

# Tennessee Ornithological Society Memphis Chapter

<http://birdmemphis.org>

April 2024

## **MARCH PROGRAM**

The March Potluck was a great success thanks to the many members and guests who attended and brought dishes to share. Special thanks go to Dick Preston and Martha Waldron for organizing the event. Thanks also to all those who helped with set-up, clean-up and providing decorations and flowers for the tables. The spacious room was especially beautiful with sunshine streaming during our dinner.

TOS member Cyndi Routledge presented an interesting program on hummingbirds. Cyndi is President and CEO of Southeastern Avian Research (SEAR) that was established to promote conservation and preservation of hummingbirds and other neotropical migrants through scientific study and education. In addition to research she does through SEAR, Cyndi also does contract avian conservation work for the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and manages the Tennessee Watchable Wildlife webpage. She is a federally certified Master bird bander and has banded thousands of hummingbirds. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is the only hummingbird species that breeds east of the Mississippi. They are here from mid-March through late October. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are neotropical migrants that breed as far north as Canada and winter in Central America. Most migrate across the Gulf of Mexico to reach their wintering grounds. Cyndi provided pointers on maintenance of hummingbird feeders. She recommended spraying your feeder with white vinegar to kill mold spores before rinsing and filling it. For low maintenance hummingbird feeding spring to fall, Cyndi recommends planting red buckeye and coral honeysuckle for spring bloom, cardinal flower for summer bloom, and any of the many species of salvia for fall bloom. In addition to nectar, hummingbirds eat large numbers of soft bodied insects such as mosquitoes. Cyndi provided us with an educational pamphlet on hummingbird feeding.



Several western hummingbird species have been observed to pass through or spend time in the east



during winter. SEAR documents wintering hummingbirds in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Mississippi. Cyndi encourages interested persons to keep a hummingbird feeder up during the winter in an easily observed location. Contact Cyndi if a hummingbird is seen from November 1 through March 15 and she will arrange to capture and band the hummingbird. Data regarding the species, sex, size, weight, and health will be collected for each bird that is banded. Since 1990, 300 western hummingbirds have been banded in Tennessee. The most common winter hummingbird species seen in Tennessee are

Rufous and Black-chinned. Rarer species include Allen's, Anna's, Calliope, and Broad-tailed Hummingbirds. In early January 2024, a Black-chinned Hummingbird and a Rufous Hummingbird were documented at a feeder at the home of MTOS member Sarita Joshi. The 2023-24 winter season was slower than usual with only nine winter hummingbirds observed in Cyndi's banding area. Although many winter hummingbird sightings are of short duration some continue for much of the season and banding data show that some hummingbirds return to the same feeder for multiple years.

-Margaret Jefferson

# LOOKING FOR ARTISTS

If you have artwork you'd like to submit for consideration for use on the cover of our next MTOS Directory, please send to Theresa Graham [2graham@bellsouth.net](mailto:2graham@bellsouth.net).

**Artwork can be black & white, or in color. Preferred orientation is Portrait.**

Deadline for artwork is August 31.



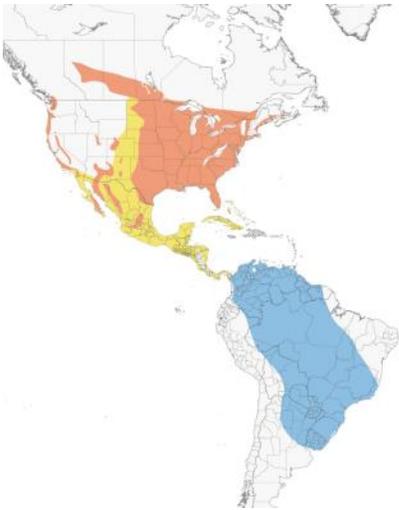
# SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

## Purple Martins

Purple Martins are large swallows with magnificently iridescent plumage. These richly dressed birds are commonly seen frolicking, preening, and chattering outside their multistoried “martin mansions” like millionaires at a party.

**Scientific name:** *Progne subis*

**Habitat and Range:** Purple Martins are long-distance migrants, spending their winters in South America and summering in the Eastern US and parts of the Western US. As an aerial hunter, martins forage wherever there is room to fly and bugs to eat, including over fields, above areas near water, and in cities. In the winter, they may roost in villages while hunting over fields and grasslands. While breeding, martins may stick close to water, where they prefer to nest.



**Diet/feeding:** These masterful fliers hunt high-flying insects such as butterflies, dragonflies, bees, although they do eat spiders, crickets, and other non-flying insects. They also consume gravel to grind up hard insect shells.

**Behavior:** Martins are gregarious around nesting sites, which can be snags with woodpecker holes or artificial houses and gourds (more on this in the Conservation section). Males attempt to defend their own patch of nesting cavities in a tree or martin house, although early arrivals lose ground to latecomers. Fights occur when neighbors enter the wrong cavity. Both males and females mate outside their pair bond, although the male accompanies his mate on hunting trips to ensure her fidelity. The nest is a collection of pine needles and twigs with fresh green leaves. The female incubates 3-6 eggs for two or more weeks, and martins





prepare for their southward migration soon after the young fledge. Flocks at migratory roosts may number in the thousands and show up on weather radars!

**When, where, and how to see:** Purple Martins turn up in Tennessee around April and begin leaving in September. In the spring and summer, they are found most frequently around nesting colonies, although one or two may be seen hunting over fields. During migration and over the winter, they gather at night in dense roosts. Martins are heavily built, seeming to be one size larger than other swallows. Unlike Barn Swallows,

their tails are trapezoidal when spread and fish-like when closed. The males' iridescent feathers look black against the sky and only shine when held at a certain angle. The females' heads have a dusting of purple feathers that fade to a mottled gray neck and finally a white belly. A good way to see a Purple Martin is to keep an ear out for their calls, which are deeper and more mellow than the chatter of Chimney Swifts or Barn Swallows.

**Conservation:** Purple Martin populations declined by 25% from 1966 to 2019, partly due to the loss of suitable colony nest sites and the encroachment of invasive European Starlings and House Sparrows. Surprisingly, the leading cause of martin deaths is cold weather: these birds are so dependent on their prey that 3-4 days of chilliness and a lack of insects leads to starvation. Native Americans hung gourds to attract Purple Martins, and today, martins in the Eastern US almost always nest in rows of gourds and martin mansions, multi-roomed metal birdhouses.



#### Fun facts:

- Myth debunked: Unfortunately, Purple Martins are not voracious mosquito-eaters, as mosquitoes are active at night while martins are diurnal. This myth was spread by a martin house vendor that claimed that "Purple Martins can eat 2000 mosquitoes a day."
- Most people like Purple Martins, but would you put up and maintain around 1,500 nesting gourds? That's what a grandfather and grandson decided to do in the small town of Rainsville, Alabama! Read more about the jaw-dropping colony here: <https://www.purplehazeacfmovie.com/post/the-world-s-largest-purple-martin-colony>

#### Bibliography:

- Photos by Lynn Hui
- Range Map from Cornell Lab's All About Birds Purple Martin profile
- eBird Bar Chart for Purple Martins in Tennessee: <https://ebird.org/barchart?byr=1900&eyr=2024&bmo=1&emo=12&r=US-TN>
- All About Birds Purple Martin pages: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Purple\\_Martin/lifehistory#](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Purple_Martin/lifehistory#)

#### Others

- Purple Martin Conservation Association pages: <https://www.purplemartin.org/>
- <http://www.chuckspurplemartinpage.com/myths.htm>
- <https://www.osc.org/how-native-american-tribes-shaped-purple-martin-birds/#:~:text=Did%20you%20know%20that%20Purple,Martins%20started%20nesting%20inside%20them.>
- <https://www.purplehazeacfmovie.com/post/the-world-s-largest-purple-martin-colony>

*Editor's Note: Special thanks to MTOS member Lynn Hui for contributing this article.*



# FAMOUS BIRDERS IN HISTORY



## John James Audubon - Naturalist Pioneer

Does the name Jean Rabin mean anything to you? How about Jean-Jacques Fougère Audubon? This famous naturalist and bird-watcher went by many names. Today we know him as John James Audubon, and he is known for publishing the massive four-volume title *Birds of America*, featuring over 453 paintings of American birds. Though his questionable character has recently cast him in a very dim light, he detailed over 700 different types of bird species and has left his mark on the birding community.

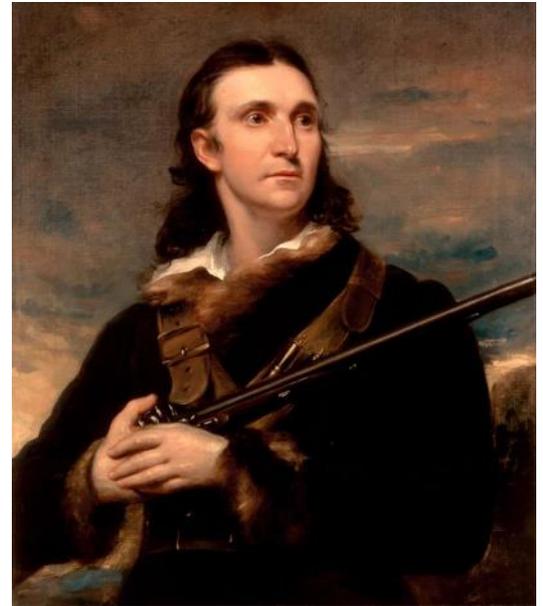
John James Audubon was born Jean Rabin on April 26, 1785 on his father's sugar plantation, in the French colony of Saint-Domingue (now the country of Haiti). He was the illegitimate son of Lieutenant Jean Audubon, a naval officer; Jean's 27-year-old mother and Jean Sr.'s mistress, a Creole chambermaid named Jeanne Rabin, died of tropical disease when Jean Jr. was only a few months old. Jean and his half-sister were raised in Nantes, France, by Jean Audubon Sr. and his childless wife, Anne Moynet Audubon. In 1794, when the boy was nine, he was legally adopted and his name was changed to Jean-Jacques Fougère Audubon. Anne Audubon raised him in France, where young Jean fell in love with the arts and the natural world.

When his son was 11, Jean Audubon Sr. sent Jean Jr. to military school, hoping he would enter a well-established naval career. However, Jean discovered that he had neither mathematical nor navigational skills, and he had a tendency towards seasickness. After failing the officer's qualification test, which ended his short-lived naval career, Jean returned home. There, he split his time learning about arts and nature at the guidance of his stepmother and



tromping through fields to study the birds he had grown up to love. He lived a quiet life in France until the Napoleonic Wars and his 18th birthday collided, and he was forced to either fight for his country, or leave the country altogether. Jean Sr. acquired a false passport for his son and helped him move to Mill Grove, Pennsylvania, where Jean Jr. took care of his father's American estates, mainly the leading mine operations and the family farm. It was when Jean Jr. arrived in rural Pennsylvania that he made a final change to his name, Americanizing it for good - he was now John James Audubon.

Despite his father's best hopes, Audubon lost the farm due to mismanagement and a lack of interest; the young man preferred to roam the Perkiomen Creek and Schuylkill River, all the while hunting, observing, collecting, and sketching birds. During this time, Audubon completed many would-be accomplishments in the field of ornithology; one of his earliest achievements was performing the first successful bird banding operation, which he did by tying strings around the legs of Eastern Phoebes. Through this, he learned that the Phoebes returned to their same nesting



sites each year. He also developed a simple “wire armature” (*John James Audubon, n.d.*), which he used to position the birds he shot so he could paint them in lifelike poses. Even today, with modern technological advancements, no modern bird painter has been able to match Audubon’s talent.

Audubon found more than just birds while in Pennsylvania; in 1804, he met a young woman named Lucy Blakewell. Four years afterwards, they married. When the mining operations in Mill Grove failed due to neglect, Audubon and his bride moved to Louisville, Kentucky in 1809, where he set up a general store and where Lucy gave birth to their first son, Victor Gifford Audubon. It is around this time, in 1810, that Audubon and Alexander Wilson met, as Wilson was gathering subscribers for his own volume on ornithological art. In 1812, John Woodhouse Audubon, the only other child of the Audubons to survive to adulthood, was born. While John and Lucy also had two daughters, Lucy in 1815 and Rose in 1819, both girls died very young.

When yet another one of Audubon’s business ventures failed, Audubon moved his family to Henderson, Kentucky, and then to New Orleans in 1820. Although he did his best to keep his family afloat, Audubon was jailed for debts and kept slaves on his plantation in order to make money so he could continue his quest to discover and paint the natural world. The family had to survive off of Lucy’s earnings as a governess and teacher, and Audubon’s odd jobs working as a taxidermist and a chalk artist. During the time when he was floundering between his family and the workforce, Audubon continued to document and paint birds. In 1824, he attempted to publish a volume of his paintings, but found that there was little interest for American bird species in America. So in 1826, he sailed to England and presented his works to the members of the Royal Institution, who fell in love



with the exotic birds from across the pond. In 1827, Audubon’s magnum opus, *Birds of America*, a four-volume work featuring over 400 of his drawings, was published. Audubon spent the next several years traveling between Europe and America to oversee the publication of his art.

In 1841, Audubon and his family moved to a large estate called Minnie’s Land, along the Hudson River in New York, where he worked on a more compact version of *Birds of America*. In 1843, undaunted by age or declining health, Audubon set out with his son, John, and his collaborator, a Lutheran pastor and anti-abolitionist named John Bachman, to compile what became *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, a 150-work compilation of hand-colored mammal drawings. However, his failing eyesight and a severe stroke in 1848 took its toll on Audubon, and he suffered from what we now know today as Alzheimer’s Disease. The renowned naturalist died on January 27, 1851, and was buried at Trinity Cemetery in New York City.

Today, John James Audubon is remembered for his scientific and artistic explorations of the naturalistic world, and is one of history’s most well-known and revered ornithologists. Though the man had many flaws, his work in environmentalism established him as one of the forefathers for modern conservationism. In 1866, the first birding society was named in his honor and is known today as the National Audubon Society.

-Cate VanNostrand

## References

- *John James Audubon.* (n.d.). John James Audubon Center. Retrieved March 21, 2024, from <https://johnjames.audubon.org/john-james-audubon-0>
- *John James Audubon.* (n.d.). National Gallery of Art. Retrieved March 21, 2024, from <https://www.nga.gov/collection/artist-info.122.html>
- *John James Audubon - Paintings, Facts & Life.* (2014, April 2). Biography (Bio.). Retrieved March 21, 2024, from <https://www.biography.com/scientists/john-james-audubon>
- Polan, J. (n.d.). John James Audubon | Audubon. National Audubon Society. Retrieved March 21, 2024, from <https://www.audubon.org/content/john-james-audubon>

# MISSISSIPPI WILDLIFE REFUGE (MWR)

## *Backyard Wildlife Habitat Workshops*



Saturday, 10am-2pm

### *Feeding Wildlife*

We will look at providing food for wildlife. Everyone will go home with a selection of native plant seeds and/or seedlings for your garden.

*April*  
**20**  
2024



Saturday, 10am-2pm

### *Bird Baths*

This workshop will cover practical ways to add water to your landscape and you will make your own leaf mold bird bath!

*Sept*  
**14**  
2024

All supplies are included with registration. You can register for 1, 2, or all 3 workshops.

Cost is \$25 for one, \$45 for two and \$60 for all three.

Workshops are held at The ARK Trails, 7001 W Commerce Street, Hernando, MS (a short 40-45 minute drive!).

To register, visit <https://www.mswildliferehab.org/>

# SUMMER CAMP

MWR is hosting two summer camps for children ages 8 to 12.

## **Wildlife Camp (June 24-28)**

Each day focuses on a different group of wildlife - mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects!

## **Nature Camp (July 8-12)**

We will have guest artists working with different mediums.

For more information and to register your child or grandchild, visit our website at [www.mswildliferehab.org/events](http://www.mswildliferehab.org/events).

## **A LA CARTE**

- Why is that woodpecker pecking on metal?  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUAqFR7yF50>
- 4 Unusual Birds Named After Mythological Creatures  
<https://birdfeederhub.com/birds-named-after-mythological-figures/>
- First Known Photos of 'Lost Bird' Captured by UTEP Scientists  
<https://www.utep.edu/newsfeed/2024/february/first-known-photos-of-lost-bird-captured-by-utep-scientists.html>
- 5 Letter Birds That Start with A (Only 2!)  
<https://birdfeederhub.com/5-letter-birds-that-start-with-a/>
- Badgerland Birding Podcast Ep 12 - Birding in WI, County Big Years, Sketchy Encounters - W/Tim Hahn  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BYqC-5itTM>
- 10 Fun Facts About the Mourning Dove  
<https://www.audubon.org/es/node/149353>
- City Nature Challenge  
<https://www.citynaturechallenge.org/>

# Upcoming Events

## April / May 2024

### **Saturday, April 6, 7:30 am**

Herb Parsons Lake, Fayette County  
Field Trip Leader: Allen Sparks  
[asparks306@bellsouth.net](mailto:asparks306@bellsouth.net)

### **Wednesday, April 10, 7:30 am**

Meeman-Shelby Forest SP  
Meet at Visitors Center  
Field Trip Leader: Van Harris/Dick Preston  
Dick: [dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)  
Van: [shelbyforester1223@gmail.com](mailto:shelbyforester1223@gmail.com)

### **Saturday-Sunday, April 13-14**

Delta Wind Birds Spring Weekend at Sky Lake  
For more information, click [here](#).

### **Wednesday, April 17, 7:00 pm**

Chapter Meeting  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
2425 South Germantown Rd.  
Germantown, TN

### **Saturday, April 20, 7:30 am**

Wall Doxey State Park  
Entrance fee is \$4 per car on the honor system.  
Field Trip Leader: Hal Mitchell  
[halmitchell@gmail.com](mailto:halmitchell@gmail.com)

### **Friday-Sunday, April 26-28**

Spring TOS Meeting  
Knoxville, TN

### **Wednesday, May 1, 7:30 am**

Overton Park  
Meet at East Parkway parking lot  
Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston  
[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

### **Saturday, May 11**

Spring Count  
Meeman-Shelby Forest SP - Meet at Visitors Center  
Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston  
Overton Park - Meet at East Parkway parking lot  
Field Trip Leader: Margaret Jefferson  
Dick: [dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)  
Margaret: [mjefferson100@hotmail.com](mailto:mjefferson100@hotmail.com)

### **Wednesday, May 15, 7:00 pm**

Chapter Meeting  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
2425 South Germantown Rd.  
Germantown, TN

### **Saturday, May 18, 7:30 am**

Shelby Farms Park  
Meet at Disk Golf parking lot - Pine Lake Drive  
Field Trip Leader: Cliff VanNostrand  
[birdinginthe901@gmail.com](mailto:birdinginthe901@gmail.com)

### **Wednesday, May 22, 7:30 am**

Meeman-Shelby Forest SP  
Meet at Visitors Center  
Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston  
[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

For more information go to:  
<https://tnbirds.org/events>



# WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY CLASS

- Where: Lichterman Nature Center (indoors), 5992 Quince Road, Memphis, TN
- When: 9:00-10:30am, Saturday, May 4
- Cost: \$15 which gives access to the class, nature center, and grounds.

Join Allen Sparks for a wildlife photography class focusing on birds, insects (macro), and other wildlife such as mammals and reptiles. The indoor class will be appropriate for beginning to intermediate photographers interested in learning more about techniques for these wildlife subjects. Topics covered include camera techniques, equipment, and image composition. DSLR and mirrorless cameras will be discussed



Contact Allen Sparks  
asparks306@bellsouth.net / 901-604-7654

Registration is not required.  
Optional shooting on the grounds of  
Lichterman Nature Center after class.

PHOTOS BY  
ALLEN SPARKS

---



"Touche!"



"Mind your own beesness!"



"Stop lookin' over my shoulder!"



"Wanna buy a watch?"



"I've Got an Itch!"



"Bottoms Up!"



"I've Lost My Head!"

Photos by:  
Debra Kienzle



Getting the last morsels out



Getting to those hard to reach places



Neck twist

PHOTOS BY  
**THOMAS KIENZLE**

# PHOTOS BY



"Kissing you kids goodnight is so awkward!"



"Look! Flying fish!"



"Mom, Egbert is chewing with his mouth open again."



"I am pretty, oh so pretty!"



"Are you looking at me?"



"Forget the Woodchuck! How much wood could I chuck?"

**TODD WINN**

# Photos by: Cliff VanNostrand



Cue the *Mission Impossible* theme



"Everybody was Kung Fu fighting!"



Duh-duh.....duh-duh.....duh-duh.....dudududdudu

# from the desk of:



Carolina Chickadee



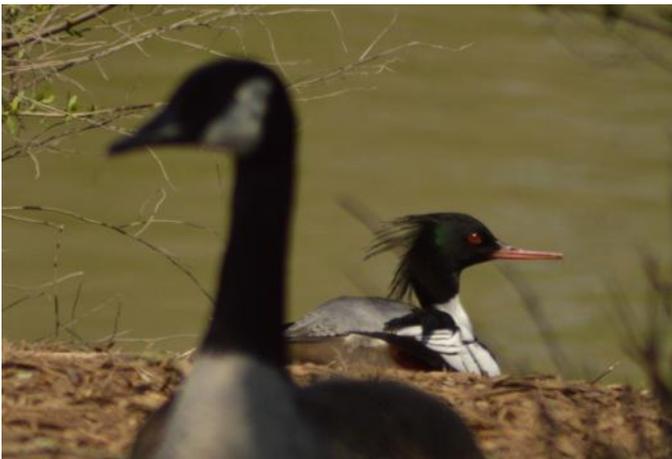
American White Pelican



Cedar Waxwing



Common Loon



Canada Goose & Red-breasted Merganser



Blue Jay



# PHOTOS BY ZEESHAN ALI



Bald Eagle



American Robin



Double-crested Cormorant



Downy Woodpecker



American White Pelican with Double-crested Cormorant



Northern Cardinal



White-throated Sparrow



Northern Cardinal

### TOS Membership Information

Members may join online at [www.birdmemphis.org](http://www.birdmemphis.org) or by mail.

Benefits include monthly programs, field trips, quarterly journals, and state and chapter newsletters.

Categories and dues are:

Individual	\$36
Family	\$40
Sustaining	\$55
College Student	\$15
Other Student	\$10
Lifetime	\$450 one time +\$18 yearly

Dues payable by PayPal

at [www.birdmemphis.org](http://www.birdmemphis.org) or by check, made out to MTOS.

Please send dues to: Barbara Pyles  
8488 East Askersund Cove  
Cordova, TN 38018  
(901) 570-1009  
E-mail [brbpyles@gmail.com](mailto:brbpyles@gmail.com)

### Newsletter Delivery Options

To reduce printing and mailing costs, a digital version, which is usually expanded with photos and occasional articles, is provided. Notify Margaret Jefferson, [mjefferson100@hotmail.com](mailto:mjefferson100@hotmail.com). If you have no internet access, a printed version can be mailed.

### Chapter Newsletter Submissions

Email submissions to Deon VanNostrand [mtosnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:mtosnewsletter@gmail.com)

*Deadline for submissions to the Newsletter is the 22nd of the month.*

### Field Cards

Please mail or e-mail your field cards and notable sightings to Dick Preston.  
[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

### Tennessee Warbler Deadlines

- \*March 15 for the April Newsletter
- \*July 15 for the August Newsletter
- \*November 15 for the December Newsletter

Forward contributions to:

Theresa Graham, Editor  
P.O. Box 366 Oakland, TN 38060  
(901) 489-0795  
Email: [2graham@bellsouth.net](mailto:2graham@bellsouth.net)

### Chapter Meeting

**April 17, 2024. 7:00pm**

St. George's Episcopal Church,  
2425 South Germantown Rd. Germantown, TN  
Phone 901-754-7282

### Program

**Van Harris, MTOS**  
*South Africa*

### Hospitality

Refreshments will be provided by Margaret Jefferson and Joanie Webb.

### Upcoming Field Trip Information

**April 6**—Herb Parsons Lake, Fayette County  
**April 10**—Meeman-Shelby Forest SP  
**April 20**—Wall Doxey State Park

Thank you to all who contributed to this month's newsletter.

For our next issue, we would like to feature some photos of nesting birds.

Please send your submissions to [mtosnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:mtosnewsletter@gmail.com).

### New Members

Logan Sirbaugh [logansirbaugh@outlook.com](mailto:logansirbaugh@outlook.com)  
Tim Kukkala [timsk1972@yahoo.com](mailto:timsk1972@yahoo.com)

### Treasurer's Report

As of March 22, 2024, the balance in the treasury is \$16,043.79. MTOS total membership stands at 150. By April 30 another 20 member renewals are expected to arrive. The March Potluck was a success. MTOS costs (mainly barbeque) were covered by \$370 in meal receipts. Attendance was outstanding (80+), as was the program. Thanks to those who helped with room set-up and clean-up. The volunteer spirit thrives at MTOS.

### New Business

There will be a chapter vote at the April meeting on the February motion to provide a \$600 Honorarium to St George's Episcopal Church, for meeting space.