The Chattanooga Chat



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Austin Young, Editor
chattbirders@gmail.com

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Front Cover Photo: Ruby-crowned Kinglet at Standifer Gap Road on October 29, 2026 by Wolf Jedamski.

Back Cover Photo: Belted Kingfisher at Chester Frost Park on October 19, 2026 by Rhonda Dodds.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

With an important election just around the corner, I hope everyone will vote their conscience, especially as it pertains to the sustainable well-being of our avian world. We can do so much at the ballot box to help shape the future of this beautiful world.

In other news, construction of Birdland is now beginning. We've begun by removing more brush and small trees to give room for the installation of the water feature, which will begin in a few days. We'll next pour the slab on which the blind will go, and once the concrete is cured we'll soon see the framework for the blind going up. I think our timing is good. Construction will be finished, we hope, in time to let the site "naturalize" itself for our springtime birds. Once everything is finished, we'll have a "grand" opening before we open it up to the public. I'm proud of CTOS and its members for helping to make this dream a reality.



Gray Catbird by OJ Morgan

We continue to search for a new meeting place and would greatly appreciate your help. We are grateful to Ascension Lutheran Church for allowing us to use their space for these many years, but conflicts with new programs are pushing us to find a new place. We want a spot that's safe with decent parking and a more centralized setting. We're looking, but we could definitely use your help. Just contact me if you have a suggestion via my email: ojmorgan@gmail.com.

The leaves are changing, at last! I hope everyone has a beautiful fall.

OJ Morgan

NOVEMBER PROGRAM & DECEMBER PREVIEW

Event Title: "Pelagic Bird Surveys in the Gulf of Mexico"
Speaker: Jon Andrew
Date: Thursday, November 12, 2026
Time: 7 PM to 8:30 PM Eastern
Location: Lutheran Ascension Church, 720 S Germantown Road, Chattanooga, TN 37412

More about the Meeting: Title: Jon is an excellent storyteller and photographer and previous speaker. This time around he will share with us his experiences completing seabird survey while when he worked for NOAA (the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). He will share more about NOAA, the vessel he was aboard, and the work NOAA does with marine mammals and oceanography. Jon's program will be "mostly about the birds", accompanied by a selection of the many photos he took while at sea.



An immature red-footed booby flying around the vessel in the Gulf of America. Credit: NOAA Fisheries/Jonny Reid

December 10, 2026 Program Preview:

Zach Atkison is a talking about Tree Swallow nesting patterns at several sites in Hamilton County, the trade-offs between artificial nest boxes and natural nest sites, the effects of weather and nest box microclimate on nestling development, and the importance of studying these impacts on Tree Swallows in the age of increasing urbanization and climate change.

Summary: Artificial nest boxes in urban environments can provide valuable nesting sites for cavity-nesting birds such as Tree Swallows, as well as greater opportunities for research. However, Tree Swallows also face trade-offs between artificial environments and natural habitats. The effects of nest box conditions on Tree Swallow breeding success are understudied, particularly in southern latitudes. Understanding these microclimate impacts on nestling health and breeding success is critical for anticipating avian response to increasing urbanization as well as broader global climate change.

FIELD TRIPS

After a full schedule of field trips in September and October, there are no November field trips scheduled at this time. But the sparrows are just getting started for the season so watch your emails for any field trip announcements. However, birders stay busy in November so stay tuned to local birding activity via BirdingApp. Perhaps you could join Tim Lenz on a Booker T. Washington Park evening outing!

As many of you know, our own David Stone, and often Clyde Blum, lead birding trips to the Honors Course on Ooltewah. Last month, they led two trips and in case you would like to see how fun it is to go birding there with this crew, take a look at the photos below shared by Sharon Klein. We offer these trips at various times throughout the year so be on the lookout for an Honors Course birding trip in the future.





BIRDING NEWS

On October 10, eBird hosted their annual October Big Day, an event where Team eBird unites as many birders as possible around the globe to all go birding that day and submit their findings as eBird checklists. They had nearly 1.1 million birders that used eBird and Merlin to document the whereabouts of nearly 8,000 bird species in just that one day. That is how many species reported through eBird on October 10. It was neat to see a lot of CTOS members get out and contribute! Hamilton county saw 24 birders document 85 species on October 10. Any 80+ species bird day in our neck of the woods is a good day in my book. I recommend perusing the Big Day webpage here to see what birding around the world is like on October 10. Where will you be next October Big Day?



Big news in the bird field guide world lately has been the pre-order availability of a new North American field guide published by Princeton University Press. I have their European field guide and it is excellent. Mark my words, this guide will change the game and bring birders back to wanting a hard copy in their hands in the field. The illustrations are unparallelled and distribution maps quite good, not to mention this guide will include all the recent splits and lumps, e.g., the new Willet and Marsh Wren species splits!! **We can pre-order the book now, which I have done, with 35% off from Princeton's webpage using this link.**

In bird photography news, the National Audubon Society published their annual photography awards. The fall issue of Audubon Magazine showcased the winners of the 2026 Audubon Photography Awards, using wildlife photography to raise awareness of conservation issues around the world. You can view the photos starting here. Many of the photos are remarkable and provide opportunities to view the birds we love in a more artistic way then we can get by viewing birds in the field. **I highly recommend getting some friends together and having a photography awards viewing party!** At least that is what I am going to do with my family. Impossible to pick a favorite but here is one I enjoyed to show you the caliber of photos in these awards (and there are over a hundred more of all different styles), if you are not familiar.

69. Hawaiian Goose by Liron Gertsman



Contest: United States and Canada

Image Location: Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, Hawai'i, United States

Camera: Canon EOS R5 with a Canon RF 100-500mm f/4.5-7.1 IS USM lens; 1/40 sec at f/22; ISO 8000

Behind the Shot: I've always been drawn to photographing birds in extraordinary environments. So when I learned that Hawaiian Geese, or "Nēnē," occasionally roost close to the active volcano, I traveled to Halema'uma'u Crater on Hawaii's Kīlauea Volcano to document them. I scouted and waited for the volcano to erupt for 10 days before it finally came alive. As darkness arrived, a few geese flew in and landed on the crater rim as a massive lava fountain glowed behind them. I captured this moment using an aperture of f/22 to maintain detail in both the birds and the dramatic backdrop, paired with a relatively slow shutter speed of 1/40 to handle the low-light conditions. The photograph tells a uniquely Hawaiian story: the threatened state bird outlined against the fiery eruption of Kīlauea, the volcano where they have lived for millennia.

On to the research desk. A very interesting article published in early October compared a few different studies that explored bird collision rates before and after painting wind turbine blades. While several studies found hugely decreased bird collision rates after painting at least one blade, we are talking 70-85% reduced collision frisk, one robust study found no difference in bird collision rates before and after painting a blade. I recommend reading the short article here and skimming the cited research papers. **Note: the Netherlands research paper has an English summary on page 8.** I find it interesting the conflicting results between studies. It appears that some researchers may not have considered painting one of the blades in a way that sufficiently contrasted with the surrounding environment. In other words, it might not work to paint a blade black in an environment where a rapidly moving black object may not be enough to contrast with the surrounding environment.



Photo from a Netherlands study comparing bird collision rates before and after painting one of the wind turbine blades black, as you can see on the wind turbine directly above the person walking.



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