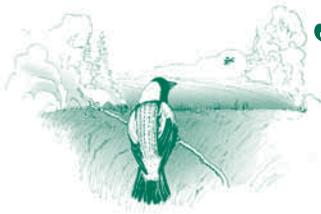
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Thank you for your donation. We are a 501(c)(3) organization; your tax-deductible gift is very important to us

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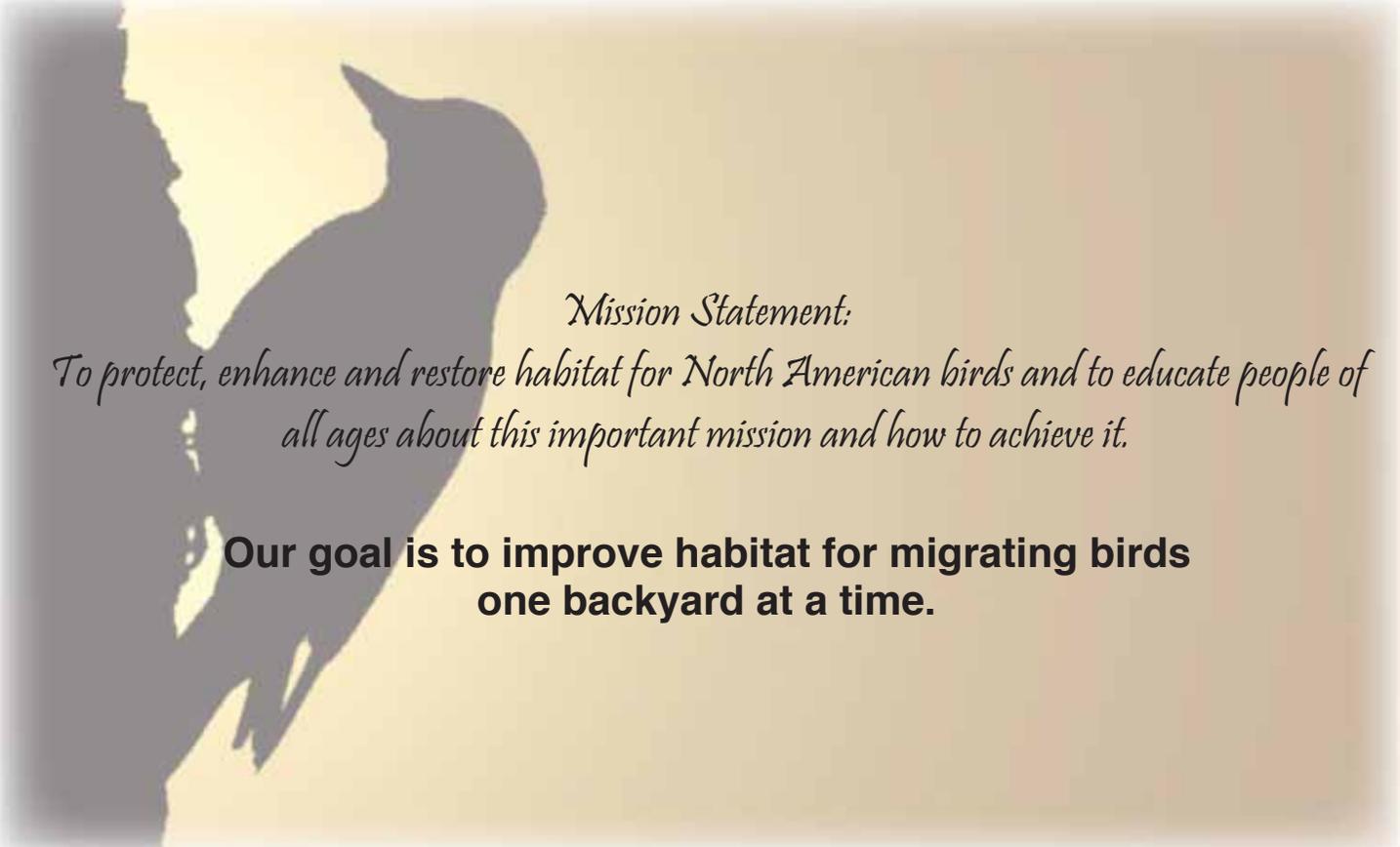
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Saving Birds Thru Habitat

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Mission Statement:

To protect, enhance and restore habitat for North American birds and to educate people of all ages about this important mission and how to achieve it.

**Our goal is to improve habitat for migrating birds
one backyard at a time.**