

#### MEMPHIS CHAPTER NEWS

#### TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

http://birdmemphis.org

March 2021

#### MID-SOUTH RAPTOR CENTER

The Mid-South Raptor Center has been very active these last several months. In 2020 the Center treated thirteen species of hawks and owls with over fifty birds rehabilitated and released in addition to several non-releasable birds transferred to wildlife centers as educational birds. Since its relocation from the zoo to Shelby Farms nineteen years ago the Center has successfully treated and released over 2,000 birds. In addition the Center participated in several "special" raptor projects over the years. For example, as part of a collaborative effort between Kansas and Tennessee state wildlife agencies, over ninety juvenile Mississippi Kites were relocated from Kansas and subsequently released in West Tennessee. Several years ago five Peregrine Falcons were hacked in downtown Memphis, and in the last nineteen years over 16 Bald Eagles and two Golden Eagles were treated and released in West Tennessee.

Recently the Center has undergone a complete renovation of its infrastructure with fresh paint, new perches and installation of predator screens. Predator screens became necessary after three unfortunate incidents of predation. The cost of material alone exceeded \$1,500, putting a financial strain on the Center's budget despite a generous donation. Fortunately all labor involved was donated. In-kind donations, such as Eagle Scout projects, and money from the Memphis Chapter provide invaluable support to help sustain Center operations. The Center's volunteer staff is committed to avian wildlife preservation, and the Center is grateful for any and all donations to provide funding for food, maintenance repairs and supplies.

### Field Trip Reports

#### **FEBRUARY 22: SHELBY COUNTY**

The field trip scheduled for February 20 at Shelby Farms was cancelled because of winter road conditions. However several members forged ahead and submitted an incredible list to eBird. The ice-free lakes at Shelby Farms and Halle Park attracted 22 species of waterfowl. A total of 69 species was recorded for Shelby Farms, Halle Park, and feeder watchers. Unusual species including a Dunlin (at Halle Park) and Lapland Longspur added to the total of 69 species. A White Pelican was found in an abandoned parking lot in downtown Memphis. It was there for three days according to the Memphis Police Department. Its feet were frostbitten and it was very thin. Medical care was given by the Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation in Arkabutla, MS, but the bird died shortly after it was rescued.

-Martha Waldron



Lapland Longspur



Horned Lark

#### **Great Backyard Bird results—United States**

-663 species observed -221,309 complete checklists https://www.birdcount.org/



American Tree Sparrow



Snow, Ross's, Greater White-fronted Geese Photos by: Cliff VanNostrand

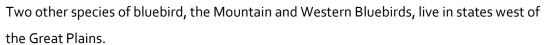
# Species Spotlight: **Eastern Bluebird**

The Eastern Bluebird is a common backyard visitor for many, beloved by many birders and non-birders alike. Despite suffering from severe population declines in the 1900's, this blue and orange thrush can be found in many suburban areas nowadays.

Scientific name: Sialis sialis



Range: Eastern Bluebirds live in the eastern US. In Memphis, they stay year-round, but in northern states, these thrushes migrate south for the winter.



**Habitat**: Bluebirds prefer to forage and nest in open areas with large trees (much like T.O. Fuller State Park!). Fields bordered by woods (or vice versa), farmland, open forests, parks, open backyards, and lawns all serve as habitats for the bluebird.

**Diet/feeding:** Insects and fruit make up most of the Bluebird's diet, like that of other thrushes. They consume large quantities of caterpillars, spiders, crickets, and other insects during the summer and spring, when these prey items are readily available. However, during the colder months, they switch to a fruity diet, eating berries such as blueberries, sumac, dogwood, juniper, and mulberry berries. Bluebirds are readily attracted to feeders serving mealworms, suet, or fruit. Although they naturally eat only insects in the warmer months, mealworms in winter will be greatly

appreciated.

Behavior: Bluebirds forage by standing on an exposed perch and surveying the ground below for any sign of prey. Then, they swoop down and land on the ground, snatch up the unlucky insect, and fly back to their perch. During the breeding season, bluebirds can become territorial, as suitable nesting cavities are scarce. Such cavities are often much sought after, and bluebirds must compete with House Sparrows, Chickadees, Starlings, nuthatches, Tree Swallows, and flycatchers who also need a place to raise their young! Males also fight within their own ranks, chasing off other males who threaten to usurp their territory. Fights include chasing, grappling with feet, and feather plucking.

Males attract females by performing a "nesting ritual," carrying a mouthful of nesting material into and out of the box. The nesting season begins in March, when the female constructs a nest out of grass, pine needles, and hair or feathers. After the nest is completed, she lays an egg every day for a total of 2-7 blue eggs. Nestlings are fed by both parents and fledge in 17-21 days. Bluebirds readily use man-made nest boxes that are erected in open areas with trees nearby.

When, where, and how to see: The male Eastern Bluebird is a stocky, medium-sized thrush with a rufous chest, white underparts, and cobalt blue head, back, wings, and tail. Females seem like a diluted version of the males, with grayish blue heads and backs. Juveniles differ greatly in appearance from the adults, sporting gray plumage dappled with white spots.

Conservation: The population of Eastern Bluebirds has been increasing ever since the widespread use of nest boxes. During the twentieth century, bluebird populations were dwindling due to two introduced species: the House Sparrow and the European Starling. These overly aggressive birds tend to hog all the cavities and nest boxes meant for bluebirds and their native cavity-nesting brethren! Since then, bluebird trails with anti-sparrow and -starling boxes and responsible landlords have helped bluebird populations recover.



#### Fun facts:

- House Sparrow vs Bluebird: The ubiquitous House Sparrow, a gray-brown sparrow found in nearly every US city, is perhaps the bluebird's arch-enemy. As mentioned in the Conservation section, these aggressive birds are a threat to bluebirds, as they take over nest cavities and destroy nests of native birds. House Sparrows have been known to destroy nests and eggs and kill young as well as adults. They are perhaps the hardest bird to deter, as they are about the same size as bluebirds. Sparrow spookers and sparrow halos (see link below for more information), seem to deter sparrows without scaring bluebirds. A box with two entry holes also helps bluebirds defend a nest against sparrows (link below).
- The bluebird's scientific name, Sialis sialis, was inspired by the Greek word sialis which means "a kind of bird".
- For any information on bluebird feeding or nest boxes, <u>sialis.org</u> is a great website.

-Lynn M. Hui

#### Bibliography:

- Most info in this article and range map from the Eastern Bluebird pages on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds guide
   <a href="https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern\_Bluebird/overview">https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern\_Bluebird/overview</a>
   House Sparrows:
- https://michiganbluebirds.org/problem-solving#:~:text=House%20Sparrows%20(HOSP's)%20are%20an,the%20adults%20and%20eggs%20too.
   http://www.sialis.org/hosp.htm#hir

Sparrow spookers: http://www.sialis.org/sparrowspooker.htm

- Sparrow Halo: <a href="http://www.sialis.org/halo.htm">http://www.sialis.org/halo.htm</a>
- Two-hole nestbox: <a href="https://woolwinehousebluebirdtrail.com/test-2-holers/">https://woolwinehousebluebirdtrail.com/test-2-holers/</a>
  Other sources:
- <a href="https://www.greenwoodwildlife.org/bird-tawk-by-tina-mitchell-3/">https://www.greenwoodwildlife.org/bird-tawk-by-tina-mitchell-3/</a>
- Range map from All About Birds Pin Warbler page
- All photos taken by Lynn Hui

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

#### THE KILLER STORM OF FEBRUARY 2021

Dr. Anthony Fauci has predicted that historians will refer of the 2020 pandemic for many decades, if not longer. I fear that ornithologists will remember the great winter storm of mid-February 2021 with equal dread. Evidence is just starting to be gathered, but early impressions indicate to me that this is the most devastating avian event in my lifetime.

In January 1977, when I was living in Connecticut, we experienced below-freezing temperatures that continued, unbroken, for a full month, and this Arctic air mass extended from Maine almost to the North Carolina border. It affected not only freshwater lakes, ponds, and rivers, but near-shore saltwater as well. It devastated entire populations of such species as Brant, Black Ducks, Kingfishers and Great Blue Herons, and they took many years to recover.

But this record-breaking February storm (Figure 1), which brought hardship to millions of Americans, especially Texans, killing nearly fifty people and untold numbers of livestock, poultry, etc. had an even greater impact on birds, especially Passerines.

Biologists will be measuring the extent of this mass-mortality over the coming months, but my personal observations from a recent survey of Eastern Bluebirds in the Memphis area would certainly give cause for alarm. What made this storm so devastating was that a significant ice-storm, which is always treacherous for small birds that can no longer access food, was followed by snow and sub-freezing temperatures that lasted for another twelve days. You could not possibly design a more perfect bird-killing event.

That any birds were able to survive this onslaught of ice and record-breaking cold is a mystery to me, but among the many dead bluebirds found starved/frozen in the 58 nest boxes that I examined, I did observe five active Eastern Bluebirds that had managed to make it through alive.

Figures 2 and 3 show the condition in which I found many of these emaciated birds – almost always with an abundance of dung in the bottom of the roosting box, which is very atypical -- a result of their staying put and living off their own fat and muscle. Numerous other instances were found of starving birds that perished outside of the box (Figure 4). Three birds, two females and a male, were found by Brian Roberts inside an abandoned Wood Duck box where they had huddled together for warmth, and subsequently died (Figures 5 & 6).

Eastern Bluebird is, of course, just one of many species to have suffered mass casualties. Eastern Phoebes, Yellow-rumped and Orange-crowned Warblers and Eastern Meadowlarks are among those which I notice have virtually vanished. Savannah Sparrows seem to have all but disappeared where flocks were seen a week or two earlier. One wonders, too, how Woodcock, which depend on earthworms, could possibly have survived with nine inches of snow covering a layer of ice. A friend had a Ruby-crowned Kinglet land on his finger while filling a suet feeder. He was captivated, but it was an ominous sign of desperation. I have witnessed many instances of both birds and mammals apparently losing their fear of humans when at the doorstep of death. Moose, for example, when dying of a lethal infestation of Winter Ticks, have walked right up to me.

The list of bird species having suffered greatly diminished populations must be huge, and the number of individuals that have perished absolutely staggering. In my sixty-nine years (as of next month) of studying birds, I have never seen anything like it.

There are a few bright spots, and I would like to end on those. Predators seem to have fared a little better than most. Kestrels, Red-shouldered and Red-tailed Hawks are in evidence, and I found a fresh Barn Owl pellet in an area where I had never seen one before; others were still present at their usual roosts. Bird feeders certainly kept thousands alive that would otherwise have perished, but they represent a tiny fraction of those extant. We can only hope that the Polar Vortex does not continue to produce these lethal patterns of extreme winter weather in the immediate future.

-David O. Hill

# 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

#### **ARTICLES OF INTEREST**

- Shutterbug Photography Contest <a href="https://www.tnmagazine.org/shutterbug-showcase-natural-areas/">https://www.tnmagazine.org/shutterbug-showcase-natural-areas/</a>
- Birds can use your help: 'It takes a lot of energy to fly' (HT: Julie Markham)
   <a href="https://dailymemphian.com/article/20047/feed-the-birds">https://dailymemphian.com/article/20047/feed-the-birds</a>
- World's oldest known wild bird hatches chick <u>https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/news/conservation/worlds-oldest-known-wild-bird-hatches-chick/</u>
- Long-lost Black-browed Babbler rediscovered on Borneo <a href="https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/news/science/long-lost-black-browed-babbler-rediscovered-borneo/">https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/news/science/long-lost-black-browed-babbler-rediscovered-borneo/</a>







# UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

#### March / April

#### Sunday, March 21, 7:30am

Shelby Farms Park/Agricenter International

#### Sunday, April 4, 7:30am

Wall Doxey State Park, Holly Springs, MS

Field Trip Leader: Hal Mitchell

halmitchell@gmail.com / 409-539-2577

#### Wednesday, April 14, 7:30am

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

dickpreston48@gmail.com / 901-837-3360

#### Saturday, April 17, 7:30am

Herb Parsons Lake, Fayette County, TN

Field Trip Leader: Allen Sparks

asparks306@bellsouth.net / 901-604-7654

#### Wednesday, April 21, 7:30am

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

dickpreston48@gmail.com / 901-837-3360

#### Saturday, April 24, 6pm

Open House at the Mid-South Raptor Center

Host: Knox Martin

knoxmartin2@aol.com / 901-685-8827

Due to the fact that we have not had a chapter meeting in almost a year Chapter President Michael Collins has announced a special combination chapter meeting and open house to be held at the Mid-South Raptor Center on Saturday, April 24, 2021, beginning at 6 pm. Bring your dinner, chairs, and any Chapter business we need to discuss. I will supply water, tea, and lemonade. We have not been together as a group since the open house in August of last year so this will give us all a chance to get together and socialize. I hope to see you all there. -Knox Martin







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 yearround. 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 <a href="mailto:brbpyles@gmail.com">brbpyles@gmail.com</a>

#### **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**

March 21: Shelby Farms Park/Agricenter International

April 4: Wall Doxey State Park

April 14: Shelby Forest

April 17: Herb Parsons Lake

April 21: Shelby Forest

April 24: Open House at the Raptor Center

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

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

Please send your submissions to mtosnewsletter@gmail.com before the 22nd.

#### **New Members**

Helen Akin <a href="mailto:hakin@crye-leike.com">hakin@crye-leike.com</a>

Cindy Hazen & Rick White <a href="mailto:cindyhazen@cs.com">cindyhazen@cs.com</a>

Callie & Cecilia Sanders andrewbsanders@gmail.com



**Chipping Sparrow** 



Swamp Sparrow



White-throated Sparrow



LeConte's Sparrow



White-crowned Sparrow



Song Sparrow

PHOTOS BY

## **TOM & DEBRA KIENZLE**

PHOTOS BY

# Don & Peyton Sanderlin



Fox Sparrow Photo by Peyton Sanderlin



Chipping Sparrow Photo by Peyton Sanderlin



Fox Sparrow Photo by Peyton Sanderlin



White-throated Sparrow Photo by Don Sanderlin