



MEMPHIS CHAPTER NEWS

TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

<http://birdmemphis.org>

January 2021

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear friends,

I write you today (December 19th) from my recliner on a gray, rainy Saturday afternoon. It is difficult to believe that we have not met as a group for nearly a year, and it is unlikely that we will meet in person again until August when, I hope, Knox Martin will once again kick off the year and host us at the Mid-South Raptor Center. This year has presented challenges for almost everyone as Covid has impacted our health, our economy, and our social lives. Many of us have family or friends who have tested positive for Covid, and with winter upon us, cases are likely to remain high. Families, businesses, and organizations such as MTOS struggle to adapt and survive. And yet, I am filled with hope. Two vaccines are now approved, and our healthcare workers and elderly neighbors are already getting vaccinated. I am optimistic that by late spring shots will be available to the general population. We cannot be complacent, but there is reason to think that things will start to return to normal in early summer.

I am also filled with gratitude. Despite being socially distanced, cell phones and Zoom have allowed me to stay in touch and “see” friends, colleagues, family. I am thankful for the birding community in Memphis and in particular would like to thank Cliff VanNostrand for keeping us informed and in touch through the monthly newsletter. MTOS members continue to lead and attend our many socially-distanced bird walks. Many of us will participate in Christmas Bird Counts over the next week. Just yesterday, I was able to join Martha Waldron on the Fayette County CBC. What was the best thing I saw, you ask? Well, we had a Blue-headed Vireo, three Bald Eagles, and nice flocks of Pine Siskins. But the best thing I saw was fellow members! I saw Martha, Gaynell Perry and her husband, Ted, and Allan Trently. Seeing them reminded me again of how much I value the MTOS community. I hope to see the rest of you soon.

My family and I wish each of you a peaceful and joyful holiday season. Enjoy our winter birds and know that neotropical migrants will return in the spring. Social gatherings will likely begin in the summer, and in the fall, MTOS will be back in full swing with exciting talks and great company. Until then, stay safe, mask up, and carry on.

With warmest wishes,
Michael Collins
MTOS President

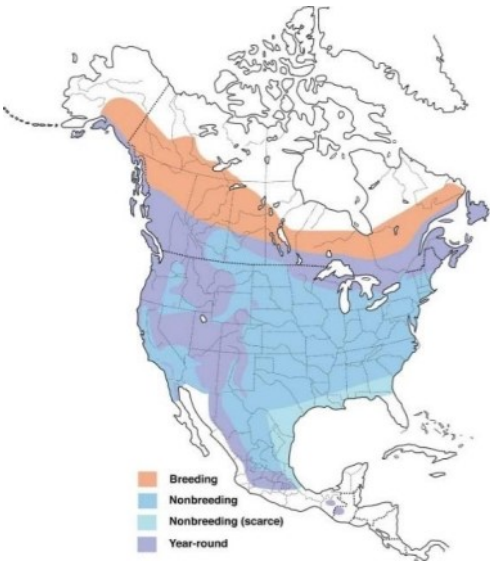
Species Spotlight:

Pine Siskin

Is that a house finch? Wait, no, it has yellow feathers! This is probably a birder's first thought as she or he sees a siskin for the first time. A relative of the goldfinch, pine siskins are small, energetic finches that often descend upon feeders in noisy flocks. After ransacking your feeder for several months, they mysteriously disappear in spring, alongside juncos and yellow-rumped warblers. These birds are here one year and gone the next! Get your binoculars ready, though... 2020-2021 is an "irruption year" for pine siskins.

Scientific name: *Spinus pinus*

Range: This bird likes the cold, so they are strictly winter finches in Tennessee, migrating to Canada to breed. They are year-round birds in the Rockies. Although siskins generally migrate in a southward direction, these migrations fluctuate with the production of coniferous cones in Canada. The more food is available in the north, the less they will migrate. This is the reason for their sporadic appearances in Tennessee.



Habitat: Siskins winter in a diverse range of habitats, including parks, fields, lawns, roadsides, backyards, and any type of open woodland, preferring forests with conifers. They breed in boreal and mixed forests.

Diet/feeding: As their name suggests, pine siskins are often found near pine trees. They are mostly vegetarian, consuming a wide

variety of conifer and deciduous seeds, as well as tree buds and weed seeds. At the feeder, they have a soft spot for nyjer and thistle, but will hang around sunflower feeders as well, waiting for larger birds to drop a few tasty morsels. Hanging up black-eyed susan or coneflower seed heads along with other feeders will attract siskins.

Behavior: These finches are extremely gregarious, especially during winter. Flocks of 5-20 birds descend upon nyjer and sunflower feeders, chasing off smaller birds like chickadees. Siskins can be quite aggressive at times, opening their mouths and spreading yellow-streaked wings in a threat display. They may also engage in fierce fights over the access of a food source. Away from feeders, siskins forage high in the canopy, where their favorite seeds are found. Around feeders or other abundant sources of food, they may land on the ground to eat. During the summer, siskins retain their gregarious habits, nesting and foraging in loose communities. Females build cup nests in conifers, often towards the end of branch. Nests are



made of grass and other plant material and lined with soft moss, feathers, or fur. Females lay 3-5 spotted eggs, and during incubation, they are often fed by their mates. Young fledge in 13-17 days.

When, where, and how to see: Siskins resemble small, streaked house finches, approximately the same size as goldfinches (in the photo to the right, the top bird is a siskin and the bottom bird is a house finch). The streaking on a siskin's belly is denser and more distinct than that of a



house finch, and they have small, wickedly sharp bills which they use to crack open tiny seeds. Some also sport a white patch on their lower chest and belly. Siskins have yellow on their wing and tail feathers (fainter on females than on males), which they display during disputes with other birds. When they fly, these yellow feathers form a striking pattern. The siskin's call sounds like an emphatic, staccato version of a bluebird's call. They also have a peculiar "watch winding call", an upturned wheeeeEEE! that sounds strangely robotic.

Conservation: Sadly, the population of this lively little bird is in decline, having decreased 80% since 1970. Siskin populations are hard to predict, as they do not have a migratory pattern. (Like many other winter nomads, siskins

follow seed crop abundances, so their movements vary from year to year.) They face a number of threats, from salmonella outbreaks at feeders to an abundance of nest predators. Their habitat of eating road salt often endangers their lives, as they must land near or on busy thoroughfares. Siskins are also vulnerable to pesticides, and deforestation has caused them to lose some of their habitat. However, siskins are versatile nesters, so they will also breed in suburban habitats. Commercial forest planting also mitigates the loss of conifer forests, a siskin's preferred breeding habitat.

Fun facts:

- 2020-2021 is an irruption year for siskins and other winter migrants: that is, a huge wave of siskins surged through the continent during the fall. An exceptionally large irruption of siskins swept through the entire US, the likes of which have not been recorded before. In fact, many other boreal species also migrated to the southern states this season, such as the red breasted nuthatch and the purple finch. The birds in this wave are still here, in the trees and at our feeders!
- Siskins are closely related to goldfinches. Although they may look different, these two birds share the genus *Spinus*. However, their diets and behaviors are strikingly similar. Siskins and goldfinches share a love for small seeds like nyjer and thistle, and their calls are similar as well.
- To survive frigid Canadian nights, siskins employ several interesting techniques. Females build well insulated nests, and they almost never leave their nests during the incubation period. They store a large amount of food in their crop (part of a bird's esophagus). Siskins also increase their metabolism during the night, as much as 40% more than other birds.

Bibliography:

- Most info in this article and range map from the Pine Siskin page on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds guide
- Other sources:
- <https://www.audubon.org/news/-pine-siskin-finch-irruption-fall-2020>
- <https://blueridgediscoverycenter.org/blueridgediscoverycenterblog/2020/11/3/irruption-of-the-pine-siskin>
- <https://www.courierpress.com/story/news/local/2020/11/07/birds-irruption-year-here/6184610002/>
- <https://birdcast.info/news/migration-alert-red-breasted-nuthatch/>
- <https://www.explorenature.org/blog/on-the-cusp-of-an-irruption/>





UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

Saturday, January 9

Tunica/Northern Mississippi

Field Trip Leader: *Dick Preston*

Dick: dickpreston48@gmail.com / 901-837-3360

Saturday, January 30

Wolf River WMA

Field Trip Leader: *Gaynell Perry & Martha Waldron*

Gaynell: gcperry1@comcast.net / 901-373-7411

Martha: martha.waldron@gmail.com / 901-493-2868

Friday-Monday, February 12-15

Great Backyard Count

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/about-great-backyard-bird-count>

Saturday, February 20

Shelby Farms/Agricenter

Field Trip Leader: *Cathy Justis*

Cathy: cajustis@gmail.com / 901-324-3685





Great Blue Heron
Photo by: Cliff VanNostrand

Cathy Souther has a Zhumell
20X-60X 80 mm scope and tripod
that she would like to sell for \$200.
If interested, please call or text
Cathy at 219-707-1787.

ARTICLES OF INTEREST

- Wisdom the albatross is at least 69.
<https://www.hawaiinewsnow.com/2020/12/03/wisdom-albatross-is-back-midway-atoll-incubate-an-egg/> (HT: Judy Dorsey)
- Snowy Owl Viewing: Observe Without Disturbing
<https://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/solve/conservation/snowy-owl-viewing-observe-without-disturbing.php>
- Birds increase human happiness, study finds
<https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/news/birdwatching/birds-increase-human-happiness-study-finds/>
- What kinds of woodpeckers can you find in the United States?
<https://birdwatchinghq.com/woodpeckers-in-the-united-states/>
- Simple Platform Bird Feeder Works Wonders
<https://screech-owls.blogspot.com/2020/12/simple-platform-bird-feeder-works.html>

RARE BIRD ALERT

The "Rare Bird Alert" is a email/telephone chain to notify interested members of unusual sightings. To report unusual sightings or to add your name & any "Wish List" birds to the list, call or e-mail Virginia Reynolds (vbreyndols@att.net).



Blue Jay
Photo by: Cliff VanNostrand

2021 DUES ARE DUE

\$36 Individual

\$40 Family

\$55 Sustaining

\$23 College Student

\$5 College Student

\$450
+\$18 Lifetime

DUES PAYABLE BY CHECK, MADE OUT TO MTOS

Recently, David Haggard, a longtime employee and naturalist with the State of Tennessee Parks Service at Reelfoot Lake was in a serious boating accident. David is home now.

If you would like to send him a card or note you can send it to:

David Haggard
2595 SR. 21 East
Tiptonville, TN. 38079

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME

Submissions of any of the following are desired:

- Birding Events
- Stories about birds or birders
- Birding Tips
- Poetry, quotes, sketches, or photos
- Photo of birds or people at events or field trips.

Deadline is the 22nd of each month,
Email submissions to mtosnewsletter@gmail.com

For our next issue, we would like to feature some photos of ducks or geese.
Please send your submissions to mtosnewsletter@gmail.com.



HUMMINGBIRD SIGHTING BETWEEN November 1 and March 15

If you do get a hummingbird, Please contact
Cyndi Routledge - routledges@bellsouth.net

Please consider leaving
out your feeder out year-
round. Keep it clean,
maintained and
easily viewed

Since November 1990,
300 hummingbirds of 7 different
species have been captured, banded
and released here in Tennessee as
part of a winter banding
research program.

TOS Membership Information

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	\$23
Other Student	\$ 5
Lifetime	\$450 one time +\$18 yearly

Dues payable 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

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. If you have no internet access, a printed version can be mailed.

Chapter Newsletter Submissions

Email submissions to Cliff VanNostrand
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

Tennessee Warbler Deadlines

*February 28 for the April Newsletter
*June 30 for the August Newsletter
*October 31 for the December Newsletter

Forward contributions to:
Theresa Graham, Editor
P.O. Box 366 Oakland, TN 38060
(901) 465-4263
Email: 2graham@bellsouth.net

Chapter Meeting

Chapter Meetings are cancelled until further notice.

Upcoming Field Trip Information

January 9: Tunica/Northern Mississippi

January 30: Wolf River WMA

February 12-15: Great Backyard Count

February 20: Shelby Farms/Agricenter

Member Contact Changes

Sam Cox samjcox79@gmail.com

Van Harris

(901) 592-8739

3986 Grahamdale Circle Memphis 38122

New Members

Amy Ballentine, Germantown shrinkmom@gmail.com

David Bearman, Memphis dbearman@bakerdonelson.com

Treasurer's Report

The balance in the Treasury as of December 22, 2020 is \$16,784.52. This compares to a balance in the Treasury one year prior (12/31/19) of \$16,045.41.

MTOS Dues for 2021 are Due

The Treasurer welcomes membership renewals for 2021, starting January 1. See the newsletter on how much, how, and where to mail in dues checks. **This is also a great time to send in any contact information changes that you may have.**

Online/Digital Payment Set-up - Looking for Expertise

The Treasurer wants to figure out how to set up an online and/or digital payment option for members, i.e., Paypal, Venmo. If any member has know-how in this area let me know at brbpyles@gmail.com. I would like to make progress on this in 2021. Thank you. -Barbara Pyles

Proposed: Mid-South Raptor Center Donation

MTOS supports the work of the local, nonprofit Mid-South Raptor Center rehabilitation facility. The chapter's last donation of \$750 was made in November 2019. I propose that MTOS make a \$750 donation in January. Member input is invited; please send comments by **January 14, 2021** to:

President Michael Collins collinsm@rhodes.edu and
Barbara Pyles brbpyles@gmail.com (Treasurer).