

# Habitat Happenings

SAVING BIRDS THRU HABITAT NEWSLETTER

November, 2016, Volume 15, Number 2



Voogt Farm

## How a Tee Shirt Saved 7 Bobolink Nests

On Memorial Day last year, U. S. Forest Service Migratory Species Coordinator Greg Butcher rode the ferry back from Beaver Island with our Executive Director. Each had presented programs for Warblers on the Water. A dense fog grounded all flights to the mainland, so the Emerald Isle was packed to the gills with people on their way home from this great birding event. Our Director was wearing her Bobolink tee shirt. Cattle farmers Gary and Shirley Voogt, from Marne, MI, sat near Greg and Kay. Gary noticed her tee shirt and said, “Those birds

nest on our farm.”

Kay said that sadly, these wonderful little songsters are in decline. Gary loves the birds that nest on his property, and the onboard conversation led him and Shirley to travel to Omena to seek Kay out to learn more. The conversation resulted in a bird survey done on Voogt Farm, conducted with an eye to documenting nesting stats for the bird. Birder Chip Francke headed up the survey. When he and his fellow surveyors discovered seven Bobolink nests in a ten-acre section of one of Gary’s hay fields, he marked the area

off and let it stand for the first two cuttings, at a real cost to him of several thousand dollars.

Our hats are off to Gary and Shirley Voogt, who cared so much about their upland nesting birds that they were willing to give up significant income to save seven Bobolink nests.

Even better, the work on Voogt Farm is continuing, not just for Bobolinks, but for other avian nesters. 

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**Edited by:** Kathie Snedeker,  
Kay Charter



In May, six Ronald Brown students – who began with our project three years ago – graduated out of our program as they moved into middle school. We gave each a personalized certificate marking their passage, and we gave each a pair of binoculars to use as they move forward. Pictured here retiring Senior Conservation Scientist for The Nature Conservancy, Dave Ewert, SBTH member Sue McKeon, and two RBA students. On the right is graduating student Kiera McCoy, proudly showing off her certificate and another “graduate” checking out his new binocs. 



## Welcome to Our Board of Directors, Lisa Six

A native Michigander, Lisa Six fell in love with nonprofits when she was only a teenager. Inspired while raising funds for Hurricane Katrina victims, she developed a deep passion for charitable work. This resolve stuck with her through college, leading her to get her BA in Liberal Studies from Grand Valley State University. She has worked primarily in Marketing and Sustainability. Lisa is a mother of three and an avid hiking enthusiast. She has removed many invasive plant species and she makes it her mission to inform others on the importance of planting only native species.

Working with Saving Birds Thru Habitat as a volunteer since 2011, Lisa has been

inspired by Kay Charter to fight for bird protection. Lisa respects the bird habitat initiative that SBTH promotes. She also admires how SBTH educates children, striving for younger generations to grasp the importance of environmental awareness. Lisa looks to the future in continuing to build her relationship and purpose with SBTH to satisfy her desire to promote the protection and sustainability of our environment for generations to come. She is currently working on her Master's in Public Administration with an emphasis in Nonprofit Management and Leadership. Lisa is thrilled to join the Board of this fine organization. 🦋

## Welcome Jack Dunn

Jack Dunn remembers spending many hours outside as he grew up. Walking through fields, wading in creeks, catching crayfish, butterflies and frogs, (among other things) filled his hours as a child. He also remembers the time that twenty snakes in his collection escaped from their container in the garage just as his mother's sorority sister was visiting. That ended his budding career as a herpetologist, but did not change his ever-increasing fascination – and love - for all things in the natural world.

In 1975, Jack took an undergraduate degree in Zoology from MSU, adding a more scientific component to his interest, and feeding his desire to know more about

how animals (and people) work.

But instead of a career in some aspect concerning the natural world, he went to medical school (MSU College of Human Medicine, 1979) and then spent 35 years as an internist and geriatrician. Jack recently retired from that practice. He confesses that although part of him misses medicine, especially his patients, he is pleased that he will now have the time to spend exploring and learning more about our natural environment. He was pleased to be invited to join the Board of Saving Birds, and is very excited about having the opportunity it presents to learn about, and perhaps help, our birds to survive and even thrive. 🦋



## Special Conservation Partner of the Year: Beaver Island, Michigan



*Beaver Island Association Board Member Jim Jones accepts award from Executive Director Kay Charter*

The Community of Beaver Island was chosen as our Special Conservation Partner of the Year for 2016. The island was selected because of its dedication to maintaining healthy ecosystems by removing or controlling invasive species and by protecting island trees from disease and pests, such as the quarantine against bringing wood onto the island in order to prevent introduction of the emerald ash borer.

This jewel in Lake Michigan serves as a critical stopover site for birds migrating to and from the Tropics. It also hosts thousands of pairs of many Neotropical - and resident - nesting bird species. Three years ago, a birding trail was launched under the guidance

of Saving Birds Thru Habitat. The trail has drawn hordes of birders to the island. The trail, and subsequent activities and events celebrating birds, has served to significantly raise awareness about the need to continue protecting habitats needed by avifauna.

Jim Jones, Island resident and Beaver Island Association Board Member, traveled to Omena to receive the award. He also accepted a plaque that designated Beaver Island the first island in the world to receive a Saving Birds Thru Habitat Certified Bird Habitat award. These awards will hang in the Beaver Island Community Center for all to see and appreciate. 🦋

## From the Executive Director's Desk

by Kay Charter

Earlier this year, as I put the final touches on a presentation, I came across the headline for the 2016 State of the Birds Report: More than a third of North America's birds are at risk of extinction. I struggled to regain my composure in order to complete the changes for my presentation. By the time I left for the speaking venue, it was clear to me that my message had to change. It would no longer do to just explain to people what the problem is and how we can fix it.

It is time for birders who think of their favorite pastime as a competition to instead adopt it as a commitment to save these beautiful creatures. People often say, "I help birds, I offer them a fortune in seeds." But think of our warblers, orioles, vireos and flycatchers, none of which eat seeds and all of which depend heavily on insects. What our birds need most is insects, and those insects depend on native trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses.

This is a challenge we can all help to meet. We must. Every one of us needs to do our part. The best thing about pursuing a path to conservation is that we don't have to wait for our legislators to pass new laws, and we don't have to engage in studies that last years. All we have to do is to begin incorporating native plantings into our personal landscapes. It does not matter how large or small your property is; it can serve our birds if you just take this



Executive Director Charter with her step daughter Shelley DeBlois and honorary Board Member Doug Tallamy at our August Fundraiser.

one simple step. You don't have to do it all at once, but begin now, begin this spring by planting a native oak or cherry. Put in a native shrub or two. Add some native wildflowers and grasses.

You can also help by supporting Saving Birds. We are the only organization in the country focusing entirely on educating people about this crucial issue. If you are not a member, please join now.



## Letter From Our Board President

by Linda Ketterer

Greetings to all on a beautiful fall day – whether you are in blustery northwest Michigan or reading this in the many locations around the country where friends support the work of SBTH.

As you read through this newsletter, you'll become even more aware of the important work this organization does to educate people of all ages about the importance of preserving and increasing the acreage of native plants to create habitat for birds. Our programs continue to increase each year – in size and importance.

We have a number of key projects planned for the coming year that will expand the message even greater. To be successful we need your help! I thank you for your continued support of Saving Birds Thru Habitat. We have a unique mission among environmental groups and your participation is key to success. I would like to make a plea for your active participation through volunteering to help with the programs and activities of the organization.

We can use your ideas and help in making sure that our upcoming educational programs for young and old are successful by reaching as many as possible. We would love to involve you! I am sure there is a place for your talents,

interests, and ideas, whether you live near northwest Michigan or anywhere else in the country. Whether you like to work on the education programs for inner city school children, would like to become an advocate for native plantings at local community planning commissions, to lend a hand to insure stimulating educational field days for adults, or to become a spark plug for spreading the word of SBTH to your friends and neighbors, please let us know and we'll find a spot for you!

*Linda Ketterer*

Linda Ketterer  
SBTH Board of Directors President

*"I am only one, But still I am one. I cannot do everything, But still I can do something; And because I cannot do everything I will not refuse to do the something that I can do." -- Edward Everett*



Red-winged Blackbirds. Photo by Sheen Watkins

# Are Some Losses Flying Under the Radar?

by Kay Charter



Chickadee with caterpillar for nestlings. Photo by Doug Tallamy.

Nestling chickadees need lots of caterpillars to grow up.

On Valentine's Day of next year, I will leave on my annual winter hiatus; a getaway to escape winter weather and to reconnect with old friends – both human and avian. I travel by train, and for my upcoming trip, my lovely step-daughter Shelley will join me for two weeks. Our first stop will be Mission, Texas, where we will seek the wonderful, and easy to find, Great Kiskadee.

Like everyone, I have my favorites, and this big and bold, colorful flycatcher is near the top of the list. Flashy birds with lemon breast, cinnamon wings and back, they sport black and white lateral crown stripes. And they flash a bright orange patch on top of their heads when alarmed or annoyed.

Great Kiskadees range from the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas down through Argentina. The best fact about these birds is that they are definitely not declining.

Another favorite is one I share with many others – chickadees. Whether Black-capped, Boreal, Chestnut-backed, Gray-headed or Carolina, these friendly, energetic little denizens of forest and back yard are non-migratory.

Most folks would undoubtedly say that chickadees, like kiskadees, are holding their own in a world that is losing much. But during his presentation, Doug Tallamy told us about a study one of his students conducted on Carolina Chickadees in our nation's Capitol. The student mounted nest boxes in residential neighborhoods. A pair of chickadees built a nest in one of

the boxes and the hen laid three eggs.

For about a week, the little parents were able to feed their nestlings. Then they ran of essential caterpillars for them. When Tallamy's student checked on the nest later, she found the tiny nestlings dead, surrounded by sunflower seeds. It takes between 6,000 and 9,000 caterpillars to raise a single clutch of chickadees. Like most songbirds, these nestlings cannot eat sunflower seeds.

We know that insects are in decline. And that means many birds are not able to find enough food to bring their young off the nest. How many other chickadees – or wrens, or warblers or any other species are failing to raise their young because they cannot find enough protein rich insects for them.

This is what our birds are facing. It's a challenge, but it is one we can meet. Please join us in helping them. Begin by planting a native oak or cherry in your yard.

Then consider making a donation to help expand our educational outreach to teach more folks about how they can also help our birds. 



Great Kiskadee. Photo by Jim Stevenson.

## A Night to Remember

Best selling author Doug Tallamy (*Bringing Nature Home; The Living Landscape*) headlined our fundraiser in August. It was to be an event that would offer a rare opportunity for folks to have personal conversations with him. The response was terrific; many wanted to meet this man, from whom we have all learned so much about conservation.

The event was scheduled to begin at 5 P. M. on Aug. 20, and Doug was scheduled to arrive the evening before. But a series of storms kept him grounded in Chicago. He arrived at our building at 5:01.

The weather did not dampen enthusiasm for our guest; those who braved downpour of biblical proportions were so excited about meeting our guest that they clearly didn't mind it. In fact, in the fifteen years since our founding, we have never held any activity that was filled with so much excitement.

After nearly an hour of rubbing shoulders and chatting with Doug, everyone was shuttled next door into a large, leaky tent for his presentation. In spite of the fact that we were on top of a hill, water under us was several inches deep. Chairs sank into saturated soil and wood chips covering the surface floated away. Rain blew in the sides



*Doug Tallamy presents in downpour.*

and came down so hard that it was difficult to hear his voice, yet the keen interest level remained high. Doug's presentation was short but very much to the point, and very well received.

Many, many thanks to our guest speaker,

and those who came out in the rains to make it a successful evening. 🐦

## June 25 All-Day Workshop a Success!



*Dave Ewert (left) and Greg Butcher (right). Photos by Shane Wyatt.*

Our June 25 All Day Workshop was a sell-out success. It began with a photography class by our V.P, Sheen Watkins. She was followed by a program on the importance of stop-over sites for migrating birds by Dr. Dave Ewert. Last presentation of the morning was on monarch decline by Dr. Greg Butcher. Our workshop will be repeated next year, including choices of after lunch hikes - with a couple of new faces. 🐦



*In* this season of giving, please consider a donation to help us continue and strengthen our educational efforts.

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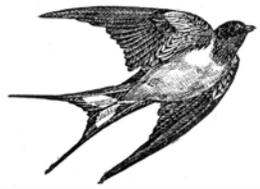
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Sunset maple in Charter prairie by photographer Ken Scott.