



# THE TENNESSEE WARBLER

Newsletter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society

August, 2020

Editor, Theresa Graham

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Hopefully all members of the TOS “family” have avoided the dangers of the Pandemic. Our inclination to be outside definitely helps. In fact, the act of sheltering in place appears to be encouraging many people to discover birds in their own backyard. I believe that TOS should pursue this opportunity to build on this interest and help others become interested in birding as a hobby. We can invite the general public to participate in basic birdwatching field trips as beginner nature experiences. TOS has a long history of inclusion and an open policy regarding participation in our organization. Related to inclusion, TOS promoted “Black Birders Week” at the end of May. This initiative was a positive response to embrace the participation of this subgroup in nature events. TOS can take this opportunity to include various subgroups including: youth birders (great educational activity), people who frequent green spaces in urban areas, and anyone who might have developed an interest generated by the pandemic.

In recognition of the uncertainty of the duration of the pandemic and in consultation with the hosts of the fall meeting, it has become apparent that TOS will not be able to hold the fall meeting in Lebanon as planned. We will need to conduct some business online, including the formal election of officers at the state level. The specific procedure for this will be communicated as widely as possible, but the process has not been determined at this time. It is with regret that we cancel this event. Please know that the members of the Lebanon Chapter have put a great deal of effort into planning for this fall meeting. I want to personally thank each of them for their hard work! Special thanks to Linda Robertson, Melissa Turrentine, Greg Tomerlin, and Stephen Zipperer! Sorry we will not be with you this fall, but we hope that TOS will meet with you sometime in the future.

Meanwhile, please continue to participate at the chapter level in the traditional ways by serving as officers and presenting programs. Also, please be creative in finding safe social distancing opportunities, outdoors in small groups and even on field trips to find, identify and enjoy birds safely. Additionally, many important environmental, conservation and bird specific legislation are under consideration at the federal level. It is a challenge to get important action in these areas through this Congress. The Conservation Policy Committee has been working on developing effective ways to communicate our positions on various legislation to our members of Congress. Informative letters to each member of the Tennessee Congressional delegation from individual TOS members and interested parties can be most effective. Please check our [Facebook](#) page and [website](#) for specific details and talking points for your consideration. Among other issues, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act is up for consideration, and the results will be extremely impactful to the bird population. While TOS is not a political organization, actions taken in Congress can have major impact on the migratory bird population. Each of us can educate our representatives as to the impact their actions will have on birds. Please make your position known on these issues through letters to your representatives.

Stay safe and stay informed!

Danny Gaddy  
President, Tennessee Ornithological Society

The current administration has been trying to gut the Migratory Bird Treaty Act since 2017. By the time you read this newsletter, the decision whether to codify their new rule will have been made. For decades we've depended on this Act to protect birds from preventable killing, or "take", by industry. For example, the original rule was responsible for part of the enormous fine British Petroleum (BP) had to pay when the New Horizon oil spill killed a million birds. Assuming the Fish and Wildlife Service has codified this rule change, a company will be fined only if they "intentionally" killed birds. The Conservation Policy Committee (CPC) submitted comments to the Fish and Wildlife Service, as did many TOS members, which were due by July 20th. This is the official letter that was sent by our president on behalf of TOS:

#### Fish and Wildlife Service

The Tennessee Ornithological Society strongly opposes the changes to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act described in your preferred Alternative A in the recent Draft Environmental Impact Statement by the Fish and Wildlife Service. And we support Alternative B, restoring the original protections that have been in place for 100 years.

Your own analysis on environment impacts confirms that your preferred Alternative A would have major negative effects on migratory birds and result in increased bird mortality. Given the three billion decline in North American bird populations over recent decades, this result could be disastrous. These declines are well documented and have raised alarm across multiple organizations which monitor the condition of birds. The policy proposed would have major impacts on industry standards and their management practices relating to protection of bird mortality.

Furthermore this Alternative A action would decrease revenue for businesses directly dependent on birds such as hunting, bird watching, guides, and ecotourism. And it would surely increase costs for businesses dependent on services provided by birds such as seed dispersal and pollination.

This draft EIS is in no way a thorough scientific analysis of all the ways the proposal would harm migratory birds. In fact, it focuses more on the possible detrimental impacts of migratory birds on certain industries—especially the airline and oil industries, rather than the opposite! The use of an aviation accident to justify the loss of millions of birds is simply indefensible. There is no evidence that migratory birds are causing impacts significant enough to justify lifting protections. Allowing corporations a free pass at harming birds accidentally or "unintentionally" is not in the best interest of future generations. However, we do have evidence of significant impact on birds by the BP oil spill which would not, under this plan, have generated a fine to BP as a result of the disaster.

In contrast, Alternative B would restore MBTA protections, reduce bird mortality, and increase the use of best management practices and enforcement. This would increase ecosystem services provided by birds, as well as other wildlife, and economic benefits. Habitat protection and restoration from use of fines would in turn benefit vegetation and wildlife. This approach is science based.

This draft EIS states that the MBTA has been enforced unevenly across the country, leaving companies to wonder how the law would apply in any given location. But this is an issue of enforcement, not of the nature of the law itself. Is not the FWS itself the most important enforcement arm that should be making sure enforcement is more even and predictable?

The Mission Statement for the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service states, "Work with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people." Please explain how Alternative A, in any way, conserves birds or their habitats, or protects birds, or enhances bird habitat. Instead these changes do the exact opposite—they would roll back a century of protecting one of America's most precious resources. How is this fulfilling the mission of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service? The MBTA is a bi-partisan bill that has worked for this country's birds for more than a century and saved countless individuals and species of birds. These proposed changes would set back conservation in this country for decades.

Sincerely,  
Danny Gaddy, President of the Tennessee Ornithological Society

Now there's a Bill before Congress that would put into law the original protections of the MBTA - overriding the decision above. The bill is H.R. 5552, The Migratory Bird Protection Act. The CPC is again mounting a campaign for letters to be written to members of the U. S. House of Representatives urging them to support this bill. We especially need letters written by TOS members living outside of Nashville and Memphis, since those two Representatives are already co-sponsors! Members of the CPC will gladly help you compose letters, just contact one of us:

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## Mack S. Prichard, 81, died peacefully on April 28, 2020 in Cookeville, Tennessee



For more than 50 years, Mack Prichard served as an effective thinker, teacher, and advocate for conservation in Tennessee. Mack began his career with the Tennessee Department of Conservation when he was just 16 years old as the Seasonal Naturalist at Shelby Forest State Park near Memphis. In addition to developing an extensive knowledge of natural and cultural history, he had a gift for connecting with people and instilling appreciation for everything natural and historic.

Since 1956, when he began his career, few people have been as instrumental as Mack Prichard in promoting conservation, state parks, and natural areas in Tennessee. Mack was actively involved in securing and protecting more than half of the areas in the state park system. Mack was the first State Archeologist who established the Tennessee Division of Archeology in 1971. Mack was Natural Areas Administrator in 1973 and helped protect the first areas under the Natural Areas Act. In the last decades of his career he was known as the State Naturalist. In May of 2006, in anticipation of his retirement, the Tennessee General Assembly commended Mack's half century of being Tennessee's "Conservation Conscience" and conferred upon him the title 'Tennessee State Naturalist Emeritus' through Senate Resolution 1007.

Mack's work outside of state government was also prodigious. He was one of three founding members of the Tennessee Trails Association and was actively involved in starting at least 30 conservation organizations statewide. The Tennessee Ornithological Society predates Mack by many years, but he was an active supporter. Mack's beloved and respected voice inspired a range of constructive work and results to advance natural resource preservation and more effective resource management across the state.

The first time I met Mack Prichard was when he came to UT Martin to give a slide talk. His message included protecting habitat for birds and other wildlife. Near the end of his program he made some jump from their seats when he loudly and accurately imitated a Barred Owl. He said we should all 'give a hoot' for conservation in Tennessee. Through the years he taught me many things and encouraged my pursuit of a career as an Interpretive Naturalist. Everyone who loves the nature and history of Tennessee owes thanks to Mack Prichard.

Co-worker and friend Richard Hilten writes: "Mack has achieved so many things in his colorful life, not the least of which has been the inspiration of countless beginning and professional conservationists. He set the standard high for all of us, and each one has done his/her part to do the right thing for the right reasons, following his lead like so many happy children behind the Pied Piper".

Randy Hedgepath

## **KEEP CATS, BIRDS AND PEOPLE SAFE AND HEALTHY**

Responsible pet ownership is a key component of a healthy and safe community for pets, wildlife and people. Unfortunately, roaming pets frequently fall victim to speeding cars, harm vulnerable wildlife and facilitate the spread of disease.

Over the last 50 years, the United States and Canada have experienced a net loss of nearly three billion birds. To reduce this decline and save our birds, we need to take action to reduce human-caused threats. While many of us love our pet cats, outdoor cats are the single greatest direct source of human-caused mortality to birds in the United States and Canada. The death toll is estimated at nearly one billion birds per year. Keeping cats indoors – or safely contained outdoors – is a simple and easy way to protect cats and birds.

Please ask your local elected officials to support keeping pets, wildlife and people safe by passing common-sense ordinances that prohibit animal abandonment, strengthen sterilization and pet identification, and encourage safe alternatives to unrestricted roaming.

Source and further information: American Bird Conservancy (ABC) – [abcbirds.org](http://abcbirds.org)

Editor's note: TOS is a member organization of ABC.

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## **VICTORY FOR MIGRATORY BIRDS IN VIRGINIA**

The Commonwealth of Virginia has come through for the mid-Atlantic's largest waterbird colony, which includes thousands of Royal Terns, Common Terns, Laughing Gulls and several other species. Their future was threatened when Hampton Road Bridge-Tunnel construction destroyed the colony's nesting site earlier this year. Following appeals from the American Bird Conservancy (ABC) and other groups, the Commonwealth created an alternative nesting site on a nearby island. They also put barges in place for additional nesting habitat. With the new sites now occupied the birds appear poised to begin a successful breeding season.

ABC and the National Audubon Society's Seabird Restoration Program supported the development and installation of a social attraction system on Rip Rap Island to lure the birds. The system includes audio continuously broadcasting the calls of Common Terns, Royal Terns and Black Skimmers – proven techniques to attract birds to a particular location.

Source and further information: American Bird Conservancy: [abcbirds.org](http://abcbirds.org)

Editor's note: TOS is a member organization of ABC

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..... **Spring Count Data Now Due** .....

The Spring bird count data are due as soon as possible to allow me to get my report in to the editor of *The Migrant* in a timely fashion. Besides the actual count data, please be sure to include the following effort data:

1. Hours and miles by car, foot, and any night birding
2. Number of observers and parties
3. Any feeder watching hours & names
4. Start and end times for the count
5. Weather data for the count
6. Names of all the participants

Compilers: please try to use a bird checklist that is based on somewhat recent taxonomy. This greatly speeds up my job compiling these reports.

If you do not have a local compiler, you can send the data directly to me at the address/email below.

TOS appreciates your efforts to record and track our bird populations and abundance. Thanks for helping us to archive this data for future generations and researchers. Please be mindful of the Coronavirus. Although TOS appreciates the bird data we certainly don't want any observer catching this wicked virus.

Ron Hoff, TOS State Bird Count Compiler  
166 Chahyga Way • Loudon, TN 37774 • 865-567-9679  
[webe2brdrs@gmail.com](mailto:webe2brdrs@gmail.com)

**OCTOBER 31<sup>ST</sup> DEADLINE**

The deadline date for the December issue of *The Tennessee Warbler* is October 31st. Please submit all articles, announcements, reports and items of interest by this deadline date.

**Submit Material To:**  
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(901) 489-0795  
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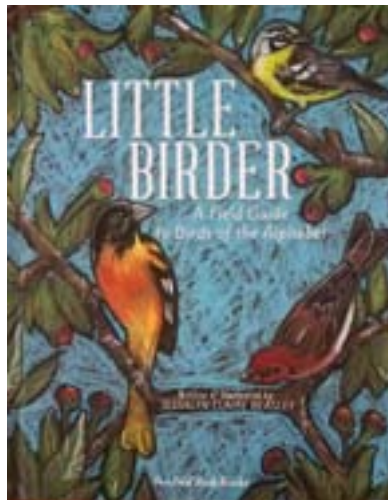


## CHAPTER NEWS

**THE HIGHLAND RIM CHAPTER** March 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting was held at First Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville. The hosts were Jim and Rachel Harwell, Rhonda Seitzinger and Janie Denis. We had 26 in attendance. Our guest speaker was Jessalyn Claire Beasley, author and illustrator of *Little Birder: A Field Guide to Birds of the Alphabet*. This book won the 13<sup>th</sup> annual National Indie Excellence Award, winning the children's nonfiction category as well as the Juror's Choice Award. She promotes learning and curiosity, and her book invites children to enter the world of nature through birds, art and easy to understand facts. Her goal is to foster creativity in young children and inspire them to ask questions. *Little Birder* not only teaches children about birds, but also the alphabet. In the back of the book are instructions on how to draw a bird as well as a Birdwatcher's Journal for the children/parents to document their sightings. Jessalyn did her own paintings and illustrations. The pages on the left are full size paintings and the opposite side describes the bird, followed by a rhyming text. Jessalyn said the letters X and Z were the hardest. She used the Waxwing for X and the Zone-tailed hawk for Z. Her favorite was C, the Chickadee. This book will grow with a child. She wanted to remind us that sometimes as we enter adulthood we forget to notice nature or the "spirit of wonder", and she is hoping this book helps plant seeds for bird watching, art, nature and the love of learning in the young and young at heart. Go discover Little Birder at [www.jessalynclaire.com](http://www.jessalynclaire.com)

Unbeknown to us at the time, March 3<sup>rd</sup> would be our last planned meeting of the year due to Covid-19. We look forward to gathering again when all is well.

Be Safe,  
Janie Denis, Secretary



In February, **BIRDING KINGSPORT** hosted a program by Bill Grigsby, on the Florida Birding Trail, which featured identification tips. Local bird walks at Fort Patrick Henry Dam and the Kingsport Greenbelt (Kingsport Birding Trail) were also enjoyed. A field trip further afield to Roane County, featuring the Swan Pond Recreation Area/Gupton Wetlands, ended the month.

Like many other groups, we suspended our activities in March due to the COVID-19 guidelines. We continued to be in this "pause" mode through June. We did host a short Zoom meeting to virtually connect our members in May, who have been enjoying backyard birding and their own birding adventures.

I want to recognize Bill Grigsby, Fred Saylor, and Kim Pruden who have done an exceptional job of monitoring and maintaining our Bluebird boxes during the pandemic. Kim has also posted many interesting photographs and updates on our Birding Kingsport Facebook page.

Officer elections were held via email in June, and I am happy to report the new group of leaders for our 2020-2021 club year, beginning July 1st: President, Helen Sirett.; First Vice President- Programs, Betty Bailey; Second Vice President-Activities (Field Trips/ Bird Walks), Bambi Fincher; Treasurer, Ken Hendrix; Recording Secretary, Judith Reid; Communications Secretary (Publicity), Kay Ann Smith.

We are looking forward to starting our full schedule of activities when it is safe and advisable to resume.

Birding Kingsport meets the fourth Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm, typically at the Eastman Employee Center in Kingsport. Meeting details can be found on our website at [www.birdingkingsport.org](http://www.birdingkingsport.org).

Happy Birding!  
Helen Sirett  
President, Birding Kingsport

## CHAPTER NEWS

Due to the Covid pandemic, all meetings and outings of the **KNOXVILLE CHAPTER** have been curtailed the last few months. However, since spring migration happened anyway, many individuals ventured out to their favorite spots to look for those elusive warblers! When, by chance, birders came upon each other, social distancing was respected. Programs that were scheduled for the spring meetings will hopefully be rescheduled for the fall, presuming we are able to meet together again at that time.

In February, KTOS participated with a table at the Dogwood Arts Festival Home and Garden Show in the Knoxville Convention Center. This offered a wonderful opportunity to reach out to people from East Tennessee and beyond, and answer questions about backyard birding, conservation, and KTOS events.

Our last meeting in March, prior to the shutdown, brought Todd M. Freeberg, from the UT Department of Psychology and Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Animal Behavior Department. He gave a very interesting talk on the study of songbird social psychology. The concentration was on flock complexity and Chickadee behavior, studying physical behavior and vocal communications in Chickadee and Titmouse flocks. It was fascinating and included comparisons to human social behavior.

Rare birds: Even though we spent a lot of time watching birds from our living room windows, it was a spectacular spring migration with many rare sightings. In Blount County, a White-faced Ibis was discovered in a marshy lake, and was seen by quite a few people but was gone by the next morning. An Olive-sided Flycatcher showed up on Sharp's Ridge in Knoxville, and stayed for more than a week. A wonderful surprise was a flock of 19 American Avocets that arrived in early May at Concord Park, the Cove, in west Knoxville. The birds stayed close to shore so everyone got great looks. When flushed by fishermen or running children, the flock flew around for a few minutes, but continued to return to the same beach to rest and feed.

Another exciting development has been a sharp increase in the number of Swainson's Warblers reported in the counties surrounding Knox. Roane, Morgan, Anderson, Campbell, Scott, Sevier, Union, Blount and Monroe have all had reports. A number of these,

especially in Anderson, seem to be new locations for this species. Other interesting trends seem to be an increase in Dickcissels nesting and shorebirds migrating through the area.

We hope everyone continues to stay safe and healthy, and we look forward to all being able to meet together, in person, as soon as possible.

Laura Tappan, Secretary



Photo by Laura Tappan. American Avocets

Most members of the **LEE & LOIS HERNDON CHAPTER** of TOS, based in Elizabethton, have a good working knowledge of technology, whether it be birding apps or Zoom conferences. Such knowledge has been quite handy in the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic.

And not at all surprisingly, not even the pandemic could prevent the chapter's members from conducting the 77th consecutive Elizabethton Spring Bird Count. The annual survey was held Saturday, May 2. The area covered included Carter County and parts of the adjacent counties of Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi and Washington. Fifty-one observers participated in 22 parties using the suggested social distancing protocols.

A total of 159 species were tallied. The recent 30-year average is 149 species. However, broken down by decades, this particular count has seen a steady increase during that period, as follows: 1990s had an average of 145 species, the 2000s saw that increase



## CHAPTER NEWS

Herndon - *Continued from Page 8*

to 150 species, and the 2010s saw another rise to 153 species. The all-time high on this count was 166 species back in 2016.

The count found 27 species of warblers, including such notable finds as Blackpoll Warbler and Nashville Warbler. The most abundant warblers were Hooded Warbler and Ovenbird. Each of these species had 171 individuals counted. Some notable finds included the count's first-ever Mississippi Kite, as well as Common Goldeneye, Northern Harrier, Loggerhead Shrike and Bobolink.

The most abundant bird was Cliff Swallow with a total of 782 individuals counted. These swallows and their nesting colonies have greatly increased in Northeast Tennessee in recent years. The other common birds, in descending order, were American Robin, 780; European Starling, 740; Canada Goose, 440; and Cedar Waxwing, 381.

Chapter members last gathered for a meeting in March of this year. The April and May meetings, as well as the annual spring banquet, were cancelled. In June, the chapter held its first-ever Zoom meeting. The Zoom meetings in the fall remains a possibility.

Again using suggested social distancing protocols, in June the chapter conducted its annual Summer Bird Counts in Carter County and Unicoi County, respectively.

The 27th annual Carter County Summer Count on June 13 tallied 121 species, which is above the 26-year average of 113 species. The all-time high for this count was 123 species in 2017.

The seventh annual Unicoi Summer Count on June 6 tallied 110 species, which is near the six-year average of 109 with a range of 104 to 112 species.

Moving forward, the ongoing pandemic continues to represent a major challenge, but it's one that the chapter has tackled with its usual enthusiasm for getting a job done well.

Bryan Stevens, Editor

**NASHVILLE CHAPTER** - Spring arrived in Nashville just as it has for millennia, but the migration season wasn't quite the same for us. Local, regional and International birding trips were cancelled, NTOS/TOS meetings and most all field trips didn't take place and we learned to bird while practicing social distancing amid COVID-19. We were in essence, forced to slow down and spend time at home. For most of us that brought a new appreciation for spring migration in our own yards and neighborhoods, perhaps noticing the little things we may have missed had we not been there. But bird we did!

The NTOS spring migration count took place on May 2<sup>nd</sup>. Coordinator Barbara Harris and our Area Leaders did an excellent job of staying safe while documenting the birds in Davidson County. Some locations were missed, and the count will always have an asterisk due to the pandemic, but the volunteer spirit and determination of our members got the count done and those who participated had a good, safe day.

We had only one field trip this quarter. It was the annual joint Owl and Nightjar Adventure with the Lebanon Chapter. After consulting with each other it was decided that the nature of this adventure deemed it safe for members of both organizations. We left a bigger carbon footprint than we preferred - everyone in their own vehicles - but it was a safe way to enjoy Cedars of Lebanon State Park and the critters and birds on a June evening.

We have no way of knowing when meetings and field trips will resume as normal for NTOS. We will continue to monitor the COVID situation and make the best and safest decision for all members, notifying them by email on a month-to-month, event-to-event basis.

In the meantime, we'll be preparing for fall migration, and the sights and sounds that accompany it. If we're able to celebrate its arrival as a group, we'll rejoice and relish our time together. If not, we'll still welcome its arrival, taking note of the birds and the small nuisances in our own backyards.

Happy birding...  
Cyndi Routledge, NTOS President



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[plasley@comcast.net](mailto:plasley@comcast.net)

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