



MEMPHIS CHAPTER NEWS

TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

<http://birdmemphis.org>

May 2022

APRIL PROGRAM

At the April meeting, Chapter member Van Harris presented a program *Madagascar: Land of Lizards and Lemurs*. In November 2008, Van and Dick Preston traveled to Madagascar for a chance to see some of the island's many endemic species. Van has volunteered and worked at the Memphis Zoo for many years. In addition to being an avid birder, Van enjoys seeing all types of animals. He especially enjoys seeing species in the wild that are housed at the Memphis Zoo. Van described the history and habitats of Madagascar and showed photos of many animal species that he saw while there. Madagascar is located in the Indian Ocean 250 miles off the southeast coast of Africa and is the 4th largest island in the world. Madagascar has been isolated for 88 million years, and 90% of its species are endemic. The Malagasy people of Madagascar are genetically and linguistically related to southeast Asians and Indonesians. They are thought to have arrived on the island by boat 1,300 years ago. Their written language has many dropped vowels making place names difficult to learn, but a history of French and English influence makes communication easier. Lemurs are a unique group of primates found only on Madagascar. They have pointed snouts and wet noses. The 113 known lemur species are divided into 5 families. Lemur species live in all of the island's habitats including rainforests, dry deciduous forests, spiny forests, wetlands and mountains. Many lemur species are herbivores eating only plants, but other species eat insects and reptiles as well as plants. Lemur species are often adapted to eating only specific plant species and this leads to a higher risk of extinction. Many lemur species are diurnal and live in communal groups like the charismatic Ring-tailed Lemurs, while others are nocturnal and mouse-like. The carnivorous cat-like Fossa is the main lemur predator, but lemurs can also fall prey to snakes and birds. Madagascar is home to 210 lizard species. These include chameleons, skinks, geckos and iguanids. The island has day-active and nocturnal geckos. Half of the world's 150 chameleon species live on Madagascar, including an inch-long *Brookesia* chameleon that eats tiny insects and lives in forest leaf litter. In May, Dick Preston will talk about the birds of Madagascar.



-Margaret Jefferson

Business:

Chapter Officers:

The following slate of 2022-2023 Chapter Officers will be voted on at the May meeting. We thank these individuals for offering/continuing to serve.

President: Jim Varner

Vice President: Cliff VanNostrand

Treasurer: Barbara Pyles

Recording Secretary: Knox Martin

Local Directors: Nick Smith & Martha Waldron

State Directors: Judy Dorsey, Bob Foehring, Sue Cosmini, Dick Preston, Anita Vincent

News:

* Treasurer Barbara Pyles honored Peggy Kunkel with a blooming plant for her many years of service to the chapter preparing name badges for chapter members and state meetings. Peggy applied her skill as a calligrapher for the early badges. She also honored Theresa Graham for her many years of service to TOS as editor of its quarterly newsletter *The Tennessee Warbler*. Barbara also reminded us to regularly visit the TOS website events page that is kept up to date with Memphis Chapter activities by Judy Dorsey. She also mentioned that chapter member Eric Rosenthal will graduate from UT Martin this spring.

* Member, Cathy Souther announced that she will be leading birding walks at 8 AM on Sunday mornings during May on the wooded lot of Unity Church at 9228 Walnut Grove Rd. For more information contact Cathy at CMS2761@gmail.com

* A member asked about feeding birds at this time of increasing bird flu. Dick Preston recommended that we keep our nest boxes, bird feeders, and baths clean and sweep up accumulated seed hulls beneath feeders to reduce the spread of bird diseases.

Field Trip Reports:

Wall Doxey State Park, April 3: Leader Hal Mitchell and 12 observers enjoyed seeing early spring migrants during a walk around the park's beautiful spring-fed lake. They had good looks at a number of Louisiana Waterthrush and Black-and-white Warbler and recorded 51 bird species. (Photos by Chad Brown)



Herb Parsons Lake, April 9: Allen Sparks led a group of 12 observers, recording 53 bird species. Highlights included a Solitary Sandpiper, 8 Red-headed Woodpeckers, and Yellow-throated and Prothonotary Warblers. A line-up of 4 swallow species (Tree, Cliff, Barn, N. Rough-winged) on a wire provided an opportunity for swallow study.

Chapter Meeting

Shelby Farms Park
Buffalo Room



**Wednesday,
May 18, 2022**

7:00 pm

Enter/Exit through the Coastal Fish
Company entrance.

The Buffalo Room is located on the
north side of the First Horizon
Foundation Visitor Center.

The Harlan's Hawk Conundrum

We should consider ourselves fortunate when on rare occasions we encounter something truly unique, something that evokes a myriad of emotions, while simultaneously generating divergent opinions and even a hint of controversy.

The Harlan's Hawk, or "Black Warrior," accomplishes this to the extreme, while also providing birders with a welcomed respite from the sometimes pedestrian and more familiar passerines. First described in 1829 by John J. Audubon as the "Harlan's Buzzard" from a specimen collected in Louisiana and named after his good friend Dr. Richard Harlan of Philadelphia, it has generated debate in ornithological circles ever since. At the crux of this controversy is the Harlan's place in the taxonomic hierarchy, where it has been variously and erratically allocated the status of species, subspecies (race), and color morph. Firmly fixed in the genus *Buteo*, the Harlan's was assigned species status (*Buteo harlani*) by the American Ornithological Union in 1957, and then in 1973 relegated to Red-tailed Hawk subspecies status (*Buteo jamaicensis harlani*) where it has since remained. Still, the controversy rages on with those who insist that the species designation be restored, while skeptics suggest that the Red-tailed Hawk (RTHA) morph assignment, without formal taxonomic recognition, is more appropriate. However, the biological species concept, citing interbreeding with resultant fertile offspring, and the more recently relied upon mitochondrial DNA genetic studies, lend support to the current subspecies designation. Suffice it to say that this brief account will remain just that, brief and noncommittal regarding this taxonomic to and fro.

The Harlan's Hawk's distribution is exclusively confined to the North American continent. It breeds in Alaska and northwest Canada, and winters principally in the western continental U.S. and southern Great Plains, its winter range extending as far east as Tennessee, resulting in our seasonal encounters with this enigmatic raptor.

Of interest and importance to the birding community are the field marks and behavioral patterns that facilitate an accurate identification. Roughly 90% of Harlan's Hawks are dark-morphs and obtain their adult plumage by 15 months of age. As would be expected, dark underparts predominate, accompanied by white stippling on the breast, often in the configuration of a necklace. The underwing coverts are dark, while the belly band and diagnostic red tail are notably absent.

The tail is perhaps the most distinguishing feature, and although not uniform in color or pattern, it is most frequently white or gray, occasionally exhibiting longitudinal streaks and less frequently horizontal barring. Often present is a dark, indistinct terminal or subterminal band. The sexes are highly dimorphic with respect to size, the female being considerably larger than the male. Immatures are more similar in plumage to adults than other Red-tails. The upper parts are relatively uniform across the continuum of RTHAs, as are vocalizations and flight patterns, and thus contribute little in the way of specific defining characteristics. A word of caution.....as a result of frequent intergrades (inbreeding), RTHAs, inclusive of its subspecies and morphs, exist in a wide variety of diverse plumages, making definitive identification sometimes difficult and an ongoing challenge for even the most experienced birder.

The foregoing preface serves as an introduction to that part of the story which applies to us locally. Many of us are familiar with the seasonal Harlan's Hawks that visit the Gardens of Shelby Farms and the

Pits of Ensley Bottoms, having been frequently identified and well documented.

The initial Harlan's at the Gardens was identified in January 2017, and subsequently on a single occasion in March of that same year, two distinct individuals were simultaneously spotted



Photo 2
Photo by Scott Heppel

and photographed (photo 1). The individual at bottom right in that photo has been a consistent

annual winter visitor in the interim, evidencing recurring site-specific fidelity. It can accurately be determined that this bird (photo 2) with its distinctive gray/white tail and indistinct terminal tail band, as well as its distinctive “pearl” necklace, is a true representation of the *harlani* subspecies and a recurring favorite. A common behavioral characteristic of the Harlan’s is its wary demeanor, evidenced by its greater flush distance than typically exhibited by other RTHAs. Additionally, although its vocalization is not unlike its conspecifics, this particular individual gives one the impression of being more emphatic, or perhaps as we might choose to imagine, simply more enthusiastic.



Photo 1 by David Bearman

The Harlan’s Hawks listed at Ensley are a bit more problematic. Although recorded sporadically since 1990, sightings have become considerably more frequent and consistent since 2019. The images (photos 3-5) below represent those identified as being the most diagnostic, and interestingly represent three distinct raptors, although most of us have presumed this to be a recurring isolated individual.



Photo 3: Immature Harlan’s
Photo by Bob Foehring



Photo 4: Intermediate Harlan’s
Photo by PJ Pulliam

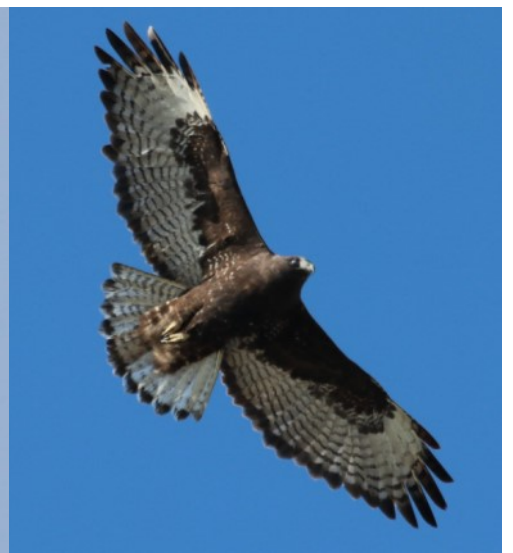


Photo 5: Dark-morph Harlan’s
Photo by PJ Pulliam

Hence, in addition to the taxonomic controversy, a second conundrum emerged, one of assumed identity.

To further complicate matters, within the Harlan's subspecies exist color morphs, including the pale (light) morph captured at the Gardens in November 2019 (photos 6 & 7).



Photo 6
Photo by Norman Soskel



Photo 7
Photo by Norman Soskel

It is apparent that there is a never ending diversity of RTHAs, even within the subspecies *harlani*, resulting in the challenge of identification and accurate taxonomic assignment. Perhaps when next tempted to list an individual as “recurring,” we should cite the above examples, make a detailed observational analysis, and consider the possibility that we have encountered a new and previously unidentified addition to our local environs.

A special thanks go out to the individuals who provided the above images with permission: Bob Foehring, PJ Pulliam, Scotty Heppel, David Bearman, and Norman Soskel. Additionally, I would like to thank Hal Mitchell for his input and expertise, without whose help the above identifications would not have been possible or reliable.

-Jim Varner

Referenced literature:

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, “Birds of the World”

“Subspecies and Morphs of the Red-tailed Hawk” by Ron Pittaway

“Comparison of Harlan’s with Western and Eastern Red-tailed Hawks” Birding, March 2010. Jerry Liquori and Brian Sullivan.

Global Raptors.org. W.S.B. Clark

Species Spotlight

WHITE-EYED VIREO

The White-Eyed Vireo is well-known for its pale-colored iris and irresistible charisma that accompanies its buoyant song. Although it may not be the brightest in the flock, this bouncy bird puts on a show when it starts to sing!

Scientific name: *Vireo griseus*



Range: This bird can be found as far north as Pennsylvania in the summer, but they winter in Central America and the Yucatan Peninsula along with other colorful migrants. They stay year-round in some southern states and coastal areas.

Habitat: White-Eyed Vireos prefer areas with lush vegetation, which provides plenty of cover and a refuge for insects. Favored habitats include forest edges and young forests, areas near streams, and wild fields.

Diet/feeding: These vireos are insectivores, sticking to a mostly insect-based diet. They take a wide range of prey, including caterpillars, butterflies, and spiders. However, in the winter months, they eat fruit such as dogwood, sumac, and wax myrtle berries.

Behavior: White-Eyed Vireos adopt secretive foraging habits, staying hidden behind dense tangles of vegetation. They forage like warblers, combing branches and leaves for prey. When a vireo finds a large insect, it may hold its struggling prey with one foot before eating it. Males become extremely extroverted during the breeding season, and they often sing for hours while perching on the tops of bushes and trees. After courtship, both mates build a neat cup nest hanging from two branches. They collect and weave spider webs into a cup shape before adding bits of bark and lichen to camouflage the



nest. The female lays three to five tiny spotted eggs which hatch in around two weeks.

When, where, and how to see: These vireos are easy to find during the breeding season. Males sing a lively *quick-with-the-beer-check* song from perches during all times of the day. Both sexes have soft gray bodies with washes of yellow on either flank, as well as yellow “spectacles”, ring-shaped marks around their eyes. Their wings, tail, and back are olive-colored, and each wing is marked with two bold bars. Most famously, though, is this vireo’s conspicuous pale eye, which sometimes gives it a comical expression of surprise.

Conservation: These vireos are faring well. However, people often destroy their dense, brushy breeding habitat. Ironically, the growth of forests also threatens this bird, as it relies on open areas. Managing vireo habitat proves to be difficult at times, as they often scatter and fail to breed if their favored breeding areas are destroyed or overgrown with trees. In addition, collisions with structures kill some migrating vireos every year.

Fun facts:



- Males vigorously defend their territories from each other, and they may peck a branch to warn intruders.
- Both sexes show a strong homing instinct, returning to breed in the same areas year after year. An account from Birds of the World describes a male stopping in a dirt field that had once been its breeding territory. The field had been cleared during the winter, and the male sat on a root for more than three minutes, turning its head in apparent confusion before leaving!

-Lynn M. Hui

Bibliography:

- Most info in this article and range map from the White-Eyed Vireo pages on Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s All About Birds guide
- Other sources:
 - Birds of the World White-Eyed Vireo species account
 - <https://nestwatch.org/connect/home-tweet-home/perfect-nest-for-a-beautiful-bird/>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1iOGP7qiAU>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bacpApp8Tzk>
- iBird Pro birding app
- Range map from All About Birds White-Eyed Vireo page
- All photos taken by Lynn Hui

TOS Spring Meeting 2022



Keynote Speaker Dawn Hewitt presenting "Getting Ready for Warblers"



Susan McWhirter presenting Lifetime Achievement Awards to Ron Hoff and Bob Ford



Bob Ford introducing our keynote speaker



TOS members enjoying some good food



Good food and good times
Photos by Chad Brown



Sunday at Hatchie NWR during TOS field trip
Photo by Susan Hubley. Bird: American Bittern

TOS Spring Meeting 2022



Lifetime Achievement Award Recipients:
Bob Ford & Ron Hoff with TOS President Michael Collins

Photos by Chad Brown

Remembering Chapter Member

Michael Durham Terry

TOS multi-decade Life Member Michael Durham Terry of Germantown passed away on October 30, 2021. His wife Joan Durham graciously made a donation to our chapter in Michael's memory. Michael also leaves behind children Agnes and Luther, three grandsons, and "a plethora of friends as well as numerous pigeons and chickens".

Michael was an avid birdwatcher and appreciated the many wonders of nature. He loved our monthly newsletter. Over the years Michael sent in various interesting and wry observations, such as the below.

Michael Terry will be missed.

July 8, 2021

email to Margaret Jefferson

"A friend of mine was out hunting and watched a roosting owl get mercilessly harassed and mobbed by crows. Apparently the owl had reached the limit of its patience and suddenly grabbed a crow from the air, killed it immediately and dropped it to the ground. The crows dispersed, and he never saw another crow while he sat and watched for a long time. Crows are apparently quick learners."

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.

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

Deadline for artwork is August 31.

A LA CARTE

- Incredible Ways Birds Change Their Bodies for Migration (HT: Chad Brown)
<https://www.audubon.org/news/five-incredible-ways-birds-change-their-bodies-spring-and-fall-migration>
- How do birds fly thousands of miles with no food or breaks? (HT: Chad Brown)
<https://www.audubon.org/news/five-incredible-ways-birds-change-their-bodies-spring-and-fall-migration>
- Bird Photography - 6 Myths (HT: Chad Brown)
<https://youtu.be/7qzaJbYHNS0>
- Bird Collective, is featuring a new apparel collection inspired by Mississippi's wetland birds & habitats, and benefiting Delta Wind Birds
<https://www.birdcollective.com/collections/delta-wind-birds>
- Subscriptions to the new BWD magazine are open now
<https://www.facebook.com/BWDmag/posts/126444449986930>
- Should I Take Down Feeders Because of the Avian Flu?
<https://birdfeederhub.com/should-i-take-down-feeders-because-of-the-avian-flu/>
- How Often to Change Your Hummingbird Feeder (Tips)
<https://birdfeederhub.com/how-often-to-change-your-hummingbird-feeder/>
- 10 Possible Ways to Attract Warblers!
<https://birdwatchinghq.com/attract-warblers/>
- Explore the Greenway—Nature Walk at Epping Way, 9am Saturdays
<https://wolfriver.org/default.aspx?p=129528&evtid=2103032>
- Birds of the World. FREE ACCESS for Global Big Day starting 8am ET May 11th through 11:59pm ET May 15th.
<https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/home>

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 2022

Wednesday, May 4, 7:30am

Overton Park

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

dickpreston48@gmail.com

Meet in the parking lot off E. Parkway.

<https://goo.gl/maps/foC2YRLq2RiaYQLj7>

Saturday, May 7, 7:30am

Spring Count

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

Field Trip Leader: Margaret Jefferson (Overton)

Dick: dickpreston48@gmail.com

Margaret: mjefferson100@hotmail.com

Meet at the Visitors Center at Shelby Forest. If you can't make that, individuals are encouraged to bird anywhere in Shelby County that day and forward their observations to Dick Preston (dickpreston48@gmail.com).

<https://goo.gl/maps/LCyck4xQkuUUa2v89>

For Overton Park, meet in the parking lot off E. Parkway.

<https://goo.gl/maps/foC2YRLq2RiaYQLj7>

Wednesday, May 11, 7:30am

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

dickpreston48@gmail.com

Meet at the Visitors Center at Shelby Forest.

<https://goo.gl/maps/LCyck4xQkuUUa2v89>

Saturday, May 14

eBird Global Big Day

<https://ebird.org/globalbigday>

Wednesday, May 18, 7:00pm

Chapter Meeting

Shelby Farms Park, Buffalo Room

6903 Great View Dr N.

Memphis, TN 38134

Saturday, May 21, 7:30am

Ensley Bottoms

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

dickpreston48@gmail.com

Meet in front of the T.E. Maxson Wastewater Treatment Plant office (2685 Plant Road)

<https://goo.gl/maps/2xWXeRDpvkQg7B1F9>

TOS Membership Information

Members may join online
at 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	\$23
Other Student	\$ 5
Lifetime	\$450 one time +\$18 yearly

Dues payable by PayPal
at 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

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 Deon 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

May 18, 2022. 7:00pm

Shelby Farms Park, Buffalo Room
6903 Great View Dr N.
Memphis, TN 38134

Enter/Exit through the Coastal Fish Company entrance. <https://maps.app.goo.gl/UfyXYTXmc8LNXGup8>

The Buffalo Room is located on the north side of the First Horizon Foundation Visitor Center.
<https://maps.app.goo.gl/hzGsiUcjgeQF7X2QA>

Program

Dick Preston, MTOS "Birds of Madagascar"

Upcoming Field Trip Information

May 4: Overton Park
May 7: Shelby County Spring Count
May 11: Shelby Forest
May 21: Ensley Bottoms

Please send your submissions to
mtosnewsletter@gmail.com by August 22 for the
September newsletter.

New Members

Lisa Altizer laltizer8@hotmail.com
Stephen Arrowood
Keith Paluso keithpalusomusic@gmail.com
Ellan Thompson lmamelm@gmail.com
Joanie Webb joaniewebb@me.com

Treasurer's Report

At the March 16 meeting the chapter voted to make a \$500 donation each to two nonprofit conservation groups, the Mid-South Raptor Center and Mississippi Wildlife Rehabilitation, Inc. These donations have been made. MTOS enjoyed the use of the Shelby Farms Visitors Center for the April (and upcoming May) meeting, which was provided gratis to our group. The balance in the Treasury as of April 25, 2022 is approximately \$16,000. This balance estimate takes into account state meeting-related expenses that have not yet cleared the account. An updated Treasurer Report will be ready for the May 18 monthly meeting.

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME

Submissions of any of the
following are desired:

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

Please send your submissions to
mtosnewsletter@gmail.com.

PHOTOS BY
Andrea Cowart



Rose-breasted Grosbeak



Yellow-rumped Warbler



Great Crested Flycatcher



Black-throated Green Warbler



Red-eyed Vireo



Blackpoll Warbler