

Tennessee Ornithological Society Memphis Chapter

<http://birdmemphis.org>

February 2026

January Program

January's program, "How Birds Sing: Evolution of the Avian Voicebox" was brought to us by Evan Kingsley, assistant professor at Rhodes College, who went into detail about the unique anatomy of birds compared to other animals, and how that influences their complex vocalizations.



Evan explained to us that, unlike most vertebrates, birds have a unique vocal organ called a syrinx at the base of their trachea, right before their lungs. The position of this vocal organ allows for them to use both sides independently, as though they have two separate sets of vocal cords!

This unique adaptation isn't fully understood, but it is something that biologists are seeking to further understand. One of the hypotheses is that, long ago, an ancestor of modern birds possibly lost the use of their larynx, and that useless larynx evolved into something different to better suit their needs. The syrinx also was discovered to use different cells to build itself compared to the cells used to construct the larynx itself, though the cellular composition is similar across most vertebrates. A fascinating adaptation, for sure!

SUBMISSIONS WELCOME

Looking for submissions of any of the following:

- Birding Events
- Stories about birds, birders, or birding
- Birding tips
- Articles or other interesting things in the bird world
- Photos, poetry, art, quotes

Send your submissions to:
mtosnewsletter@gmail.com

The Great Backyard Bird Count is coming up this February 13th-16th!

[Click here to find out how to participate!](#)

2025

Christmas Bird Count



The 97th Memphis Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is in the books! December 14, 2025 dawned clear and COLD at 18°, the coldest since 2000 when it was the coldest ever at 12°! Sunshine all day was appreciated. Occasional light wind gusts were felt by all 30 hardy counters. We counted 103 bird species again this year. This is a somewhat typical count for the past decade, with the recent exceptions of 2022 with 111 species, and 2023 with 112 species.

There were fewer numbers of almost all species, and in some instances, many fewer. The Rusty Blackbird and the Orange-crowned Warbler, our two high counts, were the exceptions with the RUBL topping out at 2161 individuals. The other "black birds" continue to be low in numbers, an historical trend. Red-winged Blackbirds - 2285 (high of 1,200,000 in 1994!), Brown-headed Cowbirds - 536 (high of 350,000 in 1957), and Common Grackle - 2456 (high of 900,000 in 1960).

The OCWA are coming in strong with 8 individuals counted.

The geese and duck numbers were low. Snow Geese numbers topped the list at 850, about 10% of their past high of 8243 in 2007. Outside of our count day, December was warmer than usual, likely impacting these birds.

We had 32 American White Pelicans, seen on only 8 counts over the years. We added the Gambel's sparrow, a subspecies of White-crowned Sparrow, to the list. A Merlin and an Eastern Screech Owl were counted this year - both counted only 9 times in the past. The Blue-headed Vireo showed up for the count. The Cedar Waxwings were barely here at 21 individuals; we've all noticed their scarcity this season.

There were no Wild Turkeys counted, and the trend continues of no Northern Bobwhites or Logger-head Shrikes.

Overall we had a good number of species represented, but fewer individual birds on this frigid winter count day. I think this proves what we've known all along - our feathered friends are not bird brains!

Many many thanks to all the organizers, group leaders, and counters who make the Christmas Bird Count happen!

Happy birding!

Anita Vincent, Compiler

The MTOS March Potluck is Coming Up!

Happy February, members of MTOS!

The annual MTOS Potluck is coming up in **March**, and we're looking to get a rough head count put together for it. A sign up sheet went around at our January meeting, and will likely be passed around again at our February meeting — if you did not sign up in-person, please send a RSVP to Dick Preston - dickpreston48@gmail.com

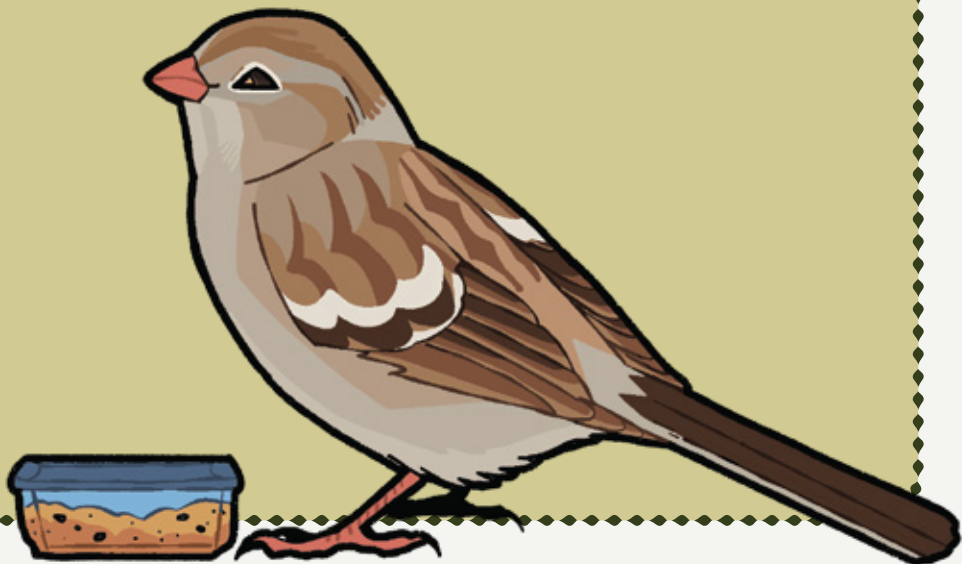
The chapter will provide BBQ, beans, buns, and various non-alcoholic beverages. Those attended are requested to bring in a side dish of their choosing (6-8 portions suggested.) Examples include: salads, desserts, platters, etc.

Cost is **\$5** per adult, with no charge for children under 18.
Alcoholic beverages are permitted.

Reservations are required so that we may ensure we provide enough BBQ, buns, etc. for those that are attending. Volunteers are needed to help with set up (tables, chairs, table decorations.) Set up crew must arrive by 5 PM. Please bring food starting at 5:30, and we hope to start serving at 6 PM.

Please direct any questions to Dick Preston.

March 18, 2026, 5:30 - 9:00 pm
St. George's Episcopal Church,
2425 South Germantown Rd. Germantown, TN



Feature Hotspot

February 2026



Hinton Park is located at 10524 East Holmes Rd in Collierville, TN. The park is just over 10 years old but offers some great amenities for people as well as some great habitat for wildlife. With 110 acres, the park includes grassy fields, a five-acre lake, a large playground, an 18-hole disc golf course, a mix of paved and unpaved walking trails and clean heated restrooms. There are a decent mix of trees throughout the park as well as meadowscapes with a nice mix of native grasses and forbs. As an eBird hotspot Hinton Park has a bird list of 90 species all time with only 8 species observed in the month of February.



Please visit and submit a checklist during the month of February if you are able.

February and March Field Trips

Reelfoot Lake

February 7th at 8 AM

led by Mark Greene

Meet at Gipson Electric in Tiptonville
1515 Lake Dr, Tiptonville, TN 38079



Ghost River Area - Saturday February 14th

led by Larry Chitwood

Meet at the LaGrange Post Office at 12:30pm to visit the Mineral Slough and surrounding areas in search of bob whites, waterfowl, sparrows, and more.

Meet at the Pole Barn on Beasley Dr at 3:30pm to look for more birds including owls and woodcocks at sunset.

Shelby Farms (Amphitheater Loop)

February 21st 7:30 AM

led by Adrian Hall

Meet at the Amphitheater Parking Area



Christine's Woods (Great Blue Heron Rookery)

Thursday March 12, 2026

Shelby Farms (Amphitheater Loop)

Saturday March 14, 2026

Nonconnah Greenbelt Park

Saturday March 28, 2026

Field Trip Notes

from Ryan Pudwell

Can you believe we are already to February? January gave us a warm start but settled back into more typical weather. In addition to the usual suspects, we had a few rare birds that graced us with their presence. The Say's Phoebe has been seen by many at the Shelby Farms Gardens and right next door at the Marsh an American Bittern has been sulking in the reeds occasionally stepping out to let people catch a glimpse. We even had a couple Harris's Sparrow sightings. Below is a synopsis of this month's field trips and those in March.

On February 7th Mark Greene will be leading a Field Trip for us at Reelfoot Lake. We will meet at Gipson Electric's Tiptonville office (1515 Lake Dr, Tiptonville, TN 38079) at 8am. This field trip will include visits to multiple locations in the area around Reelfoot Lake.

On February 14th Larry Chitwood will be heading up an outing to the Ghost River area in Fayette County. This field trip will have two meeting times the first at 12:30pm meeting at the Post Office in LaGrange and go from there to bird the Ghost River SNA Mineral Slough Boardwalk and surrounding spots. The second at 3:30pm at the Pole Barn area on Beasley Dr. in the Wolf River WMA to bird for sparrows, raptors, bobwhite quail, owls, and woodcocks at sunset.

On February 21st Adrian Hall will be leading a walk at the Amphitheater Loop at Shelby Farms Park. This outing will start at 7:30am from the parking lot near the old amphitheater.

On Thursday March 12th at 8am I will be leading a visit to Christine's Woods, a small slough in the Balmoral area that is home to a great blue heron rookery. Long pants and boots are strongly recommended for this outing as the site has had minimal work done with regards to establishing trails.

On March 14th Sophie Dismukes will be leading a walk at the Amphitheater Loop at Shelby Farms Park. This outing will start at 7:30am from the parking lot near the old amphitheater.

On Saturday March 28th I will be leading a field trip at the Nonconnah Greenbelt Park located on Forest Hill Irene just north of Highway 385. The meeting time for this field trip will be 7:30am if that's too early you can come along for the Nonconnah Creek Conservancy field trip at 10am.

Christmas in Dry Tortugas National Park

.....Well, Almost.



By Chad Brown

Actually we were there on the December 18th, for about four hours. I have been to Fort Jefferson on Garden Key in the Dry Tortugas twice before. Both times my mode of arrival was on small sailboats. The first time in the 1990s on a 22 foot Venture sloop sailed from Everglade City to Key West, Key West to the Marquesas Islands and on to Garden Key the next day. Second time was on my 26 foot MacGreager sloop directly from Everglade City in one wonderful day long voyage. Anchored short of the reef at night.

This time, however, we flew from Key West in a 10 person 1954 single engine De Havilland Otter seaplane. The 35 minute flight much quicker than the two day sail in the 1990s. The flight was an extension of a Florida west coast cruise from St. Petersburg to Key West. The cruise was arranged by my wife and her sister and I readily agreed for nostalgia reasons, plus there was something there I wanted to see, again. But I'm getting a little ahead of my story as there were other stops along the way of interest, bird-wise.

The first stop was at Marco Island where I took a boat tour in the 10,000

Islands, a group of mangrove islands that stretch along the southwestern coast of Florida. Some thirty of us from our American Cruise line ship spent two hours sampling the waterways among the mangroves observing the flora and fauna of the region.



<< White
Ibis

Great
Egret >>

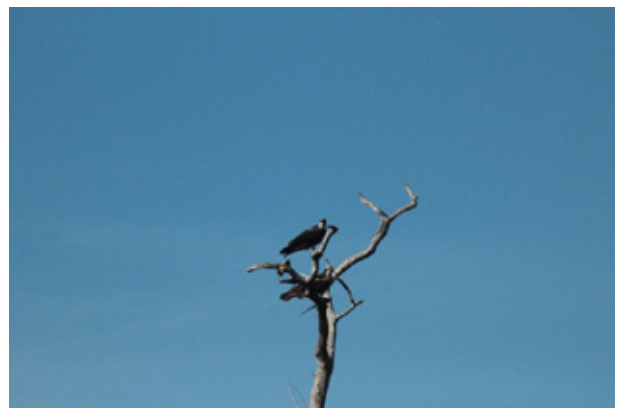


<<Brown
Pelican

Occupied
Osprey
Nest >>



Not far
away was
another
nest with 2
Osprey
keeping
watch.

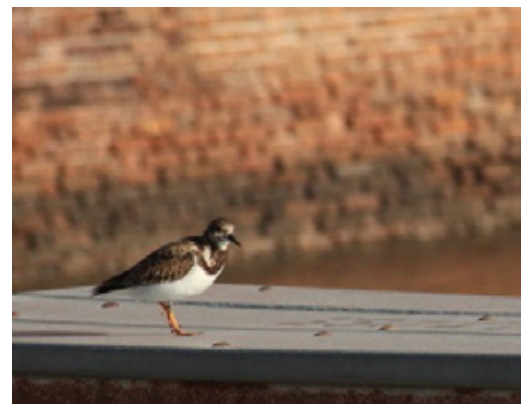


Our next stop the next morning, in the dark, was Key West and our flight to the Tortugas left early. The logistics of getting everyone (20 of us) to the Airport, briefed on safety, pay the fee to the park (\$15) almost took longer than the 30-40 minute flight.

The major attraction at Dry Tortugas is Fort Jefferson on Garden Key. Built beginning in 1846 was never totally completed although it was occupied during the Civil War and housed Federal Troops along with some prisoners including Dr. Samuel Mudd who was convicted of complicity in the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. He came in very handy when a epidemic of yellow fever hit the island. The island has no fresh water so the plan was to collect rain water and hold it in cisterns in the foundation of the fort. The weight of the walls cause cracks in the cistern allowing saltwater to intrude. So much for that idea. The reason for the fort was to protect the Florida Straits from ships coming from the Gulf wanting to create problems for Florida and the east coast. The fort saw no action and was abandoned in 1874.

My reason for returning to Garden Key had to do with bird life. Both of my previous trips occurred in late spring at the peak of the nesting season the Sooty Tern which nests on Bush Key adjacent to the fort by about 100 yards.

Now, when I say there were a lot of terns there, I'm talking in the thousands. Flying back and forth, calling 24 hours a day. However, December is not nesting season and there were no terns there. What I was counting on was the presence of Frigatebirds, and I was not disappointed. A few other birds were there in small numbers.



Immediately after deplaning, we walked out on the beach and saw this

small flock of Yellow-crowned Night-Herons and one lone Belted Kingfisher which avoided my camera. At the picnic tables at the fort entrance were a few Ruddy Turnstones scavenging for leftovers.

It wasn't till I got up on top of the fort that I could get some pictures of the Frigatebirds soaring on the updrafts where

the wind hits the fort wall and goes straight up.

There were at least twenty of them riding the air currents by the fort another forty or more in the air and on the ground by Bush Key.



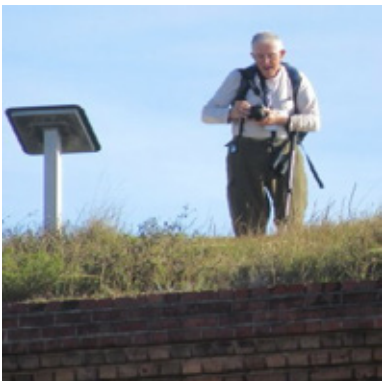


Thirty-one in the air and unknown number on the ground at Bush Key.

On the return to the ship at Mallory Dock in Key West, I was treated to a fly-by of a flock of Black Skimmers. A super ending to a fun filled day.

Black Skimmers >

Chad on the Fort.



Photos by Chad and
Jean Brown.



BLACK SKIMMERS

from Allen Sparks

My favorite bird sighting of 2025 occurred on January 31 on Sanibel Island, FL. I went to an inland section of Ding Darling NWR called the Bailey Tract which has several freshwater ponds. I was hoping to photograph wading birds feeding at the ponds. To my surprise, a black skimmer appeared and began skimming on the largest pond. This is the first and only time I have witnessed that behavior. I was surprised by the speed of the bird skimming. He/she really motored which made photography a real challenge! One of the locals told me that was the first time she had seen a skimmer working one of the freshwater ponds there. She supposed the bird may be there because of red tide in the gulf then. In any event, it was a fortunate and memorable experience as my wife and I were flying out the next day back to Memphis. I've included some photos I took that morning.



Got a Winter Hummingbird?



HAVE YOU HAD A HUMMINGBIRD AT YOUR FEEDER
BETWEEN **NOVEMBER 1ST AND MARCH 15TH?**

OR

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT LEAVING OUT A
HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER ALL YEAR LONG?

HELP **SOUTHEASTERN AVIAN RESEARCH** CONTINUE OUR
ONGOING '**WINTER HUMMINGBIRD**' PROJECT!



Scan the QR code to find out more about winter hummingbirds and how you might become one of the lucky few who host one of these rare visitors.



Photos by:

Allen Sparks



Dark-eyed Junco



Northern Cardinal



Northern Cardinal



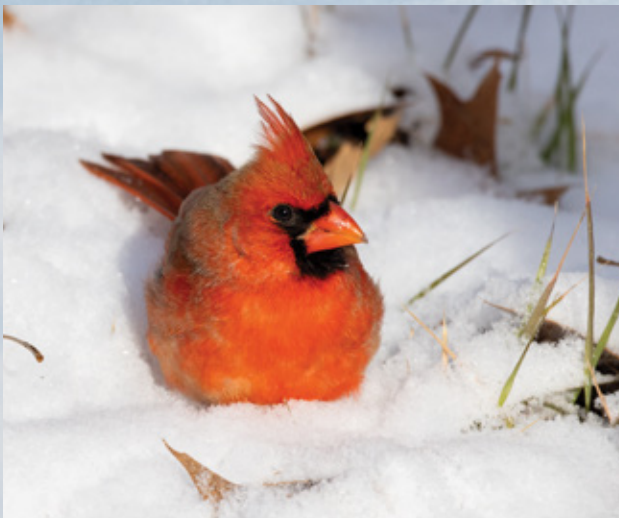
Pine Warbler



Dark-eyed Junco



Northern Cardinal



Northern Cardinal



Pine Warbler



White-throated Sparrow



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Photos by:

Michael Threlkeld



Blue Jay



Blue Jay



Carolina Wren



Common Grackles



Dark-eyed Junco



Dark-eyed Junco



Dark-eyed Junco



Downy Woodpecker



Green-winged Teal



Hermit Thrush



White-crowned Sparrow



Willow Ptarmigan

Photos by:

Riley Metcalfe

Photos by:

Sophie Dismukes



Dark-eyed Junco



Field Sparrow



Horned Lark



Lapland Longspur



Rusty Blackbird



White-throated Sparrow



Carolina Chickadee



Dark-eyed Junco



Eastern Bluebird



Orange-crowned Warbler



Pine Warbler



Red-bellied Woodpecker

Photos by:

Tricia Vesely

Photos by:

Van Harris



Bohemian Waxwings



Dunlin



Hazel Grouse



Redpolls



Snow Bunting



Willow Ptarmigan



American Pipit



Horned Lark

Photos by:

Connor Robinson

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	\$15
Other Student	\$10
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 Caroline Schratz caroline.schratz@gmail.com. If you have no internet access, a printed version can be mailed.

Chapter Newsletter Submissions

Email submissions to Sophie Dismukes 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

*March 15 for the April Newsletter
*July 15 for the August Newsletter
*November 15 for the December Newsletter

Forward contributions to:
Theresa Graham, Editor
E-mail: 2graham@bellsouth.net

Chapter Meeting

February 18, 2026, 7:00pm

St. George's Episcopal Church
2435 South Germantown Rd. Germantown, TN
Phone: (901)-754-7282

Program

Than Boves, Professor of Ecology, Director of Graduate Program in
Biology, Arkansas State University
*From None to Abundant: The Story of Black-throated Green Warblers in
the Ozarks of Arkansas*

Hospitality

Refreshments will be provided by Dick Preston and
Sarita Joshi.

Thank you to all who contributed to this month's newsletter!
For our next issue, we would like to feature some photos of:



Backyard Birds



Please send your submissions to mtosnewsletter@gmail.com

New Members

Jeffrey John
jeffreyjohn84@gmail.com

Nancy Kennedy
nankennchf@gmail.com

George Witham
georgewitham6@gmail.com

Treasurer's Report

As of January 22, 2026 the balance in the Treasury is \$14,370.69.
No new business was conducted at the January chapter meeting.