



## MEMPHIS CHAPTER NEWS

TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY

<http://birdmemphis.org>

September 2022

### **FROM THE PRESIDENT**

As your incoming president of the Memphis chapter of the Tennessee Ornithological Society, I have been asked what my goals are and how they might be achieved. Aside from the obvious objectives of increasing membership, maintaining our sound financial position, and providing programs and activities to keep members actively engaged, additional goals that extend beyond these pragmatic considerations are essential. One is conservation, especially when considering the plight of our feathered friends.

We have witnessed an ongoing precipitous decline in the North American bird population, with the loss of more than 3 billion birds since 1970. Grassland birds have been particularly hard hit, experiencing a 50% decline. There are many contributing factors including habitat loss, pesticides with attendant loss of source food, climate disruption, nest predation, and brood parasitism, some of which are outside our immediate sphere of influence. However, it should be our goal individually and collectively to educate ourselves and others on this critical and far-reaching issue, and to act in concert with state and national organizations to preserve and protect this vital resource if we hope to pass our enjoyment and appreciation of birds, birding, and the environment to future generations. I look forward to time shared in the field and working with our membership as we address the challenges ahead.

-Jim Varner

# Species Spotlight

## Indigo Bunting

The male Indigo Bunting seems like a dot of electric highlighter ink amidst a sea of green. This bird's astonishing plumage seems too blue to be true!

**Scientific name:** *Passerina cyanea*

**Range:** Indigo Buntings can be found in the East, Midwest, and Southwest during the summer. After the breeding season comes to a close, they journey to Central America and the Caribbean, where they spend the winter before heading back to the U.S.



**Habitat:** The Indigo Bunting thrives in wild, overgrown places. They breed in weedy fields and clearcut areas where forest gives way to more open habitat with plenty of tangled undergrowth. During migration, buntings occupy similar areas, including overgrown fields and lawns. They may visit suburban areas during migration, attracted by feeders or forest cover.

**Diet/feeding:** Indigo Buntings have a wide diet. They take mostly insects in the summer, such as caterpillars and spiders. However, at other times of the year, they take seeds and berries, including thistle seeds, various types of grain, strawberries, and blackberries. Buntings also eat twigs and buds of trees in early spring, when insects are not yet in abundance. They occasionally visit feeders.

**Behavior:** Indigo Buntings forage in tangled weeds and shrubs, looking for insects and tasty seeds. They may also pick at seeds hanging on the ends of stems in a goldfinch-like foraging style. During the spring and summer, males often behave boldly and aggressively. They perch on prominent branches, singing for long stretches at a time. When two birds are disputing over territory, they may confront each other with a “butterfly flight”, in which a bird flutters slowly towards its challenger. The dispute may escalate into a fight, with both males grappling with each other on the ground. After finding a mate, a male may aggressively protect the





female until after eggs are laid. The female chooses a nest site close to the ground, amid dense undergrowth. She builds a cup nest without help from the male, using leaves, bark, other plant materials, and spider web. She lays 3-4 white eggs, which hatch in about 2 weeks.

**When, where, and how to see:** Males are easy to find in breeding plumage, with their brilliant bluish-turquoise feathers and habit of perching in the open. The dun-colored females, immature birds, and nonbreeding males can be trickier to recognize and are easily confused with sparrows. They are lightly streaked on the breast, and their wing and tail feathers are often tinted with pale blue. Molting males may sport brownish plumage checkered with patches of blue, which creates the impression of a blue rash! The male sings a series of loud, paired warbles.

**Conservation:** Indigo Bunting populations are doing well, although some trends continue to pose threats for this species. Many conservation efforts center around

protecting forests, but, ironically, these efforts lessen the habitat available for buntings as trees regrow in open areas. Urbanization and the expansion of agriculture also take away available breeding habitat. In addition, Indigo Buntings face dangers during migration and in their wintering range, as the male's eye-catching beauty makes it a target for hunters and the illegal caged bird trade, and birds of all ages and sexes fall victim to car and building collisions. Despite these challenges, their habitat continues to expand as humans clear forests.

### Fun facts:

- Young males learn their songs from older males. Young males that were isolated in experiments developed abnormal song patterns that differed from their fathers' songs, indicating that songs are a learned characteristic. This ability to learn leads to the formation of "song neighborhoods" as older males pass on a particular way of singing to their younger counterparts.
- Are you tired of buying cheap birdseed and having all that millet go to waste? Buntings are one of the few feeder birds that will eat white millet!
- Indigo Buntings migrate at night, using stars to navigate.



-Lynn M. Hui

### Bibliography:

- Indigo Bunting pages on Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds guide
- Indigo Bunting account in Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Birds of the World resource
- Other sources:
  - <https://morebirds.com/blogs/news/how-to-attract-buntings>
  - The Sibley's Guide to Birds, 2nd Edition
  - Range map from All About Birds Indigo Bunting page
- all photos taken by Lynn Hui



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# 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](mailto:mtosnewsletter@gmail.com)

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## A LA CARTE

- Recordist of Note: Robert C. Stein  
<https://www.macaulaylibrary.org/2022/07/11/recordist-of-note-robert-stein/>
- The Big Tern Cheat Sheet: How to ID Four Common Species  
<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/summer-2022/the-big-tern-cheat-sheet-how-id-four-common>
- "Health Benefits of Birdwatching" There are Many Great Reasons for Birding (HT: Chad Brown)  
<https://youtu.be/LysJIfZ8RS8>
- Top Ten Traits of Great Wildlife Photographers (HT: Chad Brown)  
<https://youtu.be/mUuTpc2WJIE>
- Donna Dawson from Castle Rock, Colorado and their local Blue Jay accepting an offering (HT: Chad Brown)  
<https://www.dropbox.com/s/efmc4xrmvshqj35/Our%20Blue.MOV?dl=0>
- How Scientists Use the Data You Collect During Climate Watch and Christmas Bird Count  
<https://www.audubon.org/news/inside-data-factory>
- Free, twice-a-week birding newsletter from BirdWatching magazine  
<https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/newsletter/>
- Migration Dashboard  
<https://dashboard.birdcast.info/>
- Rare Bird Alerts & Needs Alerts  
<https://ebird.org/alerts>

# UPCOMING EVENTS

## September & October 2022

### **Wednesday, September 7, 7:30am**

Ensley Bottoms / The Pits

Meet at the T.O. Fuller State Park Visitors Center

<https://goo.gl/maps/Pe5R7RoCoAzkggM58>

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

### **Saturday, September 10, 7:30am**

Shelby County Fall Count

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park Visitors Center

<https://goo.gl/maps/AZuNGqXhbg43k7gQ9>

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

Or, bird anywhere within Shelby County and forward your observations to Dick Preston.

### **Saturday-Sunday, September 10-11**

2022 Hummingbird Migration and Nature Festival

<https://strawberry.audubon.org/hummingbird>

### **Wednesday, September 21, 7:00pm**

Chapter Meeting

St. George's Episcopal Church

2425 South Germantown Rd. Germantown, TN

### **Saturday, September 17**

Fort Pillow SP/Lower Hatchie NWR

Meet at the Alex Haley rest area

<https://goo.gl/maps/5BnZmfzohtKuZwcY9>

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston

[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

### **Wednesday, September 28, 7:30am**

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park, Visitors Center

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston / Van Harris

Dick: [dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

Van: [shelbyforester1223@gmail.com](mailto:shelbyforester1223@gmail.com)

### **Saturday, October 1, 7:30am**

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston / Van Harris

Dick: [dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

Van: [shelbyforester1223@gmail.com](mailto:shelbyforester1223@gmail.com)

### **Wednesday, October 5, 7:30am**

Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

Field Trip Leader: Dick Preston / Van Harris

Dick: [dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

Van: [shelbyforester1223@gmail.com](mailto:shelbyforester1223@gmail.com)

### **Saturday, October 8**

October Big Day

<https://ebird.org/news/october-big-day-2022>

### **Sunday, October 9, 7:30am**

Wapanocca NWR

Field Trip Leader: Van Harris

[shelbyforester1223@gmail.com](mailto:shelbyforester1223@gmail.com)

### **Wednesday, October 19, 7:00pm**

Chapter Meeting

St. George's Episcopal Church

2425 South Germantown Rd. Germantown, TN

### **Friday-Sunday, October 21-23**

Reelfoot Lake Pelican Festival

<https://tnstateparks.com/parks/events/reelfoot-lake/>

### **Saturday, October 22, 7:30am**

W.C. Johnson Park

Field Trip Leader: Chad Brown

[cwb496@bellsouth.net](mailto:cwb496@bellsouth.net) / 901-754-3385

<https://tnbirds.org/events/>

# CHAPTER MEETING

St. George's Episcopal  
Church

**2425 South Germantown Rd.  
Germantown, TN**

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**Wednesday,  
September 21, 2022**

**7:00 pm**

**Meetings are held in the  
Parish Hall**

### TOS Membership Information

Members may join online  
at [www.birdmemphis.org](http://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	\$15
Other Student	\$ 5
Lifetime	\$450 one time +\$18 yearly

Dues payable by PayPal

at [www.birdmemphis.org](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

### Tennessee Warbler Deadlines

- \*March 15 for the April Newsletter
- \*July 15 for the August Newsletter
- \*December 15 for the December Newsletter

Forward contributions to:

Theresa Graham, Editor  
P.O. Box 366 Oakland, TN 38060  
(901) 489-0795  
Email: [2graham@bellsouth.net](mailto:2graham@bellsouth.net)

### Chapter Meeting

**September 21, 2022. 7:00pm**

St. George's Episcopal Church,  
2425 South Germantown Rd. Germantown, TN  
Phone 901-754-7282

### Program

**Dr. Kelly Miller**, University of Memphis  
*Experimental alteration of male parental care reveals benefits of pairing with good fathers in a wild bird population.*

### Hospitality

Refreshments will be provided by Jewell Simpson and Elizabeth Hall.

### Upcoming Field Trip Information

**September 7** - Ensley Bottoms  
**September 10** - Shelby County Fall Count  
**September 17** - Fort Pillow SP & Lower Hatchie NWR  
**September 28** - Meeman-Shelby Forest SP

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

For our next issue, we would like to feature some photos of your favorite bird.

Please send your submissions to [mtosnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:mtosnewsletter@gmail.com)

### New Members May-August 2022

John Dorion [john@johndorion.com](mailto:john@johndorion.com)

Liz and Adrian Hall [elizabeth.l.alford@gmail.com](mailto:elizabeth.l.alford@gmail.com)  
[adrianhall1974@gmail.com](mailto:adrianhall1974@gmail.com)

Susie McCandless [smdmccandless@comcast.net](mailto:smdmccandless@comcast.net)

Irene Brownlow [irenebrownlow2@gmail.com](mailto:irenebrownlow2@gmail.com)

Miki and Jorma Skeen [miki@peachyskeen.com](mailto:miki@peachyskeen.com)

Jennalyn Speer [jennalyn.krulish1@gmail.com](mailto:jennalyn.krulish1@gmail.com)

Shantanu Deshpande [shantanu.deshpande6@gmail.com](mailto:shantanu.deshpande6@gmail.com)

Kelly Miller [kdmler3@memphis.edu](mailto:kdmler3@memphis.edu)

### Treasurer's Report

As of August 24, 2022, there is a balance of \$5,782.81 in the checking account and \$10,050.97 in the money market account, for a total fund balance of \$15,833.78.





**Andrea Cowart**



Bay-breasted Warbler



Female Bay-breasted Warbler



Summer Tanager



Great Crested Flycatcher





Rose-breasted Grosbeak



Female Rose-breasted Grosbeak



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher



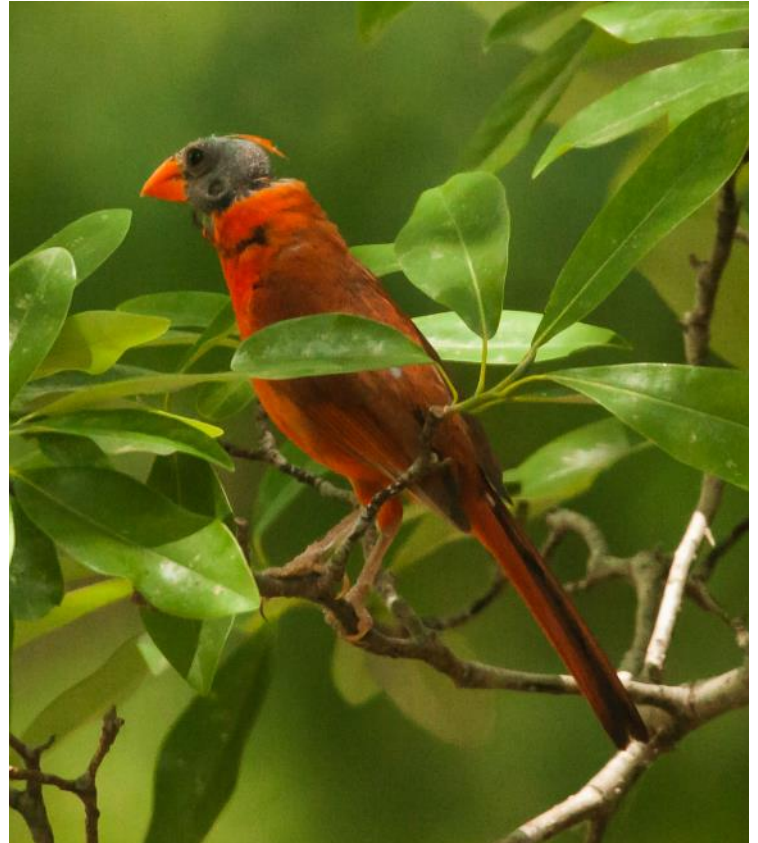
Indigo Bunting



Female Indigo Bunting

PHOTOS BY:  
**DON SANDERLIN**



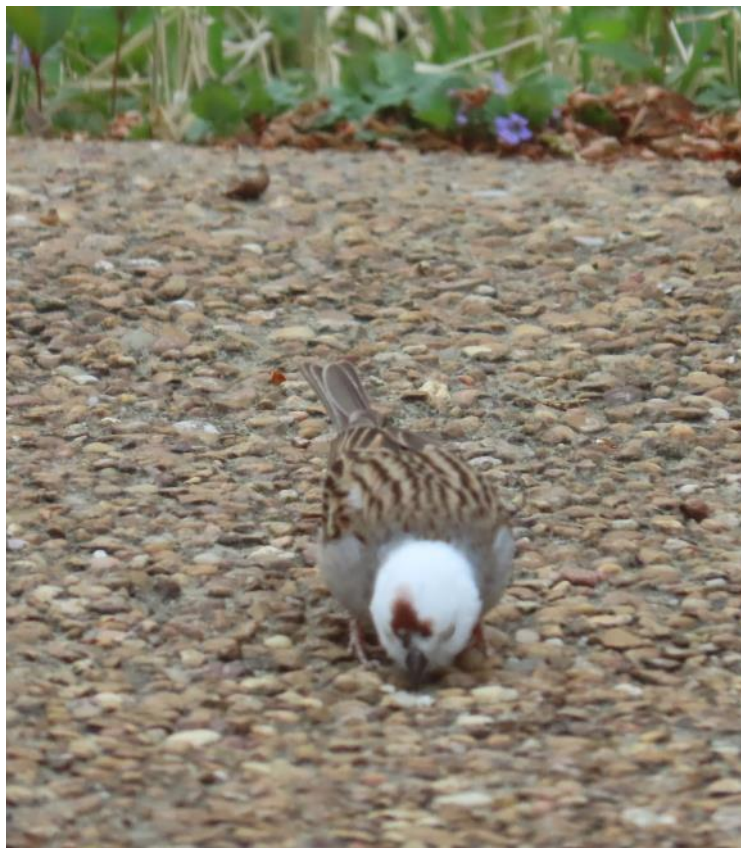


These photos were taken outside my office at Ducks Unlimited of a male Northern Cardinal with almost no head feathers. I first saw it on 7/6/22 and have regularly seen it since. On 7/15, it was seen with a juvenile that was begging for food (video: <https://youtu.be/PnRQJPUIKq4>). Apparently this catastrophic molt is not too uncommon in Cardinals right after the nesting season (<https://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite/solve/faqs/cardinal-baldness-what-happened.php>).

-Nick Smith

Photos by Jenna Evans





This "white headed" sparrow visited my backyard in April along with some White-Throated and Chipping Sparrows. It mostly stayed on the ground around the patio and under the feeders. After a couple of hours it left never to be seen again. I believe it is a Chipping Sparrow from the rusty colored spot on the top of the head, but it spent more time feeding with the white-throats and there were far more white-throats around at the time.

-Denny Buchannon