

# Tennessee Ornithological Society Memphis Chapter



<http://birdmemphis.org>

April 2025

## **MARCH PROGRAM & POTLUCK**

**March Program: Do Ivory-billed Woodpeckers Persist? A story of patience, blurry pictures, and occasional adrenaline.**



Bob Ford updated us on recent searches for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Bob is a longtime TOS member and is Editor of *The Migrant*, the journal of the Tennessee Ornithological Society (TOS). He attended the University of Memphis and has a Wildlife Management degree from the University of Tennessee. He went to work for the US Fish and Wildlife Service in 2000 with much of his time there spent at the Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge. Bob retired from the US FWS in 2022 but has been instrumental in forming

the Hatchie Fest and the Hatchie River Conservancy. He is also involved in efforts to determine if the Ivory-billed Woodpecker persists. He is the co-author of the paper *Multiple lines of evidence suggest the persistence of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (Campephilus Principalis) in Louisiana* in *Ecology and Evolution* 2023;13:e10017. Bob noted that the graduate thesis (1937-39) of James Tanner is the most important source for information on range, habitat, and behavior. (See *The Ivory-billed Woodpecker* by James T. Tanner). Tanner estimated that there were 22 Ivory-billed Woodpeckers in the US (South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana) in 1942. The last accepted record of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker in the continental US is from 1944 in the Singer Tract in Louisiana where Tanner did his studies. Bob noted that there have been over 200 reported sightings of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers since 1944. He has interviewed people and evaluated some of those reports. An exciting report he investigated was at Moss Island, TN. During searches there at least 5 people heard Ivory-billed Woodpecker-like double knocks on eight days between Feb. 27 and April 5, 2008. There was one detection after April 5 and then no more in May. Bob reviewed the reports of Ivory-Billed Woodpecker sightings in the Cache River area of Arkansas in 2005 and discussed in detail the methods and findings reported in the 2023 paper. The paper reported on efforts over 10 years in the study area in Louisiana. The authors detail evidence for the presence of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers: 1) 16 visual observations deemed to be probable; 2) Audio recordings of kent-like calls and double knocks; 3)

Trail cam images; 4) Drone videos. Trail cams and drone flights focused on areas where Ivory-billed-like birds had been seen or heard and where there were foraging sign or cavities. Bob showed interesting video and still images of large, crested woodpeckers that appeared to show a white saddle on the body when perched and a large area of white on the trailing edge of the wings in flight. He noted that Ivory-billed Woodpeckers differ from Pilated in the positioning of the toes while on trees and limbs, leading to a difference in posture when perched. The paper reports that some of the images obtained suggest a posture like that of members of the genus *Campephilus*. Although tantalizing, none of the photos were clear enough to give definitive proof of Ivory-billed Woodpeckers. Bob addressed the question: Why it is so hard to get a good photo of an Ivory-billed Woodpecker? He attributed the difficulty to several factors: 1) The birds move frequently. They feed on recently dead trees exploiting areas where trees have died from flood, fire, and blowdowns. 2) Ivory-billed Woodpeckers fly high, often above the canopy. 3) The trail cam cameras used in the study are designed for animals that walk close by. 4) The images obtained from hovering drones are better but do not provide close images. The frequent movement of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker may explain why some reports yield frequent sightings over a period followed by no additional sightings. The work at the Louisiana site continues and the authors hope to further analyze their many hours of audio recordings and obtain DNA data and definitive images.



Audubon, John James. *The Birds of America*. London: 1827-1838.

### **Additional resources:**

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/ece3.10017>

<https://www.aviary.org/new-findings-released-in-the-search-for-the-ivory-billed-woodpecker/>

<https://www.nytimes.com/article/ivory-billed-woodpecker.html>

[https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery\\_plan/100719.pdf](https://ecos.fws.gov/docs/recovery_plan/100719.pdf)

### **March Potluck**

We had a large turnout for the annual March potluck meeting that featured a program on continued searches for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker by Bob Ford. Thanks to our speaker, Chapter officers, and Dick Preston for planning a wonderful evening. Thanks also to everyone who helped with table decorations, setup and cleanup as well as those who attended and provided food.

-Margaret Jefferson

Remembering Chapter Member

## **Jere Daniel “Danny” Graham**

Danny Graham, husband of chapter member and TOS Warbler Editor Theresa Graham, passed away at his home in Oakland, Tennessee on March 13. Danny served 38 years as a firefighter. He was commended for conspicuous bravery for his actions in the line of duty at Station 10 of the Memphis Fire Department. Members who have attended chapter picnics hosted by Knox Martin at the Mid-South Raptor Center, or who have attended Potluck events, will remember Danny and his jovial and easy-going nature, and his love of Knox’s bread pudding. We will miss him.

*Memorials may be made  
to St. Philip the Apostle Catholic Church,  
11710 US Highway 64, Somerville, TN 38068 or  
to the Mid-South Raptor Center,  
1176 Dearing Road, Memphis, TN 38117*

# Hotspots to Consider Birding This Spring

With March now here we are in the midst of the spring migration season. This time of year offers some great opportunities to observe a wide variety of species as they pass through our area on their way to their preferred breeding grounds; quite a few of them raise young here before heading further north for the summer too. While we all have our favorite spots to check out when we are birding, allow me to offer a few suggestions for hotspots to visit that may not be on your radar.

## **Nesbit Park (Stanky Creek Trails)**

*5760 Yale Rd, Memphis, TN 38135*

At 335 acres, Nesbit Park is almost the same size as Overton Park. The land it occupies is a mix of hills and flood plain with creeks that meander through it. It has about 13 miles of trails that wind through the woods. Most of the trails are designed for mountain bikes, but they are fine for walking as well. If you only want a short visit to the park, use of the red trail that serves as a connector to the other trails. If you have a little more time take the blue trail which takes 30 minutes or so to cover. If you have more time take either the yellow or white trail, both of them go a bit deeper into the park. After the trees leaf out, shade is plentiful, but there are still nice pockets of sunshine that can be found throughout the forest. Any species you would expect to find in or near the woods would be likely here including a variety of warblers, vireos, woodpeckers, etc... You might also spot deer, box turtles, and other wildlife.

## **Rodney Baber Park**

*2200 block of James Rd, Memphis, TN 38127*

I have previously written about Rodney Baber Park and we had a field trip to see Woodcocks there in February. This park is about 170 acres. As a whole, this park is pretty open with paved trails that run through the north and center parts of the park. There are a few creeks that intersect the park, a couple of lakes (one on the east and another on the west end of the park), stands of young deciduous trees, and a stand of pine trees. There are also some mature trees around the perimeter of the park and it is very close to the Wolf River. With a variety of different microhabitats within the park and a lot of edge habitat that should equate to a variety of bird species. This location has not been birded in the spring before, but given how good it has been for birding during the fall and over the winter I expect that trend to continue.

## **The University of Memphis**

*Main Campus on Central Ave*

This may seem like an odd suggestion to many, but despite the buildings and paved surfaces the main campus of the U of M has a wide variety of species that pass through especially during spring and fall migration. The best evidence I can point you to is the data collected by Bird Safe Memphis of the species that have been involved with building collisions. While you may not find as many species here as you might at Shelby Farms or Overton Park it isn't too tricky to enter a checklist with 20+ species on a nice spring morning. I recall one morning last spring that it seemed like there were Great-crested Flycatchers everywhere. While the lawns and sidewalks seem to always be busy with robins, spots like the mature trees along Walker Ave, the garden east of the Field House, and the area on the east side of Zach Curlin Street close to Central Ave always seem to have a variety of species. The areas on the west and north sides of the library are worth checking as well if you chose to bird at the U of M.

## **Water Plant Park**

*5809 Lillian Bend Dr. Arlington, TN 38002*

This is another location that doesn't have any spring data, but with a big lake adjacent to fields, woods, and wetlands there are a lot of species that should be able to be seen in a place like this. This park is only accessible from US-70 westbound just SW of TN-385. If you take US-70 east to get there you will need to make a U-turn to access the park.



# Alexander Wilson – A Book Review



In their book, *Alexander Wilson: The Scot Who Founded American Ornithology*, authors Edward Burttt and William Davis chronicle Wilson's life in an approachable, entertaining, and deeply informative way. This book was published in 2013 and may already be in your library. But the book was new to me when I ran across it on Amazon.com, where it is still in print and available.

Alexander Wilson is heralded as the "Father of American Ornithology." His nine-volume opus, *American Ornithology*, was published in a series between 1808 and 1814. His work laid the groundwork for future ornithologists and naturalists including John James Audubon.

Alexander Wilson was born in Paisley, Scotland in 1766. As a young man in Scotland, Wilson apprenticed as a weaver but had greater visions for his life and career. Wilson was a poet and artist at heart. He published two poetry books and wrote numerous essays. Most of Wilson's writing focused on the social injustices of Scotland in his day. One of his poems and his lithograph of a "Fish Hawk" follow this article. Wilson earned extra money in Scotland as a smuggler and part-time liquor distiller during the tough economic times Scotland experienced following Great Britain's failed war with America. Alexander Wilson's advocacy for poor and working-class people put him at odds with the political and social elite, leading to his decision to emigrate to America in 1794.

Wilson settled near Philadelphia. He continued to work odd jobs. He was a peddler, handyman, journeyman, and shopkeeper – eventually finding some margin of success as a schoolteacher. All this time Wilson was developing a passion for the natural world and for birds in particular. While living in Philadelphia, Wilson was befriended by well-known naturalist William Bartram. Under Bartram's tutelage, Wilson honed his skills in observing, documenting, and illustrating birds. This lifelong friendship served to equip – and sometimes underwrite – Wilson's quest to catalog the birds of the United States.

Writers Burttt and Davis recount Wilson's great adventures, including a ten-month-long, 1,000-mile round-trip journey from Philadelphia to Niagara Falls and back. Most of Wilson's expeditions were on foot. Wilson traveled 12,000 miles on foot, on horseback, in a rowboat, and by stage and ship, establishing a network of observers along the way. He wrote hundreds of accounts of indigenous birds, discovered many new species, and sketched the behavior and ecology of each species he encountered. The risks and rigors of his adventures took a toll on Wilson's health, and he died at the young age of 47 before the last volume of his series could be published.

Alexander Wilson's life and work left an indelible mark on American ornithology. His collected works identified at least 46 species of birds previously unknown to science. Five species of birds are named after Wilson, including 3 that are familiar to Shelby County birders: Wilson's Warbler, Wilson's Snipe, and Wilson's Phalarope. *Alexander Wilson: The Scot Who Founded American Ornithology* offers an in-depth exploration of a man whose passion for birds transcended personal and professional challenges. Burttt and Davis provide readers with a richly illustrated narrative that not only celebrates Wilson's achievements but also contextualizes his work within the broader scope of American natural history. This biography serves as a fitting tribute to a pioneer whose legacy continues to inspire and inform the study of ornithology today.

## "The Fisherman's Hymn"

THE OSPREY sails above the sound,  
The geese are gone, the gulls are flying;  
The herring shoals swarm thick around,  
The nets are launched, the boats are plying;  
Yo ho, my hearts! let 's seek the deep,  
Raise high the song, and cheerily wish her,  
Still as the bending net we sweep,  
"God bless the fish-hawk and the fisher!"  
She brings us fish—she brings us spring,  
Good times, fair weather, warmth, and plenty,  
Fine stores of shad, trout, herring, ling,  
Sheepshead and drum, and old-wives dainty.  
Yo ho, my hearts! let 's seek the deep,  
Ply every oar, and cheerily wish her,  
Still as the bending net we sweep,  
"God bless the fish-hawk and the fisher!"  
She rears her young on yonder tree,  
She leaves her faithful mate to mind 'em;  
Like us, for fish, she sails to sea,  
And, plunging, shows us where to find 'em.  
Yo ho, my hearts! let 's seek the deep,  
Ply every oar, and cheerily wish her,  
While the slow bending net we sweep,  
"God bless the fish-hawk and the fisher!"  
© by owner. (provided at no charge for educational purposes)  
([allpoetry.com/The-Fishermans-Hymn](http://allpoetry.com/The-Fishermans-Hymn))



# WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY CLASS

Where: Lichterman Nature Center (indoors),  
5992 Quince Road, Memphis, TN

9:00-10:30am, Saturday, April 26, 2025

Cost: \$15 which gives access to the class,  
nature center, and grounds.

Join Curt Hart and Allen Sparks for a wildlife photography class focusing on birds, insects (macro), and other wildlife such as mammals and reptiles. The indoor class will be appropriate for beginning to intermediate photographers interested in learning more about techniques for these wildlife subjects. Topics covered include camera techniques, equipment, and image composition. DSLR and mirrorless cameras will be discussed. Optional shooting with Curt and Allen on the grounds of the nature center after class.



Contact Allen Sparks  
asparks306@bellsouth.net / 901-604-7654

Registration is not required.  
Optional shooting on the grounds of  
Lichterman Nature Center after class.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

## April / May 2025

**Saturday, April 5, 7:30 am**  
W.C. Johnson Park  
*Field Trip Leader:* Allen Sparks  
[asparks306@bellsouth.net](mailto:asparks306@bellsouth.net)



**New location!**

**Wednesday, April 9, 7:30 am**  
Meeman-Shelby Forest SP  
Meet at the Visitors Center at 7:30 am. Easy walking on paved surfaces.  
*Field Trip Leaders:* Van Harris/Dick Preston  
Dick: [dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)  
Van: [shelbyforester1223@gmail.com](mailto:shelbyforester1223@gmail.com)

**Wednesday, April 16, 7:00 pm**  
Chapter Meeting  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
2425 South Germantown Rd.  
Germantown, TN

**Saturday, April 19, 7:30 am**  
Wall Doxey State Park  
Entrance fee is \$4 per car on the honor system.  
*Field Trip Leader:* Hal Mitchell  
[halmitchell@gmail.com](mailto:halmitchell@gmail.com)

**Friday-Sunday, April 25-27**  
Hatchie Birdfest  
For more information, click <https://www.hatchiebirdfest.com/>

**Friday-Sunday, May 2-4**  
Spring TOS Meeting  
Chattanooga, TN  
For more information, click <https://tnbirds.org/event/tos-meeting-may-2-4/>

**Wednesday, May 7, 7:30 am**  
Overton Park  
*Field Trip Leader:* Dick Preston  
[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

**Saturday, May 10**  
Spring Count  
*Field Trip Leader:* Dick Preston  
[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

**Wednesday, May 21, 7:00 pm**  
Chapter Meeting  
St. George's Episcopal Church  
2425 South Germantown Rd.  
Germantown, TN

**Saturday, May 24, 7:30 am**  
Shelby Farms Park  
*Field Trip Leader:* Cliff VanNostrand  
[birdinginthe901@gmail.com](mailto:birdinginthe901@gmail.com)

**Wednesday, May 28, 7:30 am**  
Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park  
*Field Trip Leader:* Dick Preston  
[dickpreston48@gmail.com](mailto:dickpreston48@gmail.com)

<https://tnbirds.org/events>



# 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 [mτοςnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:mτοςnewsletter@gmail.com)

## A LA CARTE

- **Bird Song Hero (HT: Larry Chitwood)**  
<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/features/bird-song-hero/bird-song-hero-tutorial#%2Fbird-song-hero-tutorial>
- **'Shrubs for Shrikes' Strives to Save Indiana's Butcherbirds From Going Extinct**  
<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/shrubs-shrikes-strives-save-indianas-butcherbirds-going-extinct>
- **Birds That Dance Better Than Humans: The Funniest Mating Displays in Nature**  
<https://www.birdwatchingdaily.com/beginners/birding-faq/birds-that-dance-better-than-humans-the-funniest-mating-displays-in-nature/>
- **Audubon Calls on Bird Enthusiasts Across the State to Search for and Report Banded Roseate Spoonbills**  
<https://www.audubon.org/florida/press-room/audubon-calls-bird-enthusiasts-across-state-search-and-report-banded-roseate>
- **Creating and Using a Vermont eBird Bar Chart**  
<https://val.vtecostudies.org/explore/bird-bar-chart/>



### 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	\$10
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
- \*November 15 for the December Newsletter

Forward contributions to:  
Theresa Graham, Editor  
Email: [2graham@bellsouth.net](mailto:2graham@bellsouth.net)

### Chapter Meeting

**April 16, 2025. 7:00pm**

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

### Program

**Steve and Cyndi Routledge, NTOS**  
*Birding in Costa Rica*

### Hospitality

Refreshments will be provided by Barbara Armstrong, Pam Key, and Jo Lawson.

### Upcoming Field Trip Information

**April 5:** W.C Johnson Park

**April 9:** Meeman-Shelby Forest State Park

**April 19:** Wall Doxey State Park

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

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

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

### New Student Member

Mila Kedzierski  
[milashkanevalyashka@gmail.com](mailto:milashkanevalyashka@gmail.com)

### Treasurer's Report

As of March 21, 2025 the balance in the Treasury is \$15,726.56. Meal receipts of \$350 for the March 19 Pot Luck essentially covered expenses of \$353.67. The chapter provided paper goods, drinks, and pulled pork barbeque. Members brought side items and desserts. The 2025 event was a great success.

PHOTOS BY  
DEBRA KIENZLE

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Prothonotary Warbler



Palm Warbler



Yellow Warbler



Carolina Wren  
W. C Johnson Park—Peterson Lake Nature Center



Eastern Meadowlark  
Shelby Farms Park—Gardner Rd. Marsh



Cooper's Hawk  
Shelby Farms Park—Community Gardens



Barred Owl  
Arlington Wetlands—Galloway Levee Rd.

# from the camera of:



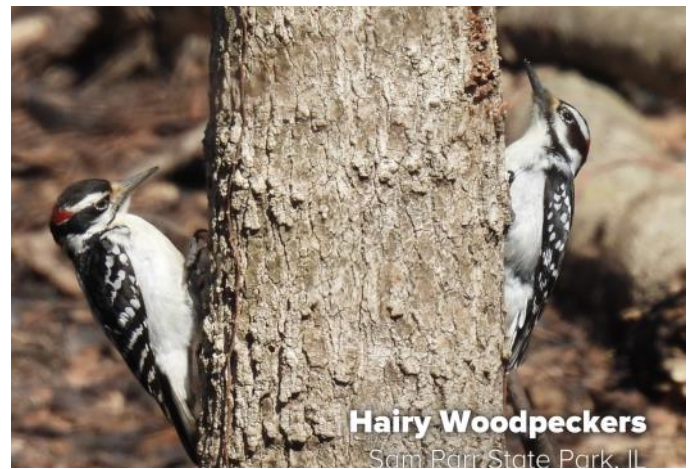
**Brown Thrasher**  
Mayfield, KY



**Common Loon**  
Lake Newton, IL



**White Breasted Nuthatch**  
Lake Newton, IL



**Hairy Woodpeckers**  
Sam Parr State Park, IL



**American Pipits**  
Jasper County, IL



**Wood Ducks**  
Ballard Nature Center, Effingham, IL

