

# Habitat Happenings

## SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

November 2009, Volume 8, Number 2

**Website:** [www.savingbirds.org](http://www.savingbirds.org)

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Kathleen Snedeker  
and Kay Charter

## It Was a Very Good Year

*by Executive Director Kay Charter*

It's great to be able to report that in spite of a rough economy over the past year, SBTH has held its own – thanks to all of our dedicated members. We also snagged several grants: The first, from the Friendly Garden Club, went to the purchase of additional native grasses and wildflowers for our prairie demonstration garden. The second was a donation of \$10,000 from Fairmount Minerals of Ohio for our Endowment Fund. This fund is managed by the Leelanau Township Foundation and, as such, entitles Michigan residents to a 50% credit on state taxes. And last month our grant request to Norcross Foundation to underwrite the construction of an “earth window” was approved. This structure will be just south of our Nature Center. It will allow visitors to see the incredibly dense and complex systems of native prairie grasses and flowers. This project is scheduled for completion early next spring. 

## Message From Our President Lucky

Lucky...yes, I am very lucky. I live in a wonderful part of the world where I wake up to the beauty of this area and new experiences every day. My husband, John, and I have lived here full time since 1999. When we moved to Leelanau we were not sure where our interests would lead. We waited a year to see what direction life would take us. People would ask: “Aren't you bored? What do you do with your time?” Well you go from bored “NOT” to Board! As you all know there are many deserving organizations in the community and every one needs a helping hand. We became involved in several on the committee level. I was lucky enough to be asked to join Saving Birds Thru Habitat in its beginning stages, now I am President – AMAZING! Being a person who loves nature this has been a perfect fit. I can't tell you how much I have learned and how much fun I am having. I am proud of what our small organization has accomplished over the last 8 years, proud of how instrumental it has been in guiding young and old about the benefits of native habitats that benefit all, and proud of our partnerships with other organizations.

SBTH has been lucky also. Over the past 8 years we have had the good fortune to have as our Board Treasurer, Jim Charter. Getting it right takes a lot of perseverance and time. Jim has worked hard to make our financial records professional and easy to understand. We will miss him, but he's not getting away easily. He is still our number one Habitat Manager. Thanks, Jim, for all your hard work and devotion.

Our luck has not run out. Replacing Jim as treasurer is Mary Valpey. Mary and her husband, Bill, moved here from down-

state. Mary graduated from U of M and has a Master's degree from Wayne State. She taught mathematics for 5 years, co-owned an importing business and was treasurer of the Detroit Methodist Conference. Her love of native plants brought her to us and we are looking forward to her Board tenure. Thank you, Mary.

*Gina Erb* 

## Bobbie Poor - 2009 Volunteer of the Year

During this year's Nest Builders' reception in June, Ann McInnis presented our Volunteer of the Year Award to SBTH member, and one of its founders, Bobbie Poor.



*Bobbie Poor leads a family on a bird hike on Charter Sanctuary*

In a very real way, Bobbie is responsible for the founding of this organization. One afternoon, about two years before the birth of SBTH, she was sitting with Kay in the Charter living room. She suggested that the Charters invite school children for field trips. Kay said that she'd done that and did not think she was very good at it.

“Well of course you are!” Bobbie said. She said it with such

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enthusiasm that Kay thought she saw something in her that she herself was unaware of. The following year a number of Traverse City schools took up the offer and sent fourth and fifth graders for field trips. Following one such trip in the spring of 2001, a mother who had come with her son suggested that a nonprofit would help promote, and underwrite the cost of, these great educational forays. Three months later, Saving Birds Thru Habitat was born. Without Bobbie's earlier special encouragement in the Charter's living room, there is a real possibility that none of what came later would have happened.

Not only was Bobbie the original de facto docent for the organization (helping out from the time the first bus arrived), but she also served as a Board Member during that crucial first year, and she was the second person to become an actual member of the organization.

Bobbie helped with the "barn raising" for the Discovery Center on that hot day in June of 2003, and she continued helping with painting and other jobs until the building was complete. From that time, she has been a dedicated volunteer, serving wherever and whenever she has been needed. She helped with Family Day and with Nature North. As a member of our Education Committee, she has continued to bring fresh ideas for events and programs.

When Ann McInnis presented Bobbie with the award, she said of her:

*This year's award winner shares multiple talents.... not only with SBTH but also as a docent and instructor extraordinaire for the St. Louis Zoo, the Leelanau Conservancy and the Audubon Society. She has helped develop programs that give confidence and educational support to other volunteers... reminding them to "know what you tell.... but not to tell all you know." She has developed programs for the general public presenting fascinating information about such things as the amazing lives of hummingbirds and the sexual behavior of birds.*

*She graciously and reliably volunteers as an SBTH docent, enriching the learning experiences of all.*

Bobbie Poor is one of those rare dedicated individuals without whom organizations like ours simply cannot survive. We are most fortunate, and deeply grateful to have her. L

## Another Eagle Project for SBTH

Wyatt McDonnell elected to work with SBTH on his Eagle Project. His choice was to install permanent ID tags with each plant in our Prairie Demonstration Garden.



Wyatt McDonnell prepares a plant marker

Through his research, Wyatt found reasonably priced tags that will hold up long term, even through our harsh winters. He also researched Latin names for each plant, a task no doubt made easier by the fact that he was a finalist in the National Spelling bee. His training as a speller provides him with a clear understanding of word origins. That skill was helpful when sorting out confusing common names of plants.

Wyatt's parents are members of SBTH. L



SBTH Prairie Demonstration Garden in mid-summer

## Four Season Nursery Donates Prairie Plants

In September, Brian Zimmerman, owner of Four Season Nursery, brought his entire crew to our Discovery Center to attend a PowerPoint presentation on the importance of native plants to our bird population.

After the presentation, a Four Season crew stayed to install native grasses and wildflowers on SBTH property, adjacent to the prairie installation that extends down through Charter Sanctuary. Brian generously donated the plants for which SBTH is very grateful.

Four Season Nursery is at 7557 E. Harry's Road. It is an excellent source of native plants and related expertise.

Thank you, Brian!! L



Crew from Four Season Nursery installs prairie plants.

*(SBTH membership reaches across the United States  
The following piece was written by a member in New Mexico.)*

## **SBTH Member Hosts Hordes of Nesting Cliff Swallows**

*by Malcolm Morrison*



*Cliff swallow nestling photo by Robert Epstein. The Morrisons host dozens of pairs every year.*

Like a horde of biblical locusts they came flying in, but they weren't locusts, they were our cliff swallows coming home. Cliffies are fun to observe, and observe them you will if they nest on your house because they will be right above your head all day. One really can feel good at the end of the day looking up and seeing 150 or more cliffies sitting on power lines, flying overhead, skimming your stock pond for water, and even still darting in and out of the nests feeding their second clutch. You know you had a trivial part in making it happen. However, when admiring your cliffies it is wise not to stand directly under the flight pattern and gaze straight up. There is a good reason why the grass under the nest area is dead.

A few times a year we find a hatchling on the ground below the nests. We always put it back in the nest directly above. If it gets thrown out again in a few minutes, we picked the wrong nest. We try again. When the young jump out of the nest for their first flight, 95+% make it fine. They flap like heck and plummet downward, but the height of the nest gives them the initial altitude they need to start heading up before they pancake into the ground. When pancaking happens, the parents hang around. Here is where you can help out. Check your flight zone several times a day. Pick up any ground pounder you find (your cats ARE indoors, right?) and take it to your highest window, or to your roof. Gently take your junior birdman and smoothly throw it as high as you can and with some forward momentum in the direction you want it to fly, the direction with the least obstructions for 100 feet or so.

This works if it has no wing damage. If it tanks again, put it in a shady spot on the roof, like in a rain gutter on the north side; and mom and pop, who were watching all this, will feed it until it is ready to try again. In eight years we have found only a very few dead in the gutter at the end of the day.

In the fall, house sparrows move into the abandoned nests and remain all winter. In early spring, we knock down the nests to shoo the sparrows away. If house sparrows are in the nests when the swallows return, the battles for the nests are fierce. With no sparrows to contend with, cliffies simply build new nests. L



*Photo by Malcolm Morrison.*

*Post-breeding cliff swallows roost on power line near Morrison home.*

*Editor's note: cliff swallows nest virtually across North America. SBTH has an ongoing effort to attract nesting pairs at the Discovery Center. Local (Leelanau County) residents interested in seeing them can do so at the Omena Bay Country Store. According to Dr. Greg Butcher, Director of Bird Conservation for National Audubon Society, these engaging little birds are doing well in our country, but not so well in Canada. The reasons for the decline in Canada are not understood.*



*Cat killing yellow-rumped warbler  
Photo courtesy American Bird Conservancy*

## Felines Fatales

*by Ted Williams*

***The American Bird Conservancy estimates that 150 million free-ranging cats kill 500 million birds a year in the United States.***

The University of Hawaii is overrun by feral house cats. They are fed by university professors and students, who also trap and medicate them, get them spayed and castrated, then release them. The idea is that the colony will eventually die out without individuals being subjected to the perceived hideous fate of euthanasia. Pioneered in North America at the University of Washington in the 1980s, it's called Trap, Neuter, and Return (TNR). It's all the rage across the United States. And it doesn't work.

My guide was Rachel Neville, manager of the Oahu Invasive Species Committee, which has accomplished the monumental task of ridding the island of coquí frogs from Puerto Rico. Her chances of ridding Oahu of feral cats: exactly zero. On this island alone there are 1,200 people registered as feral cat colony caregivers. And from July 1, 2007, to June 30, 2008, the Hawaiian Humane Society sterilized 2,573 feral cats at no charge for 461 people. That sounds impressive unless you consider that 71 percent to 94 percent of a colony needs to be sterilized before there can even be a decline (provided there's no immigration) and that there are thought to be at least 100,000 feral cats on the island. Moreover, it's nearly as hard to trap cats as it is to herd them, and welfare programs for feral cats encourage the dumping of unwanted pets.

Wildlife biologists and law-enforcement officials contend that in most situations feeding feral cats violates federal law because it facilitates "take" of species protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and/or the Endangered Species Act.

The take is prodigious. The American Bird Conservancy estimates that 150 million free-ranging cats kill 500 million birds a year in the United States. And according to a peer-reviewed study published February 24, 2009, in *Conservation Biology*, TNR causes "hyperpredation," in which well-fed cats continue to prey on bird, mammal, reptile, and amphibian populations so depressed they can no longer sustain native predators.

Feral cats that blight America hasten the extinction process. On Hawaii's Big Island, for example, they depredate about one of every ten nests of the palila—an endangered honeycreeper. Ten thousand feet up on Mauna Loa, cats are snatching endangered Hawaiian petrels from their burrows. The single chick can't fly for 15 weeks, and adults don't breed until they're at least five. On Kauai threatened Newell's shearwaters get disoriented by lights and crash. Usually they're unhurt, but because they can't take off from land people pick them up and deposit them in large "mail boxes" at fire stations from which they're collected and returned to the sea. But feral cats have learned to congregate under the lights, and, increasingly, they're killing the birds before they can be rescued.

On Maui, where, at last count, the public maintains 110 feral cat colonies, two cats killed 143 wedge-tailed shearwaters in one night. Wedge-tailed shearwaters lay one egg a year after they're seven years old, and if one parent is killed, the chick dies. One study turned up Hawaiian stilt parts in 12 percent of feral cat stomachs. Scott Fisher of the Maui Coastal Land Trust points out that seabird guano that used to enrich coastal wetlands throughout the state has declined to the point that alien plants are destroying these habitats. When Fern Duvall, a biologist with the Hawaii Division of Forestry and Wildlife, compared seabird production on main islands and offshore islands where cats were absent, he found 13 percent nesting success on the former, 83 percent on the latter.

*Ted Williams is Editor-at-Large for Audubon Magazine. The above piece was condensed (with permission) from the Sept.-Oct. 2009 issue. As part of his response to a letter in the current issue of Audubon, Mr. Williams points out that a TNR colony at Point Pleasant Beach in New Jersey is being rounded up because rabid cats from that colony have bitten children. To read the piece in its entirety, go to:*

<http://www.audubonmagazine.org/incite/incite0909.html>

*Another piece by Mr. Williams on the same subject can be found at: <http://www.flyrodreel.com/node/12538>* L

## Why Not Save Every Wild Creature?

*by Robert D. Hinkle, PhD.*

There are many well-meaning individuals from all walks of life who look at nature today and, with just concern, feel for the safety and well-being of every living thing existing there. They ask, why not save every wild creature? While the biology is old and the explanation is simplistic, the fact remains that a given habitat can adequately support only a certain number of individuals of a given species - a population - over time. A habitat is made up of many different populations of living things - plants, nematodes, insects, snails, earthworms, birds, mammals and many, many thousands of other populations in that area.

Most wild species reproduce in numbers far larger than their habitats can support. "Nature" ensures adaptation over time through natural selection acting upon the individuals in each population. Survivors, the most fit (or sometimes the most lucky that year), live to contribute whatever genetic coding might have helped them survive to further the gene pool. Any excess num-

bers of individuals beyond the ability of the habitat to support them through each season and throughout the year or years will die, by fang or claw or whatever other cause. Generally, highest mortality is caused by lack of quality food, lack of protective cover, fatal exposure to heat, cold, or too much or too little rain/snowfall. Many other factors come into play as well. Populations with higher densities fall due to such factors as disease and its ease in transmission among closely-packed individuals. Like it or not, that seems to be the way the natural world works.

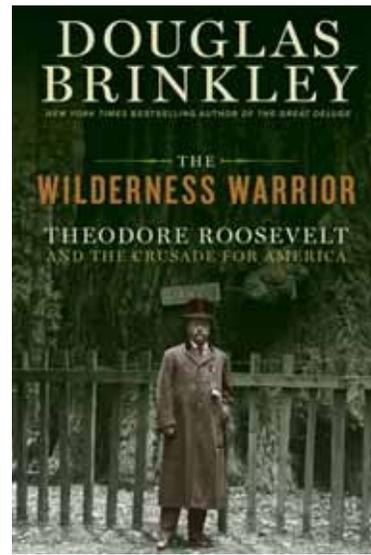
Largely, the size and quality of habitats determine individual and population survival, and high quality habitats ensure larger populations of healthy, vibrant individuals. Populations get into trouble when either they are depleted above replacement or recruitment level, or when the habitat changes and the ability of the land to support them declines or disappears. Other factors, like an unexpected pandemic or competition from introduced alien species can also play havoc with wild populations as they reduce the viability or survivability of native species.

Our problem with all this lies in our human-based perception of the value of life and our disdain for death. As humans in our western society, we are brought up to believe in the inherent value of the life of each human individual. In the field, "nature" is little concerned with the survival of the individual. She is only concerned with individual existence as it contributes to the long term survival of the population of that species. It is species survival over time, not individual survival over a single lifetime, that is important to nature. The only reason we human-folk can succeed outside of these fundamental laws of nature is that we can cleverly modify our habitats to our own advantage - food, shelter, water, safety, etc., - and increase our populations far beyond the earth's natural ability to support them. Most of us realize that there is a limit to that, too. So, in the end, we love nature but we must also take the trouble to try to understand the nature we love. Trying to overlay human attitudes and values over a complex web of intricately interdependent species and the biogeochemistry of the land that supports them is, I believe, a fool's errand. Nature plays by its own rules, and we've only just barely begun to translate the first sentence in that long, complex book. Good luck with that. L

Robert D. Hinkle, PhD is Chief of the Division of Outdoor Education, Cleveland, Ohio, Metroparks.

## BOOK NOTES: BULLY!

The United States has never had a bird enthusiast in the White House more important, innovative, or effective than Theodore Roosevelt. Although TR's bird-and-wildlife interests have played minor roles in other historical biographies, it is Douglas Brinkley, in his recent *THE WILDERNESS WARRIOR: THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND THE CRUSADE FOR AMERICA*, who most effectively puts this president's conservation zeal front-and-center (Harper Collins 2009).



Some birders will revel in Roosevelt's near-endless enthusiasm for ornithology as a youth; others will be amazed by his creative dedication to federalizing innovative Refuges, Parks, and Forests while serving as U.S. President. In any case, it's all here in one hefty volume. The American view of wild creatures and wild places was never the same after the administration of the 26th President of the U.S. (1901–1909).

The above was reprinted, with permission, from the November issue of the Birding E-bulletin: [www.refugenet.org/birding/birding5.html](http://www.refugenet.org/birding/birding5.html) L  
For conservation minded friends and relatives, there would be no better holiday gift than a Duck Stamp and a copy of Brinkley's book!

## Got Stamps?

The odds are that few people who read this newsletter are duck hunters. Many may actually dislike duck hunting. But all certainly care about helping our declining bird populations. Purchase a Federal Duck Stamp (officially called the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp). Better yet, purchase several and give them as gifts to friends and relatives.

Was your first olive-sided flycatcher at Seney National Wildlife Refuge in Michigan's Upper Peninsula? Have you stood under the setting sun at Bosque del Apache in New Mexico to watch the awesome sight of tens of thousands of snow geese returning after spending a day of foraging in nearby fields? Did you see your first bold great kiskadee at Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge in Texas? If you have ever birded any National Wildlife Refuge, you have benefited from those who support refuges by purchasing this conservation stamp. L

## Window Dangers



Nashville warbler killed by window strike.  
Photo by Dr. Daniel Klem

Dr Daniel Klem, noted expert on the subject of window crashes, estimates that hundreds of millions of birds die each year when they crash into windows. We are often asked how to prevent these tragic occurrences. Check out the following websites for ways to reduce or eliminate the crashes:

[www.birdscreen.com](http://www.birdscreen.com)

[www.wpines.com](http://www.wpines.com)

[www.windowalert.com](http://www.windowalert.com)

[www.windowdressingetc.com](http://www.windowdressingetc.com)

To read more about this subject go to Dr. Klem's article on our website:  
[www.savingbirds.org/windows.html](http://www.savingbirds.org/windows.html)

Read Dr. Klem's latest quantitative assessment in *The Wilson Journal of Ornithology* (2009. Vol. 121, Issue 1 Pages 126-134). 

## Saving Birds Thru Habitat Membership List 2009

Many thanks to all  
who support us!

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John and Patricia Foote  
*Honoring John and Virginia Erb*  
111 Group  
*Honoring Bobbie Poor*  
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*Honoring Gina Erb's birthday*  
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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.**

**Yes! I want to support Saving Birds Thru Habitat with a \_\_\_\_\_ Membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal at the following level:**

- Chickadee (\$25)                       Bluebird (\$50)
- Common Yellowthroat (\$100)       Bobolink (\$250)
- Piping Plover (\$500)                 Loon (\$1000)
- Other (\$ \_\_\_\_\_)

**Nest Builders:** Those who make an annual pledge at the Bobolink level (\$250) or higher/

In memory / honor (please circle one) of:

\_\_\_\_\_

Acknowledgment card to go to: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you prefer your membership/gift to be anonymous?

Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 (payable to **Saving Birds thru Habitat**)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Address (if different)

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Questions?** Please call (231) 271-3738 or email:  
 bobolink3@prodigy.net

*Thank You!*



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*Check Out Our  
Web Site!!*  
[www.SavingBirds.org](http://www.SavingBirds.org)

### Winter Migrants

Striking black and white birds of the high Arctic during the breeding season, snow buntings migrate southward for the winter. South for this hardy little bird is not the Tropics, but rather the southern tier of Canada and northern U.S. During the winter months, they take on a rich tawny, white and black coloring. They can be found, often in large flocks, in sand dunes, weedy fields and occasionally along roadsides.

Dark-eyed juncos come in a variety of colors, but are most commonly seen as slate-gray birds with white bellies or with pinkish sides and black and gray head. These birds nest across Canada, down through New England and in the western U.S. They winter from southern Canada down throughout the lower forty-eight states. Their preferred breeding habitat is coniferous and mixed woodlands. In winter they can be found almost any place there is sufficient food and cover.



Photos by Robert Epstein

Our mission is 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.