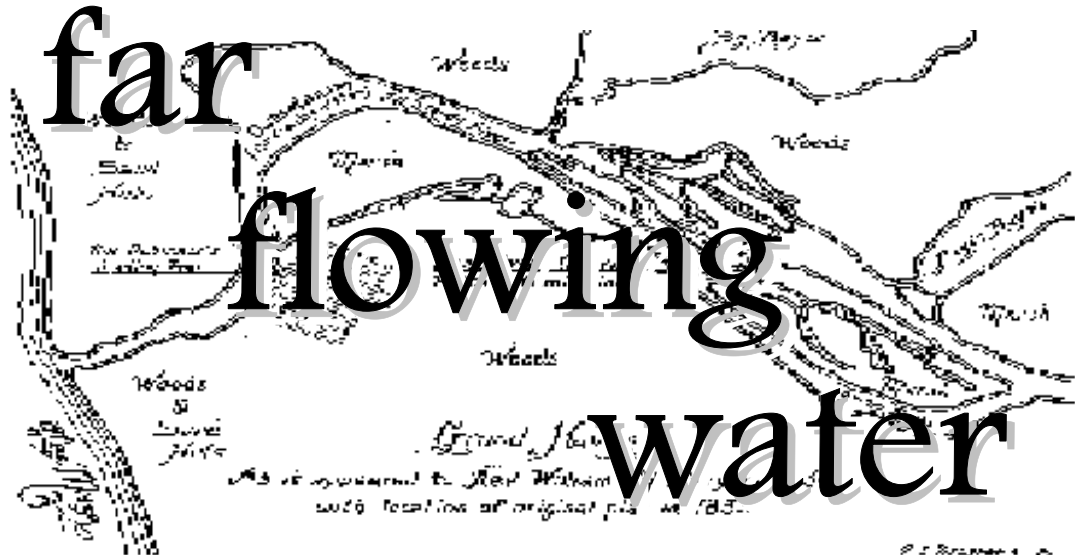


Grand Haven, Michigan



April 21

6:15 P.M.

A FLEDGLING'S GUIDE TO BIRDING: TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

Presented by **Cindy Dobrez**, OIAS Vice President

Are you interested in learning how to become a birder in addition to being a bird watcher? Don't know the difference? As a fledgling birder herself, Cindy has tips, resources, photographs, and funny stories to share. Some people have "spark birds" that draw them into birding, others, like Cindy, have a spark event. Others began to notice nature during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whatever your reason for being intrigued about the hobby of birding, you, too, can soon be on your way from identifying a Tufted Titmouse in your backyard to photographing a Keel-billed Toucan at a gas station in Costa Rica! The obsession is real, and you'll leave the program with a list of resources to help you on your way. Ottawa County is one of the best places in Michigan and in the U.S. for rewarding birding. Don't miss out.



Cindy is a retired school librarian and currently the Vice President of the Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society, starting her 7th year of birding. Her life list stands at 635 and includes birds in all but 14 counties in Michigan, 32 U.S. states, and the countries of Panama, Costa Rica, and Croatia. List? Did you say List? Music to a birder's ear. Wait until you learn how many types of lists you can make as a birder!

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President's Corner – April 2026

Confusions of a Young Birder

By Malcom Oosting-Sineath, OIAS Member

There are a variety of ways to name the age and plumage of birds. You've likely heard jargon such as "first winter," "nonbreeding," and "breeding" plumage. I'm fourteen years old, and with a less experienced eye, I've been noticing that there are a lot of inconsistencies with this "life-year" system: adult male Scarlet Tanagers have a bright red plumage aspect in what we think of as "breeding plumage"; however, adult female Scarlet Tanagers, who are also breeding, and replacing feathers in a very similar way to males, just aren't brightly colored, so are they not in "breeding" plumage?

This is just the beginning. Mallards are in their bright supposed "breeding" plumage through the fall and winter, when in fact, some of their breeding takes place in the spring and summer when they have a dull "nonbreeding" plumage aspect. We're not done yet. Some birds, such as flycatchers, replace many of their feathers in the spring (just like male Scarlet Tanagers do) but stay the same color, keeping the same plumage aspect, which means that the fall plumage looks identical to the spring plumage. The bird replaces its feathers and is breeding, but the supposed breeding plumage looks identical to the nonbreeding plumage. Once again, a recipe for confusion. Finally, in European Starlings, the supposed breeding plumage consists of the same feathers as the nonbreeding plumage; there is just more wear. This doesn't help either!

At first, I thought I was confused simply because I'm relatively new to birding. Not so. The life-year system is actually confusing because it is inconsistent. There must be a better way. Over the next year, I'm going to dive more deeply into the alternatives to the life-year system, including calendar-year, Humphrey-Parkes, modified Humphrey-Parkes, and Wolfe-Ryder-Pyle. I'm hoping that birders will adopt a system that is more consistent. I'm hoping to publish short pieces about this journey in the newsletter throughout the next OIAS season.

Board of Directors Election

Carl Manning

Three board members are up for election as reported at the last meeting. All three have indicated a desire to continue serving in their current positions, thus we would have all nine positions allowed by the by-laws filled.

- ↪ Cindy Dobrez – Vice President
- ↪ Beth Miller – Secretary
- ↪ Susan Schmidt – General Member

Voting will be online. Anyone desiring to run for a board position should submit their nomination at the April meeting or submit by email to oias@oias.org by the end of the member meeting on April 21, 2026. Members in good standing will receive a link to cast your vote about April 28. Members who do not have an email address on file are encouraged to send their vote by USPS to the OIAS PO box 1654, Holland, MI to arrive by the end of April.



NEW!
Shores of Lake Erie Spring Birding Trip
 May 22 - 24, 2026
 3 days | 2 nights

Camping **Guided Birding** **Community**

Experience world-class birding hotspots, group camping at East Harbor State Park, all led by ODC's expert guides!
 Register for this exciting new adventure today!

Only \$405 Per Person

Shores of Lake Erie Spring Birding Trip
 May 22 - 24, 2026
 3 days | 2 nights

Situated on the southwestern coast of Lake Erie are many wetlands, forests, prairies, ponds. Each of these are a stopover point for migrating birds, with thousands of waterfowl, waterbirds, shorebirds, and songbirds every spring and fall—spring migration has had more than 300 species of birds recorded in the area! Many hotspots have accessible boardwalks throughout the ecosystems, offering some of the best birdwatching opportunities in the Midwest.

Day 1
Travel to Northwest Ohio
 We'll spend the first half of our day traveling with a 3.5 hour drive to northwest Ohio. We plan to arrive around noon and will have a sack lunch before heading out to bird in that region for the afternoon.
 We will travel to East Harbor State Park campground for dinner and set up camp.

Day 2
Exploring Hotspots
 Our second day will include birding at a variety of local hotspots based on recent birding data.

Day 3
Birding and Return to Holland
 After some final hotspot stops, we will have a group lunch to close out our trip and head back to Holland, MI.
 We will arrive back at the Outdoor Discovery Center in early evening.

Hotspots
 Places we may go birding:
 Magee Marsh Wildlife Area
 Center Point National Wildlife Refuge
 Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge
 Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area
 Howard Marsh Metropark
 Mallard Club Marsh Wildlife Area
 Stange Prairie
 Maumee Bay State Park
 Pearson Metropark
 Crane Creek State Park

When Did You Start Birding?

Judi Manning

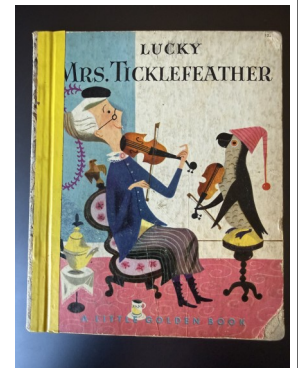
This is a question many birders ask one another. Here is my story.

My Mom said I read *Lucky Mrs. Ticklefeather* by Dorothy Kunhardt so many times when I was very young that the cover came off.

Synopsis:

[First time I have read it since I was a little tyke]

Mrs. Ticklefeather is an older woman who wanted a sunflower for a vase. She told her companion, Paul the puffin, about her wish so one night off he went in search of a sunflower. He was not home the next morning, so a policeman went looking in many places for Paul. After he located Paul, Paul flew home with a sunflower in his mouth, and the policeman also went back to Mrs. Ticklefeather's apartment. Mrs. Ticklefeather was very happy with the sunflower and Paul.



I received my first bird field guide when I was ten and a half. I wrote at the top of some of the photos of common yard bird photos that I had previously seen as 1/1/__. The first bird I recall identifying is the Eastern Towhee which is later than my early notations. Amazingly I remember how that happened.

Thank you

MALCOLM FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS ISSUE OF *far flowing water*

OIAS welcomes the new member.

There is no May meeting.

2026 MCNC/OIAS Field Trips

Beth Miller

All field trips are from 8:00 AM to 12:00 noon

Apr. 18, '26 — Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve
 May 16, '26 — MUSKEGON Big Day Count
 June 20, '26 — Black Lake Park
 July 18, '26 — Lost Lake Trail & Muskegon State Park
 Aug. 15, '26 — Muskegon County Resource Recovery Center (WW)

Judi Manning



The theme this year is “Every Bird Counts – Your Observation Matters”. The goal is to collect data on migratory bird populations and their habitats and factors that impact their populations and contribute to our knowledge about how to protect them. . . . This data is important to identify conservation priorities, and inform effective conservation action plans and strategies. . . .

Excerpt: <https://www.migratorybirdday.org/conservation-theme/>

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

- Get an eBird account
- Just 10 minutes at your home counts. This day runs from midnight to midnight.
- Enter what you see and hear in eBird.
- During the day, follow bird observations from more than 200 countries in real-time on eBird's [Global Big Day page](#).

PREPARE A TRIP REPORT

- Simply [create an eBird Trip Report](#) for 9 May 2026. As you submit lists and upload media throughout the big day, they'll be added to your report automatically. ([Learn more about eBird Trip Reports](#))

Excerpt: <https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-2026>

For Curious Minds - Interesting Links to Follow

Long-billed vs. Short-billed Dowitcher https://www.aba.org/birding_archive_files/v38n5p34.pdf

Follow this link for some interesting bird facts and amazing photos about our avian friends:

<https://chirpforbirds.com/avian-inspiration/12-bird-statistics-thatll-get-you-squawking/>

Dark-eyed Junco Subspecies

<https://www.flockingaround.com/post/identification-of-dark-eyed-junco-subspecies>

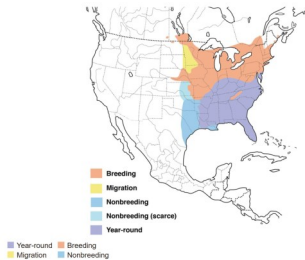
<https://www.audubon.org/magazine/dark-eyed-juncos-backyard-gems-come-dazzling-array-colors>

Eastern Towhee

Pipilo erythrophthalmus

Judi Manning

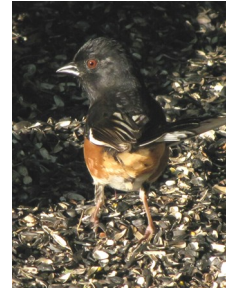
An easy bird to identify, this New World Sparrow spends most of its time in the dense shrub cover rustling the leaf litter on a forest edge. They do look for food around feeders during migration where there are brushy, shrubby borders. They use both feet in a backwards hop. Often their song “towhee” or “drink-your-teaeeee” is heard but the bird cannot be found. Both male and females call.



Female



Male



In flight, the white outer tail feathers are easy to see.

The Eastern Towhee’s scientific name means “red-eyed Chipper”. The subspecies in southern Georgia and Florida have a pale yellow eye instead of the red as those in the East.

The Spotted Towhee is found in western North America. Both forms were considered one species: Rufous-sided Towhee. They were split in 1995 and have similar names. They do hybridize where the ranges meet in the Great Plains.



They have a varied diet ranging from many different types of seeds, fruits, and insects.

Brown-headed Cowbirds lay eggs in more than half of all towhee nests which are on the ground up to four feet high.

The 2025 State of the Birds report lists Eastern Towhee as an Orange Alert Tipping Point species, meaning it has lost more than 50% of its population in the past 50 years and has shown accelerated declines within the past 10 years. According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, this species declined by an estimated 1.6% per year between 1966 and 2023, resulting in a cumulative decline of 60% over that period. [Cornell Lab]

Towhees nest on the ground and are particularly vulnerable to predation by cats. Habitat loss from clearing for agriculture or development, forest harvesting, and impacted by invasive species. Collisions with glass windows and communication towers, and the continued growth of shrublands into forest made the landscape less suitable are also negatively affecting the towhee.

References: Cornell Lab of Ornithology, https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Eastern_Towhee/overview, American Bird Conservancy, <https://abcbirds.org/birds/eastern-towhee/>, <https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Birds/Eastern-Towhee>

Earth Day - April 22nd

Judi Manning

“The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, when San Francisco activist John McConnell and Wisconsin Senator Gaylord Nelson separately asked Americans to join in a grassroots demonstration. Dealing with dangerously serious issues concerning toxic drinking water, air pollution, and the effects of pesticides, an impressive 20 million Americans—10% of the population—ventured outdoors and protested together.”

In 2026, the theme is [“Planet vs. Plastics.”](#)

10 WAYS TO CELEBRATE EARTH DAY:

- Support Pollinators
- Clean Up Plastic in Your Neighborhood
- Go to a Park
- Plant a Tree
- Use Wildflowers and Native Plants
- Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle in the Garden
- Stop Using Chemicals in the Garden
- Conserve Water
- Think About Your Diet
- Get Kids Involved

Follow link for more details about each bullet point.

Excerpts from *Earth Day 2026: How to Celebrate Earth Day*, Catherine Boeckmann, <https://www.almanac.com/content/earth-day-date-activities-history>

Instead of Mulching

Judi Manning

Some people are concerned about finding the right type of mulch to prevent soil erosion and moisture evaporation and manage weeds. An alternative is to plant Plantain-leaf pussytoes (*Antennaria plantaginifolia*). This plant is native to the eastern U.S. Being a low-lying plant, it robs weeds of water, sunlight, and oxygen. It is a slow growing plant.

Pussytoes are a host plant for the American Painted Lady butterfly.

Follow the links below for more information on growing in your yard.

References: *Skip spreading mulch: This beautiful plant suppresses weeds and looks stunning*, by Kristeen Cherney, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/lifestyle/home-and-garden/skip-spreading-mulch-this-beautiful-plant-suppresses-weeds-and-looks-stunning/ar-AA1ZalaC?ocid=winp2fptaskbar&cvid=396d5a53baca4374f1eb4dd78681562d&ei=22>, Prairie Moon Nursery, <https://www.prairienursery.com/field-pussytoes-antennaria-neglecta.html>

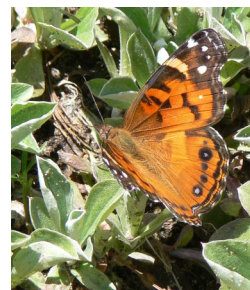
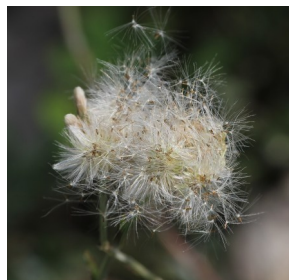
Plantain-leaf Pussytoes



Small leaves



Blossoms



American Painted Lady



Larger leaves

Spring Yard Cleanup

Judi Manning

If everything is cleaned up in the fall, dead vegetation is removed that native insects need for insulation over the winter. Birds also eat the seeds of browned flowers, use ornamental-grass blades and other plant parts for nest building. New shoots will emerge through last year's dead foliage.

For a long-lasting, self-maintaining garden, the ecosystem needs to be cultivated by encouraging beneficial insects and microbes to live there. Butterflies (fritillaries and swallowtails) make cocoons on the underside of leaves and dead branches. Bees and fireflies crawl into hollow spaces in bark, branches, and sticks to overwinter.

Concerned gardeners are now holding off doing "yard cleanup" until after the pollinators and "good bugs" have hatched. When is that? The longer the better so it does not disrupt insects —consistently above 50 degrees day and night in mid-to-late spring. An alternative is to let the vegetation stay on the ground unless it is too thick for plants to emerge. If possible, pile up the removed organic litter in an out-of-the-way location in low piles so the insects can crawl out. A high pile will trap the insects. Mulch will cover new insect nests and prevent hatchlings from escaping in spring. All kinds of wood mulch is knitted together by fungi growth.

Some insects overwinter or lay eggs in plant stems. It is best to cut the stems into six-inch lengths and leave them on the ground. Nothing uses ornamental grass overwinter so it can be cut back early.

Emerging insects in the spring is food for migrating and resident birds. Birds will hide from predators in branches on the ground. Some birds use yard debris for their nest.

Encourage birds to your garden/yard:

- 🌸 Do not use insecticides to avoid killing insects used by birds. Birds help control pests.
- 🌸 Plant native perennials that can survive without pesticides.
- 🌸 Invasive species such as black elder and burning bush will quickly take over, preventing native species from flourishing.
- 🌸 Plant a variety of native plants to provide various structures, heights, for use by wildlife.
- 🌸 Plant native small trees and shrubs.
- 🌸 Build birdhouses so birds will forage in your yard for food.
- 🌸 Add birdbaths or small ponds. A fountain in the pond will draw migrating birds for a quick stopover for a drink and bath.

References: *Spring-cleaning the yard doesn't mean you should kill all the bugs*, George Weigel, 3/20/26, <https://www.pennlive.com/gardening/2026/03/spring-cleaning-the-yard-doesnt-mean-you-should-kill-all-the-bugs.html>, *How Delaying Spring Garden Clean Up Helps Birds*, Matt Dursum, Horticulture, reviewed by Sarah Jay, 4/11/25, <https://www.epicgardening.com/delay-spring-clean-up/>



Species Given International Protection

Judi Manning

The U.N. Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) approved the listing of 40 new species for international protection. This convention had representatives from 132 countries and the European Union.

“Three of the 40 species are: snowy owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) are the Hudsonian godwit (*Limosa haemastica*) -- a long-beaked shorebird threatened with extinction -- and the great [hammerhead shark](#) (*Sphyrna mokarran*). . . . The countries are legally obligated to protect the species, conserve and restore their habitats, prevent obstacles to migration and cooperate with other range states.”

“According to a [report released ahead of the summit](#), nearly half (49 percent) of all species catalogued by the CMS are showing signs of declining numbers, and nearly one in four are threatened with extinction on a worldwide scale.”

“ migratory freshwater fish populations crucial to river health and sustaining the livelihoods of millions of people are in freefall and risk collapse.”

Excerpts: *Snowy owl, hammerhead shark and cheetah among 40 new species granted international protection, U.N. says, 3/30/26, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/new-species-international-protection-snowy-owl-hammerhead-shark-cheetah/>*



Snowy Owl



Hudsonian Godwit
Muskegon Wastewater 2020

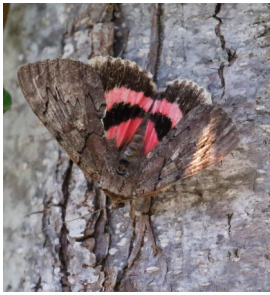


Summer 2025

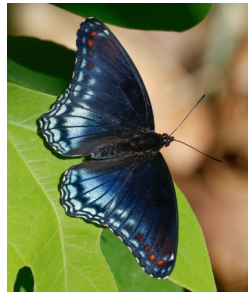
Judi Manning

Last year we saw many more butterflies in the yard. However, we have had very few Monarchs through the summer. These are probably migrating Monarchs. We started to see them heading south at Holland State Park about August 1st.

In early July the night moth treat was seeing two Darling Underwings feasting on the overripe bananas I put out for moths and some butterflies. The last time we saw them in our yard was in July, 2017, Three Red Spotted Admirals flitted and feasted all day for a few days.



Darling Underwing



Red Spotted Admiral

FAR FLOWING WATER

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Please contact Editor at oias@oias.org for other arrangements.

Far Flowing Water is published seven times per year.

If you would like to contribute a complete article for the

next issue, please have your article to me by September 1st.

2026-2027 OIAS Membership Application/Renewal

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Mission Statement **Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society**

a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Corporation

Provide stewardship of local Grand River island wildlife sanctuaries owned by the Michigan Audubon Society;

Achieve through education, public recognition of the value and need for protecting and preserving wildlife, plants, soil, water and other natural resources as well as an understanding of their interdependence;

Promote an interest in our native birds and as well as native flora and fauna, and their habitats because of their great economic, cultural and recreational value; and

Aid the Michigan Audubon Society in its study, conservation and research efforts.

Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society

Judi Manning, Editor

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