

# *The Chattanooga Chat*

CHATTANOOGA CHAPTER OF THE TENNESSEE ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Pileated Woodpeckers. Photo Credit: Clyde Blum, taken in his backyard. January 2024

## FEBRUARY PROGRAM

**February 8, 7pm**

Ascension Lutheran Church  
729 S. Germantown Road  
East Ridge, TN 37412

For the Thursday, February 8 meeting, Laura Marsh will speak about "Bird Banding: a Model for Research Tourism". Laura (MSc) is a field ornithologist and conservation biologist. She is the founder of [Nova Conservation](#), an organization dedicated to supporting environmental nonprofits through increasing their profitability. Her [TEDx talk](#) outlines the lack of financial resources available to the conservation sector, as well as solutions. She has worked as a biologist at various institutions, including the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. Laura also volunteers at Chattanooga Audubon Society and other conservation societies when she's not chasing birds in the field or her two young boys around the house!

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As you'll see in this newsletter, even a winter full of snow and rain doesn't deter us birders. Field trips, events at Audubon Acres, the Great Backyard Bird Count on February 16-19, and great observations of rare birds are keeping everyone active. Speaking of rare birds, I've been thoroughly enjoying "BirdingApp" that fellow member Tim Lenz has developed. If you haven't yet added it to your list of go-to birding apps, I strongly recommend you do so. As you know, Tim was one of the lead Cornell software developers of both eBird and Merlin, and his work on his new app is a wonderful way to connect with fellow local birders and stay up to date regularly on notable bird sightings. Just in the last few days folks have seen a horned lark, a spotted towhee, a lesser black-backed gull, an American bittern, a tundra swan, a sora, a greater white-fronted goose, and a blue-headed vireo. BirdingApp is proving to be a fabulous tool in helping us further strengthen the thriving birding community, and I encourage you to support Tim in his efforts. Great job and happy birding everyone!

~OJ

## CHATTANOOGA BIRD COUNT

By Kevin Calhoon

The Chattanooga CBC was held December 16, 2023. Forty one (41) participants (the highest turnout on many years) found 95 species (about average). Highlights included:

- 1 Pacific Loon
- 300 American White Pelicans
- 3 Merlin (high number)
- 1 Peregrine Falcon
- 1 Blue-headed Vireo
- 10 Orange-crowned Warblers (very high count)

Note: No wild turkeys were reported on the count, first time in many years!

Thank you to everyone that helped with this count!

Hiwasee Bird Count tabulation is in progress.

### JOIN OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP:

**Membership renewal is each January 1. Please renew your membership today!**

<https://chattanoogatos.org/joining-or-renewing-as-a-member/>

Individual memberships \$30      Family memberships \$35      Student memberships \$15

## FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS

*Please join us for these birding walks! All birders, beginner and experienced, are welcome.*

### **Saturday, February 10, 8:30 am**

Where: Chester Frost Park

Leader: Kent DuBois (423-827-6306)

Meeting Spot: After entering Chester Frost Park, take a left into the first main parking lot. Chester Frost Park provides a variety of bird habitat including lake, shore, wetland, wooded area, and open fields. Please dress warmly and bring water. Contact Kent for questions or updates regarding weather.

### **Saturday, February 17, 9am**

#### **Beginning Birders Workshop**

Where: Audubon Acres

Leader: OJ Morgan and Kevin Calhoon

Meeting Spot: Inside the gate, on the porch of the office.

Kevin will show beginning birders how to use binoculars. A few pair of binoculars are available for loan.

For more information, go to <https://www.chattanoogaaudubon.org/beginnerbirding.html>.

Because of its strategic streamside location with a mix of open meadows, pines, and hardwood forests, it is an excellent location to spot winter species such as Pine Siskins, White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, Dark-eyed Junco, and Cooper's Hawk.

### **Saturday, February 17, 8am**

Where: Nickajack Lake

Leader: Tim Lenz

Meeting Spot: Meet at Chantz Coffee at 8am to carpool. Tim will put together a route on the BirdingApp. Chantz Coffee (Chattanooga Coffee Company) is located at 2627 Broad Street.

## BACK TO BIRDING PODCAST

Local birders Luke Thompson and Patrick Higgins have started the podcast, ***Back to Birding***, where they discuss a variety of topics about birds and birding! Both are lifetime birders. Luke is a high school senior who has lived in the Chattanooga area nearly his entire life. Patrick is a sophomore in college at UTC originally from the Nashville area. Recent episodes have covered topics such as *Why They Bird*, *Favorite Places in the Area to Bird*, *Christmas Bird Counts*, and more! To listen, go to the Podcasts on your phone and search for Back to Birding.



American Bittern

Photo Credit: Jason Dain,  
Macaulay Library.

Nova Scotia, December 26, 2018

## FINDING THE SPOTTED TOWHEE

by Luke Thompson

Two days before Christmas, I was sitting at work about to start a shift. I looked down at my phone, and a notification from BirdingApp came through that said “Spotted Towhee at Baylor School”. The Spotted Towhee is a western species closely related to our Eastern Towhee, and one has never been seen in our area. I got permission to clock in late, and I sped over to campus. The bird was found by Florida birder Will Johnson in the thick undersbrush of a powerline cut on the backside of the school’s property. After searching



desperately for a half hour, I had to leave for work. I decided to give the top of a steep hill one last check, and lo and behold, it popped out! Over the past month, the bird has been reliably seen coming to seed I spread and many other people have been able to see it.

Female Spotted Towhee; photo credit  
Alice Domalik, 2017. Macauley Library

# BIRDINGAPP: NEW TOOLS FOR BIRDERS

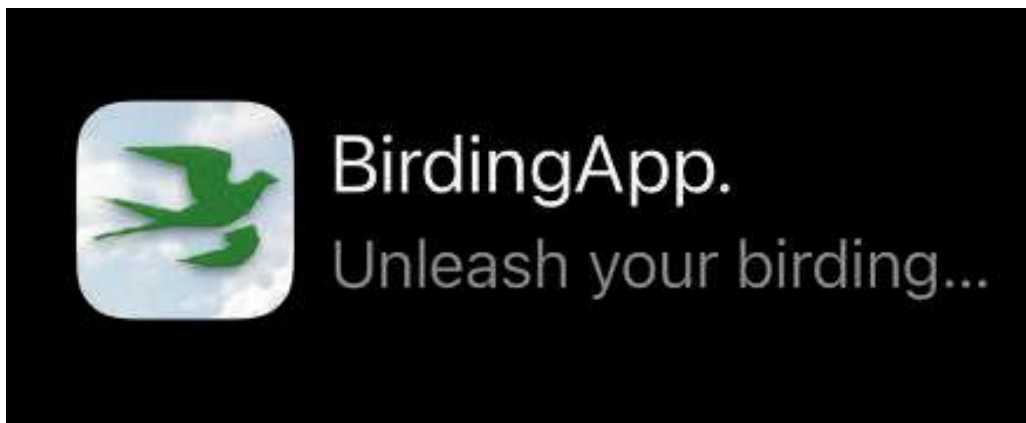
by Tim Lenz

You may be asking yourself, why do I need another birding app on my phone? I already have eBird and Merlin Bird ID. But how do I actually communicate with other birders in the field? If I think I see something rare, who can I ask for help? How can I find out about and report interesting birds to the locals even when I'm traveling? The answer is BirdingApp! We've created a free fully-featured social media app designed just for birders, offering features like posting birds, polls, hotspot route planning, trips, chat, and a variety of options for interacting.

One unique feature we've added is the "Nearby Birders" chat: you can think of it as a digital bulletin board where your messages are pinned to a location. The chat has been active around Chattanooga, with local birders posting interesting sightings, photos and invitations for meetups at the Booker T. gull-watch platform. It has also been great for intel on weather closures at local hotspots and announcements of discoveries of new hotspots such as Duck Point at Harrison Bay. The hotspot map is great for deciding where to go birding, navigating to hotspots, jumping over to eBird to explore bird data and viewing nearby rarities.

The most popular feature in BirdingApp is undoubtedly the rare bird alerts. When a rarity is entered on eBird, you will get a notification on your phone that links to all the details. BirdingApp even supports posting RBAs before they are entered into eBird, to let others know about your sighting immediately. I made use of this feature recently at Harrison Bay when I spotted a Pacific Loon. I got a quick digiscope and made a post on BirdingApp with a location pin. Two minutes later, a friend pulled up and said, "Hey, I got the alert!" and it turned out to be a life bird! For those in other RBA groups, BirdingApp posts can be shared with any outside app so you won't have to enter all the details again.

For more information, visit [birdingapp.com](http://birdingapp.com) - We are always looking to improve the app, so if you have any suggestions, be sure to send a message our way!



## BOOK REVIEW: “CROSSINGS” BY BEN GOLDFARB

Review by Barbara Johnson, January 2024

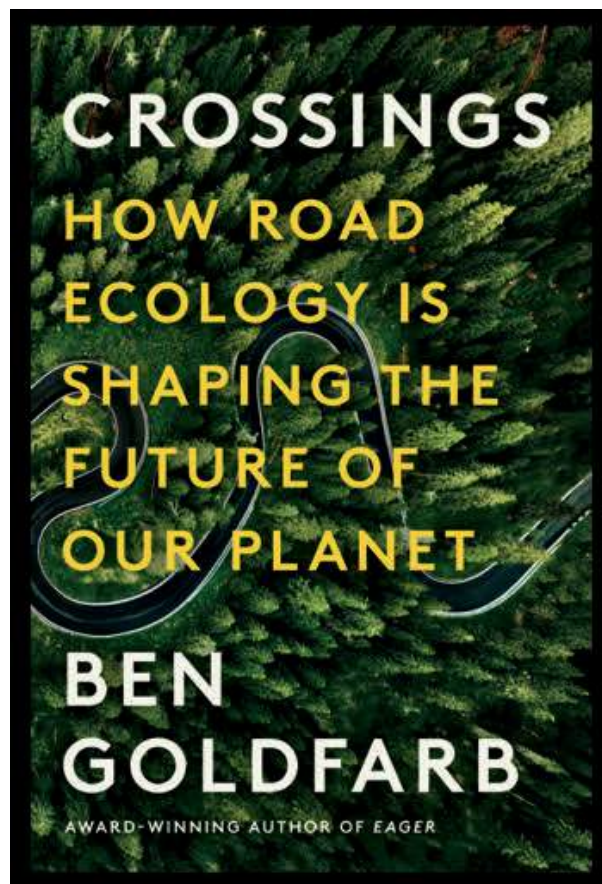
“If you’re a Kerouac reader, you grew up steeped in the dogma that highways represent freedom. If you’re a grizzly bear, they might as well be prison walls.” ~ Ben Goldfarb

In less masterful hands, Ben Goldfarb’s 2023 book *Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Planet* could have been mind-numbing. Instead, this exposé of the myriad effects of roads on living systems is a page-turner, dazzling in its scope, maddening in its revelations, engaging in its characters, and studded with humor and hope.

The some 40-million miles of road that cross the earth, from government-funded highways to illegal logging tracts, impact the behavior and physiology of wildlife from the massive to the microscopic. Roadkill, migrations, soundscapes, erosion, soil chemistry, hydrology, invasive species and human intrusion into wild lands are topics studied by road ecologists. Goldfarb has spent years ranging the globe to find and follow these experts as they count, scrape up and analyze creatures killed by vehicles; lobby for wildlife bridges and underpasses; remove and replant Forest Service roads; and fight for safer, quieter and greener cityscapes.

Birders may be especially interested to learn that traffic has shaped the morphology of the cliff swallow, a colonial species which now nests almost exclusively on bridges and underpasses. An ornithologist noticed a significant drop in road-killed swallows, and compared the bodies of birds collected in the ‘80s and 2011. Cliff swallow wings are now several millimeters shorter than they used to be, giving the birds greater maneuverability to avoid car collisions-- a classic case of natural selection. Unfortunately, more common responses are like the many birds whose movements, stress levels and nesting behavior are negatively impacted by road noise, even in the wildest of places.

We all use and need roads. *Crossings* challenges us to do so more gently, sparingly, consciously. As in his outstanding previous book, *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, Goldfarb opens our eyes to the ordinary with his astonishing, potent, encouraging story-telling.





Sandhill  
Cranes at  
Hiwassee  
Wildlife  
Refuge.

Sandhill Crane at Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge.

Photo Credit: Ray Zimmerman

## BIRDING IN PANAMA: JUNE 14-21, 2024

Join local birder and guide for the Taraloka Foundation **Luke Thompson** for an amazing week of birding in the mountains of Panama! You will spend the week looking for the spectacular Central American endemics like the Golden-browed Chlorospingus and the stunning Snowcap, as well as more widespread species like Keel-billed Toucans and a large variety of spectacular hummingbirds. There will be feeders set up to attract a wide array of species for good viewing and photo opportunities! \$2000 + plane tickets. All proceeds will go to disadvantaged girls in Sikkim, India. Email Luke at [ldtbirds37@gmail.com](mailto:ldtbirds37@gmail.com) if you are interested.

More information here at

<https://taralokafoundation.smugmug.com/Birding-in-Panama/n-DBbHWB>.