



MEMPHIS CHAPTER NEWS

TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

<http://birdmemphis.org>

May 2021

COMBINED CHAPTER MEETING AND RAPTOR CENTER OPEN HOUSE

On April 24, 2021, Chapter members met on the grounds of the Mid-South Raptor Center for a combined meeting and Open House hosted by Knox Martin. Although we met at the Raptor Center in August of 2020 and resumed hikes in September, it was the first time MTOS held a Chapter meeting since February, 2020. Our outgoing Chapter President, Michael Collins, led the meeting. Volunteers from the Mid-South Raptor Center and the Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation, Inc. (MWR), spoke about their collaborative efforts to rehabilitate raptors and other wildlife. Since DVM David Hannon left Memphis to pursue his dream of working as a zoo veterinarian, the Mid-South Raptor Center has relied on MWR for medical evaluations and X-rays of all of its injured raptors.

Michael Collins has taken on the role of President of the Tennessee Ornithological Society. He reported that volunteers are needed to step into Memphis Chapter leadership roles of President, Vice President, State Director, and Hospitality Coordinator. One member has offered to fill the office of either President or Vice President. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Michael Collins or any other officer. Michael expressed his appreciation for the work of Cliff VanNostrand as our Newsletter Editor and for the work Judy Dorsey has been doing to keep Memphis Chapter activities publicized on the TOS website events page and on tn-bird@freelists.org. He reported that Knox Martin has agreed to continue in his role as Recording Secretary and Chapter Historian, and that Barbara Pyles has agreed to continue to keep membership records and serve as the Chapter Treasurer. Dick Preston reported that St. George's Church will welcome us back as soon as they can. The timing will depend on their re-evaluation of the need for restrictions on group size for indoor meetings. They are currently using the church parish hall as overflow for their school but hope that will end with the new school year.

A motion was made and seconded to provide an additional \$500 donation to the Mid-South Raptor Center. This will help to offset the increased expenditures that were needed to add extra predator

protection to the raptor cages. This motion will be voted on at our earliest opportunity. Another motion was made to donate \$500 to MWR. This is in recognition of the volunteer and veterinary work provided by MWR. Volunteers from MWR and the Mid-South Raptor Center MWR are working closely together and share some facilities.

A motion was made and seconded to increase the expenditure amount that would require that a motion be published in the Chapter newsletter prior to the vote for or against the expenditure. The amount had been set at \$250 and the motion was to increase that to \$500. This motion will be voted on at our earliest opportunity.

A motion to provide funding in the amount of \$800 to T.O. Fuller State Park for the purchase of two canoes for use in Wood Duck nest box monitoring and youth environmental education was further discussed. Some expressed concern that the idea might not be fully developed. The motion was tabled for further discussion after additional information is obtained. The Treasurer invites member comments or questions on these business items by May 10, 2021, to brbpyles@gmail.com

-Margaret Jefferson



..... Field Trip Reports

Herb Parsons Lake - Saturday, April 17th. On a cold and windy morning, Allen Sparks led sixteen observers, who recorded 38 species. Highlights included: many Red-headed Woodpeckers, several Warbling Vireos, a Palm Warbler and Orchard Orioles.

-Chad Brown



Eastern Kingbird
Photo by: Cliff VanNostrand



Orchard Oriole
Photos by: Vaibhav Garde

Shelby Forest - Wednesday, April 21st. On another very cold morning, Dick Preston led seven observers, who recorded 52 species. Highlights included: two unexpected Wilson's Snipe, multiple Blue-winged, Nashville and Hooded Warblers, and a Blue Grosbeak.

-Dick Preston

..... Field Trip Reports

Wall Doxey State Park—April 3, Saturday



Photos by: Chad Brown

14 observers, 42 species

Field Trip Leader: Hal Mitchell

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S84698389>

Species Spotlight:

Prothonotary Warbler

The Prothonotary's brilliant song announces its presence before its shockingly golden feathers are glimpsed. This winged mango seems to radiate light as it hops from branch to branch in shady, wet forests. For those lucky enough to have a swamp nearby, the Prothonotary Warbler may nest in nest boxes set near water.

Scientific name: *Protonotaria citrea*

Range: Most Prothonotary Warblers summer in the Southeastern US, but they also breed along rivers in the northernmost part of their range. Around August and September, these warblers begin their journey towards Central and South America, where they spend the winter.



Habitat: These warblers love water! Often called “swamp warblers”, Prothonotaries are found in swamps, bogs, near streams and rivers, and in any large, flooded forest with standing water. During the winter, they prefer to stay in similar habitats, such as mangrove swamps.

Diet/feeding: For the most part, Prothonotaries are insectivores. Flies, caterpillars, spiders, mayflies, and other insects are eaten throughout the breeding season. Smaller insects are favored earlier in the season while caterpillars and other large insects are used to feed the nestlings later in the season. However, during winter, they eat a wider range of foods, including seeds, fruit, and nectar.

Behavior: This warbler is, thankfully, a slower forager than most other warblers. They forage in the mid to lower parts of trees, poking and prodding leaves and twigs along the way, though males tend to stay higher in trees. Prothonotaries may also scoot up tree trunks and branches in a creeper-like fashion, checking the bark for insects. They may also hover at the tips of branches. During the breeding season, feisty warblers of both sexes engage in fierce chases and mid-air fights. Males court females by flying above the canopy and hopping back and forth in the chosen nest hole. Pairs are monogamous for each breeding season and may even stay with the same mate for more than one season. As a secondary cavity nester, these warblers nest in ready-made chickadee or woodpecker cavities in trees that are in or near standing water. The female builds her nest with rootlets, grasses, bark, and other plant materials, and chicks fledge three weeks after eggs are laid. During the winter, Prothonotary warblers may flock together or join mixed flocks. **When, where, and how to see:** Males boast steel gray wings and tail and white underparts, as well as strikingly yellow breast and head plumage, against which their round black eyes seem



especially conspicuous. Females share this contrasting color pattern, but their heads and necks are shaded with gray. The Prothonotary is larger and beefier than most warblers. Look for it in branches and tree trunks directly above or near standing water. Their song, a series of astoundingly loud, piercing *sweet, sweet, sweet* notes, is as striking as its plumage.

Conservation: One main threat facing the Prothonotary Warbler is the loss of their habitat. In fact, only 10% of their original breeding habitat has been protected from logging or being made into pastures. As with bluebirds, the removal of dead trees, which provide nest cavities, greatly affect their population. The deforestation of mangrove swamps in their wintering ranges is also concerning, but no direct effect on the populations has been recorded.

Luckily, the usage of nest boxes has compensated for some of the habitat loss.

Fun facts:

- The American Dipper isn't the only swimming passerine! Prothonotary warbler nestlings can swim as well.
- These warblers are named after the Prothonotaries of the Roman Catholic Church, who wore bright yellow robes.
- Who knew that such a small bird could play a role in US History? State Department official and birdwatcher Alger Hiss was accused of being a Soviet spy by Whittaker Chambers, a magazine editor and former spy himself. Hiss claimed that he did not even know who Chambers was. In order to prove that they knew each other, Chambers claimed that Hiss had seen a Prothonotary Warbler near the Potomac. True enough, when led onto the subject by Richard Nixon and a senator, Hiss proudly boasted that he had seen the warbler. Many people saw this accidental admission as a sure sign that the two men knew each other, and therefore that Hiss was a spy. He was convicted of perjury. Richard Nixon's career greatly benefited from his role in this case, a career that would come to fruition in his election as president.



-Lynn M. Hui

Bibliography:

- Most info in this article and range map from :
 - the Prothonotary Warbler pages on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds guide
 - the Prothonotary Warbler pages on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birds of the World
- Other sources:
 - <https://www.npr.org/2016/06/04/480731356/murder-espionage-intrigue-its-time-for-talkin-birds>
 - <https://algerhiss.com/history/the-hiss-case-the-1940s/the-hiss-chambers-relationship/the-prothonotary-warbler/>
 - <https://www.famous-trials.com/algerhiss/657-warbler>
 - <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/chambers-accuses-hiss-of-being-a-communist-spy>
 - <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1901-1950/The-1948-Alger-Hiss%E2%80%93Whittaker-Chambers-hearing-before-HUAC/>
- Ibird app
- Range map from All About Birds Prothonotary Warbler page
- all photos taken by Lynn Hui

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

Man's Best (Feathered) Friend



For the past few weeks, my family and I have been visiting the Garden section of Lowe's Department Store, picking out plants to fill a new raised bed. Now that spring is here in full, the Garden section is overflowing with wonderful blooms of every shape and size, from rose bushes to moss rose.

Despite all this seasonal beauty, we couldn't help but notice a persistent, year-round feature of Lowe's: the gigantic house sparrows.

These birds, the proclaimed nemesis of many bluebird landlords and bird feeding enthusiasts, swarm large department stores and

fill the lofty rafters with their incessant chirping. Come spring, dozens of nests begin popping up in shadowy niches and corners. They are unashamedly fearless, hopping about in rows of potted shrubs and trees, oblivious to the casual shopper. In fact, they seem to enjoy a greater deal of peace and prosperity living with humans than any bird living in rural areas.

But do these sparrows really live the dream life?

For the average house sparrow, the answer is an emphatic yes. Life inside Lowe's and other large, spacious stores is everything a bird could want: hundreds of safe nesting places, year-round



protection from the elements, and, most importantly, a virtually inexhaustible supply of food. In many department stores, sparrows know where to find the birdseed. Before beginning their feast, a few brave members of a flock act as scouts, landing on the ground beside piles of sunflower and millet bags. When



no humans are seen, the rest of the flock descends on the seed. They peck small holes in the bags, small enough to prevent the bag from losing too much seed but large enough to access the tasty meal inside. With full bellies, the sparrows can settle into a nice spot in the rafters above and enjoy an air-conditioned, predator-free night's sleep.

Some worry about the mental well-being of the sparrows. They seemed to be doomed to spend their lives inside the concrete walls of the stores, never to fly free in the sky. However, this is far from the truth. On closer inspection, sparrows can fly in and out of the sliding doors at their free will. Another testament to their high level of intelligence, sparrows often wait for customers to trigger the doors, then quickly slip in or out of the building. There have even

been reports of sparrows flying in front of the motion sensors, attempting to activate them with their own movement. Once outside, they can quench their thirst or take a bath in the parking lot puddles.

The proliferation of these birds seems to suggest a very tolerant attitude on the part of the store owners. For many places, this is true. Department store managers and customers alike turn a blind eye to these avian squatters, as sparrow removal or eradication can be difficult. After all, the birds don't produce much of an effect on the stores. The holes that they peck in seed bags are small, so only a marginal amount of bird food is lost.



However, for the managers of large grocery stores such as Costco, sparrows are viewed as pests. Feathers and feces spread diseases such as salmonella, a big problem for stores selling food. Most methods for removing sparrows include trapping and releasing, though some stores used lethal glue traps, poison, and even firearms to rid themselves of the nuisance. Many pest removal services use mist nets and other non-lethal traps to catch the birds, releasing them far away from stores.

For a bird only six inches long, the house sparrow has certainly made a life for itself amongst its human neighbors. In fact, a study claims that they have lived alongside humans for 11,000 years, eating human scraps while keeping a wary eye on traps and tricks. But whether it be in grassy hut or gigantic store, these feathered friends will thrive.

Bibliography:

- <https://www.audubon.org/news/what-happens-when-birds-invade-stores>
- https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/House_Sparrow/idhttps://archive.naplesnews.com/community/big-box-birdhouse-opportunistic-birds-living-large-at-lowes-a-lesson-in-peaceful-coexistence-ep-4061-331422781.html/
- <https://thefrogandpenguinn.blogspot.com/2011/03/shopping-and-dining-at-lowes.html>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwpZ1R6o638>

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

- Annual Spring Meeting
<https://tnbirds.org/2021/04/12/meeting-dates-and-times-set-for-the-annual-spring-tos-zoom-event/>
- Global Big Day, May 8, 2021
<https://ebird.org/globalbigday>
- Keys to attracting orioles to your yard
<https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/beginners/attracting-birds/keys-to-attracting-orioles-to-your-yard/>
- One Million Audio Recordings Powering Science, Conservation, and Birding Tools
<https://www.macaulaylibrary.org/2021/04/27/one-million-audio-recordings-powering-science-conservation-and-birding-tools/>
- Delta Wind Birds 2021 Big Day fundraiser
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdvR7pnVku8XY_8h5MWARnNQJgPNIAAtTYU9Ui37vQudVfmnGQ/viewform
- Southeastern Avian Research has launched this year's NO RED DYE fundraiser
<https://www.customink.com/fundraising/annual-no-red-nectar-campaign2-weeks-only-3013>



UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

May / June

Sunday, May 2, 7:30am

Overton Park

Meet at East Parkway Entrance Parking Area

<https://goo.gl/maps/Ucny9fBm7WmqbKwQ9>

Field Trip Leader: Margaret Jefferson

mjefferson100@hotmail.com / 901-274-1045

Saturday, May 8

Traditional Spring Count

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

dickpreston48@gmail.com / 901-837-3360

Wednesday, May 12, 7:30am

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

dickpreston48@gmail.com / 901-837-3360



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8 MAY 2021

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Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* © John C. Mittermeier Macaulay Library

Dr. T. David Pitts, author of "Studying Eastern Bluebirds: A Biologists Report and Reflections," has donated \$120.00 from the sales of his book to our chapter. The book is out of print, but a small number are still available, for \$20.00, with all proceeds going to the chapter.

-Contact Dick Preston.

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 (vbreyolds@att.net).

Gregg Elliott has given the chapter a Bausch and Lomb 15x60 power zoom spotting scope, which may be used on chapter field trips, or loaned to individual members. The scope does not come with a tripod, so if anyone would like to donate one, contact Dick Preston.

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) 489-0795
Email: 2graham@bellsouth.net

Chapter Meeting

Chapter Meetings are cancelled until further notice.

Upcoming Field Trip Information

May 2: Overton Park

May 8: Traditional Spring Count

May 8: Global Big Day

May 12: Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

Notable Sightings

An unusually high number of Peregrine Falcons has been sighted in the Mid-South region including one that crossed Smythe Farm Road just before our meeting 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 shorebirds.

Please send your submissions to
mtosnewsletter@gmail.com.

New Members

Carrie Brownfield, Arlington
cdbrownfield@gmail.com

Treasurer's Report

The balance in the Treasury as of April 22, 2021 is \$17,778.41.

March 28 - April 4, Dick Preston, Lisa Jorgensen and Van Harris spent the week on the northeast coast of Texas. They visited Beaumont, High Island, Bolivar Peninsula and Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.

Photos by Van Harris



American Bittern



Piping Plover



Black Skimmer, Royal Tern, Laughing Gull



Brown Pelican



Sandwich Tern & Royal Tern



Scissor-tailed Flycatcher



American Avocet & Laughing Gulls



Crested Caracara



Purple Gallinule



Fulvous Whistling Duck



Ruddy Turnstone



Roseate Spoonbill



House Finch



House Finch



PHOTOS BY:
VAIBHAV GARDE



Canada Goose



Canada Goose



Eastern Bluebird



Eastern Bluebird



Prothonotary Warbler





Note one Brown-headed Cowbird egg

Wood Thrush Nest
& Young

Photos by:

Theresa Graham





PHOTOS BY LYNN HUI



Photos by Dianna Johnson



Eastern Kingbird



Eastern Kingbird



Hairy Woodpecker



Great Egret



Osprey



Mississippi Kite



Killdeer photos by

CLIFF
VANNOSTRAND





Eastern Bluebird



Eastern Bluebird



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

PHOTOS BY:
THOMAS BLEVINS