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www.benzieaudubon.org

The Meadowlark



Edited by Doug and Sally Cook



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Let's Start a Youth Movement in BAC by Doug Cook

When did you first become seriously interested in birds? My guess is that for many of us it occurred much later in life, after we had a chance to catch a breather from college, kids, and careers.

Back in the 1970's when I started, although the ecology movement was underway, we were not yet caught up in the critical challenges that face the natural world today, foremost among them global climate change. One of the primary objec-

tives of the Benzie Audubon Club's mission is to educate people about nature and show them how they can get involved to make a difference.

Lately, we have been thinking more about our responsibility to young people, like those with the eager faces in the photo above. Through our mini-grant program we have been able to provide financial assistance to local teachers to expand their curricula to include more nature-related

content. We have also offered programs for children including bird banding, field trips, and programs especially attractive to kids—but we want to do more.

Over the next few months board members will be thinking of additional ways to get kids involved. We'd like to hear your ideas. I want to lead a field trip that elicits looks like those above. If we can do that, we'll know we've made a real difference.

It's Election Time!

Our By-Laws call for an election of officers to be held at the Annual Meeting held each November. To that end, we will conduct a brief business meeting following the potluck in order to elect Club Officers for the coming year. The Board will present a slate of candidates, but we also welcome nominations from the floor. The positions open include, Vice-President, Treasurer, and the Chairs for Field Trips, Membership and Conservation.

Members' Photo Show at Annual Meeting

When discussing interesting birds I've seen, I am often asked if I photograph them. My stock answer is, no, I don't need to because our club has so many talented photographers there is no need for me to lug around the extra weight. To illustrate my point, for the

third consecutive year, John Ester and Carl Freeman have collaborated to bring together another version of the popular Members' Photo Show to this year's annual meeting. Well planned and precisely timed, attendees will, once again, be treated to the photo-

graphic skills of several of our members who will provide samples of their efforts over the past year. The meeting will be at the Tribal Outpost in Benzonia, Thursday, November 5th. A potluck dinner begins at 6:00 p.m.



Collage of Rita Mae, a Peregrine Falcon from Wings of Wonder, made by students in Mrs. Slades's Lake Ann Elementary School 5th grade class. The collage, which is approximately 2 feet x 3 feet in size, was created cooperatively by all students in the class under the direction of local artist, Glenn Wolff.

TIME TO RENEW!

It is time to renew your Benzie Audubon Membership. Just fill out the envelope enclosed, include your check, and either mail it in or bring it to the annual meeting.



Mini-Grants for Education by Doug Cook

Each year for the past several years, Sara Slade, an elementary school teacher, currently at Lake Ann Elementary, has joined with artist Glenn Wolff to teach an interdisciplinary unit about birds. The program lasts for several days and in that time students are exposed to many different aspects of birds and their importance to our environment. Mr. Wolff, who is also an experienced birder,

brings not only his knowledge about birds, but also his talents as an artist to the class to help students better appreciate birdlife.

A highlight of the course for the students is the visit to the class each year by Rebecca Lessard of Wings of Wonder. Ms. Lessard brings with her two or three live raptors from her rehabilitation facility to help her explain the role of raptors and how they function in

the wild. Mrs. Slade is able to fund Ms Lessard's appearance through a mini-grant from the Benzie Audubon Club. We are extremely pleased that our mini-grant program helps to bring together a dedicated group of local experts who lend their talents for the education and appreciation of birds to young people. For more information about mini-grants, please go to our website.

Sleeping Bear Birding Trail in Frankfort

One of our programs this past year was presented by Dave Barrons, one of the creators and the current prime mover behind the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail. Through tremendous effort and by overcoming many obstacles, Dave and others were able to create and support the idea of a drivable birding trail that follows M-22 from Manistee north, through Benzie and Leelanau Counties and back around to Traverse City. The trail covers 123 miles and includes 35 recognized stops identified by local birders as points of interest along the way. In addition, members of the Benzie Audubon Club, led by Paula Dreeszen, worked to create a Benzie Bonus Loop of 11 additional stops. All within the county, these include some of our favorite places to see birds. Maps for both of these loops and additional information are available on the trail website at www.sleepngbearbirdingtrail.org.

During Dave Barrons' program, he highlighted the fact that he was moving the central headquarters for the trail to the City of Frankfort, specifically to the Frankfort-Elberta Area Chamber of Commerce Office. He then suggested that we might consider drilling down one more level and create a couple of walkable loops within the city of Frankfort. Again, a group of club members got together, this time led by Bill Gittlen, to create two loops, both easily walkable, from downtown Frankfort. Paula Dreeszen put the information together in an attractive brochure entitled "A Birder's Guide to Frankfort/Elberta."

The first loop begins at the Chamber office, and leads to the Frankfort beach, then moves north along Michigan Avenue, heads East along Beech Street, South on Bellows back to Main Street and the Chamber office, a distance of about three miles. The second loop is a bit more ambitious and basically follows the Betsie Valley Trail completely around Betsie Bay. Both walks encompass multiple habitat types promising a wide variety of bird species. The best bird sightings will likely occur in the spring and fall, although given the variety of habitats and proximity to the Lake Michigan flyway, surprise birds could show up any time.

The Sleeping Bear Birding Trail is a great way for people from out of town to drive through our area and easily find good birding spots. The Benzie Bonus Loop and especially the Frankfort/Elberta walks will provide good birding opportunities for the whole family.

The Rain Garden by Sally Cook

Our backyard in Frankfurt was carved from coastal forest within the last twenty years. Long time residents remember when this end of Beech street didn't exist. The unbroken forest was made up of mature Beech and Maple, Ash and Cherry, with a carpet of ephemerals in spring. This was before the most recent diseases appeared. Imagine.

We were lucky. The people who built our house left many trees on our property, but the ground itself, once anchored by a web of roots, has quickly reverted to dune, with a thinning pelt of sod and weeds on the surface. The previous owners hired Tru-Green to create a mirage of healthy lawn. Not so the Cooks.

One area, in particular,

has been troublesome. At the base of a hill behind the house, there is an area where the rain washes down from above and creates a growing monument to erosion.

Early this spring, Doug and I were looking down on this patch, as we have done many times in our nine years on Beech Street, but this time, instead of simply noticing the ugliness, we had an idea—to make a rain garden.

It didn't take long to remove the existing vegetation. There was almost nothing living in the sandy soil. We worked a layer of rich topsoil into our 30' by 15', teardrop shaped patch and began planting. We planted natives, Aster, Little Blue Stem., Bergemot, Lo-

belia, and others. I collected enough rocks to build a cairn and planted Prairie Smoke around it. We installed a bird bath in the center and lined the short path with Butterfly Weed. A layer of mulch covered any remaining open patches. Locally, Four Seasons Nursery and Misty Ridge Farm are good sources for native plants.

Now, instead of looking down at a patch of eroded sand, we see a beautiful native garden. Birds splash in the bath, a chipmunk has excavated a palace under the cairn, with front and rear entrances. Flowers have bloomed all summer even though it is their first year, heavy with bees.

And we say, "It is good."



Tell us about your bird sightings for inclusion in our regular reports by emailing them to Carl Freeman at carljfreeman@gmail.com

Invasive Species by Emily Cook

When looking out at an open field, forest, or wetland, it is often easy to spot the invasive plant species. Their tendency to dominate a landscape is obvious at the surface level. One year an area may have contained a diverse array of native plants but as time goes on, an invasive species becomes established and soon takes over.

To people, this monoculture is an eye sore. But to wildlife, and birds especially, this change in habitat can critically affect their success in the wild. Birds rely on the

hundreds of insects hosted by native plants. Feeding seed in your backyard is great for the adults but fledglings rely solely on the fat and nutrients from insects fed to them.

When invasive species enter an environment and crowd out native plant species and in turn, insects, the bottom of the food chain is broken, altering all other life above. Some arguments are presented that invasives can be beneficial, and for some plants that is a true statement. In most cases how-

ever, there is no comparison between native and invasive species.

For example, invasive phragmites hosts upwards of 170 insects in Eurasia from where it originates. However, in North America, and right here in Michigan, phragmites only supports 5 insect species that we know of. These two numbers are drastically different! It is so important to educate yourself on the effects of invasive plant species. Planting even a small garden of natives in your backyard can drastically improve habitat for birds!

STOP GARLIC MUSTARD



BENZIE Audubon Club

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Dedicated to
Increasing Our Knowledge
of the
Natural World

We're on the Web at
www.benzieaudubon.org

Our major objectives are promoting an appreciation for and a better understanding of the plants and animals of northern Michigan, preserving our natural environment, and preventing any activities that may pose a threat to our natural ecology.

The Benzie Audubon Club is a tax-exempt charitable organization and a chapter of the Michigan Audubon Society. All of our meetings and field trips are open to the public without charge. Meetings are usually held the first Thursday of each odd month (January, March, etc.) at the Tribal Outpost at 7282 Hoadley Road in Benzonia. Field trips are taken throughout the year.

PLEASE JOIN US

Thursday, November 5, 6:00 p.m. at the Tribal Outpost at 7282 Hoadly Road in Benzonia
Potluck Dinner, Annual Meeting, and Program which will feature a Member's Photo Show.
Bring a dish to pass and your own table service. Following a very brief business meeting several members will share some of their favorite photos with us.