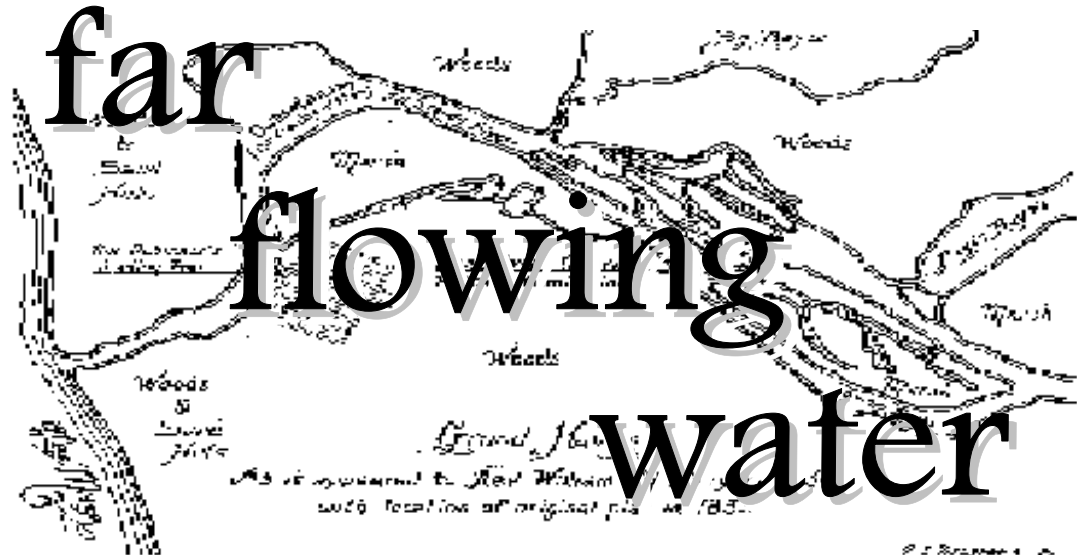


Grand Haven, Michigan

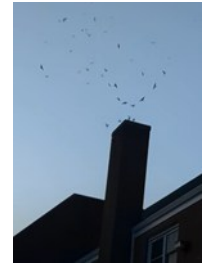


March 17

6:15 P.M.

CHIMNEY SWIFT CONSERVATION IN MICHIGAN

Presented by **Chad Machinski**, Michigan Audubon Society



How well do you know this compact, aerial acrobat? Facing steep population declines, the Chimney Swift is one urban bird that we should all get behind. In this presentation you will learn the identification and life history of the Chimney Swift along with issues these birds are grappling with. We will also discuss ways that YOU can help with Chimney Swift conservation and what Michigan Audubon is doing across the state to help this enigmatic bird.

While Chad's first love is botany, he doesn't deny the intertwining nature of birds, plants, insects, and all other organisms we share the world with. As Michigan Audubon's Conservation Manager, Chad is responsible for the management and care for all 20 of Michigan Audubon's Sanctuaries around the state and bird specific programs such as Chimney Swift and Purple Martin conservation. In his spare time, Chad enjoys tending to and expanding his native plant garden, collecting plant specimens, and learning more about our natural world.

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President's Corner – March 2026

The Joys of Chasing and Finding a Rare Bird

There is a unique kind of magic that comes with chasing a rare bird. It begins with a small spark—an unexpected report, a message from a fellow birder, or a brief note in the daily sightings. Suddenly, the ordinary rhythm of the day fades, replaced by a quiet thrill: maybe, just maybe, you'll witness something extraordinary.

The chase itself is a blend of patience, hope, and happy unpredictability. Every stretch of open field, every flutter of wings, every shape on a distant fence post becomes a possibility. But the experience becomes even richer when you're not chasing alone. Having your spouse along—someone who may not share the same obsession but shares the adventure—adds warmth to the cold waits, humor to the quiet moments, and companionship to the long drives between sightings.

One of my favorite memories comes from the day we went after a **Crested Caracara**, a species neither of us expected to see so far north. Reports placed it along a lonely mix of farm fields and winter-dulled grasslands. My spouse and I drove the back roads together, scanning tree lines, exchanging theories, laughing about the lengths to which birders will go for a single sighting.

After nearly giving up, we rounded a corner—and there it was. The *Crested Caracara* stood boldly in the open, tall and unmistakable, its orange facial skin glowing against the winter landscape. For a moment both of us just stared, breath caught, as if the world had paused to give us this rare gift. When it finally lifted off, its wings flashed white against the sky, leaving us both stunned into a shared silence that felt almost sacred.

Long after the bird disappeared, the joy lingered—not just from the sighting itself, but from the journey we took together to find it. That's the secret of rare birds: the thrill of the search, the beauty of the discovery, and the way these moments become memories when shared with someone you love.

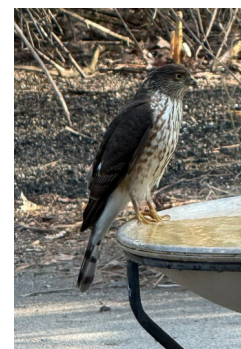
Lonny Garris, Board Member, OIAS

Sharp-shinned Hawk

Judi Manning

The last few weeks we have had a very tame male Sharp-shinned Hawk spending days in our yard. He would fly down the front sidewalk. Bank as he flew close by the front window. He landed in the tree just outside the front door. I had to open the screen door to get him to move.

Today (3/8/26) he came flying down the toward the house and landed on the birdbath about 20 feet from the house. I snapped the photo of him with my phone.



The close up photo has very good detail of his face, thin legs and square tail.

Lonny Garris

President's Corner Bird

Typical Habitat

Crested Caracaras are birds of **open country**. Across their range, they consistently favor habitats with **broad visibility and sparse tree cover**, which support both scavenging and ground-foraging behavior.

Common habitats include:

- **Dry prairies** and **open grasslands**, sometimes with patchy wet areas [\[animaldiversity.org\]](https://animaldiversity.org)
- **Semi-open habitats** such as prairies, rangeland, and savannas [\[audubon.org\]](https://audubon.org)
- **Pastures and ranchlands**, especially those with short grasses and scattered palms or oaks [\[fws.gov\]](https://fws.gov)
- **Deserts and arid regions** (e.g., parts of Arizona and northern Mexico) [\[audubon.org\]](https://audubon.org)
- **Marshy lands, river edges, and certain forested or lightly wooded areas** [\[animalspot.net\]](https://animalspot.net)
- **Agricultural landscapes**, including improved pastures and mixed rural environments [\[fws.gov\]](https://fws.gov)

Overall, they thrive in landscapes that combine **open ground for feeding** with **scattered trees for nesting**.

Geographic Range

The Crested Caracara has a broad distribution spanning parts of the **United States, Mexico, Central America,** and **South America**.

United States Range:

- Found primarily in **Texas, Arizona,** and **Florida** [\[animalspot.net\]](https://animalspot.net)
- Occurs near the **Mexican border**, from **Baja California** across to **eastern Texas** [\[animaldiversity.org\]](https://animaldiversity.org)
- Small or historically noted populations in **Louisiana** and **New Mexico** [\[fws.gov\]](https://fws.gov)
- In Florida, especially associated with **central and southern prairie regions** [\[fws.gov\]](https://fws.gov)

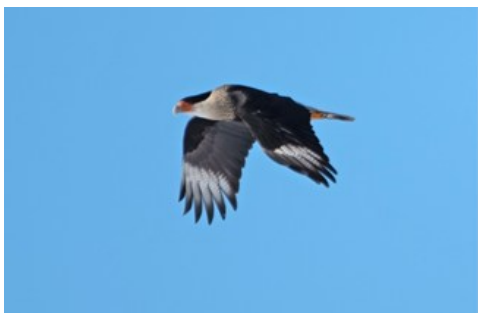
Latin American Range:

- Widely distributed in **Mexico** and south through **Central America to Panama** [\[animaldiversity.org\]](https://animaldiversity.org)
- Occurs in parts of the **Caribbean** (e.g., Cuba, Isle of Pines) [\[animaldiversity.org\]](https://animaldiversity.org)
- Present in **northern South America**, including **Peru** and **northern Amazonian Brazil** [\[animalspot.net\]](https://animalspot.net)

General Pattern:

Across the Americas, the Crested Caracara remains a bird of **semi-open to open terrain**, often associated with **rangeland, savannas, prairies, and agricultural regions** rather than dense forests.

Photo courtesy of Allen Chartier via eBird





2026

Program

April 21 Annual OIAS Business Meeting, Election, Bird Swap, Image Sharing and Dessert Potluck



MAY MEETINGS WERE CANCELLED by membership vote at the February 17, 2026 meeting.



2026 MCNC/OIAS Field Trips

Beth Miller

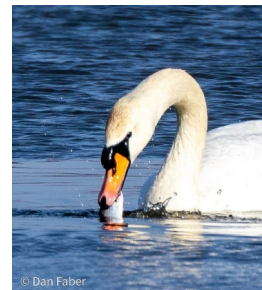
All field trips are from 8:00 AM to 12:00 noon

- Mar. 21, '26 — Dune Harbor Park
- 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)

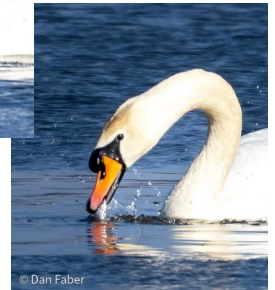
Have You Ever Seen This?

Dan is a photographer in Holland that takes stunning photos. He recently sent me pictures of this Mute Swan partaking of a fish. We had no idea that they would eat fish.

Mute swans are mainly herbivores eating submerged vegetation or grazing on land. Ater a search online I found they also feed on small proportions of aquatic insects, fish, and frogs.



© Dan Faber



© Dan Faber

Photos by Dan Faber

Thank you

TO DAN AND LONNY FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS ISSUE OF *far flowing water*

Why Do Birds Mob?

Mobbing is: A mixed-species group of birds displaying agitated flights and are very vocal when a perceived predator is spotted. Often when mobbing occurs, a bird is heard but difficult to locate where the action is.

Mobbing Action: The loud, distinctive, repetitive calls travel long distances to alert other birds of a predator's existence and to recruit more birds to harass and/or attack the predator. This call among species is similar sounding so birds respond. Cornell said it is similar to the "pishing" sound used by birders to draw in a variety of species and if it is over-used can draw birds away from their nests or a needed food source.

Why Birds are Mobbed:

- ◆ **PERCHED:** Swooping close and making diving passes at a perched potential predator are used to scare a direct threat away from a nest, protect themselves and/or their young. This harassment becomes stressful to the predator, has removed its element of surprise, so it leaves the area. Sometimes they can be seen circling or swooping toward a tall conifer tree where a hawk or owl is tucked in.
- ◆ **FLYING:** A predator in the area is a threat to nestlings, so adults flock up and pursue the overhead danger by dive-bombing and pursuing.

Does it Hurt? If you see a mobbing bird making contact with a larger bird, it usually does not harm them. The intent is not to hurt but to chase the perceived predator away.

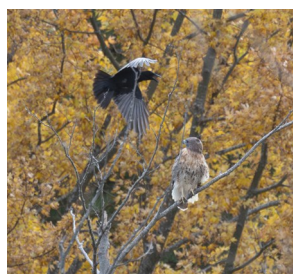
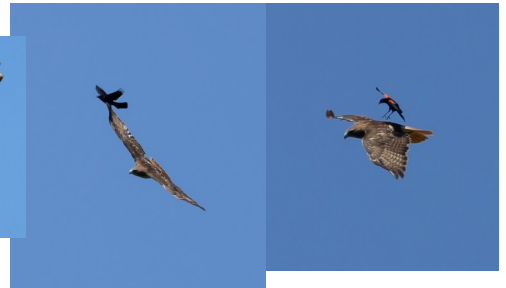
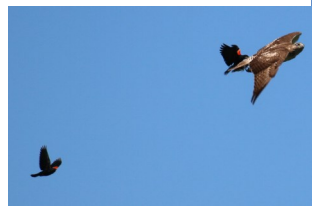
Who Does the Mobbing? Dozens of birds work together to force out a predator, which could leave the chicks and eggs vulnerable to opportunistic predators. In winter birds are less likely to mob when resources are scarcer. Blue Jays and American Crows are the most frequent mobbers. Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice and Red-winged Blackbirds will join in.

Why Small Mobbing Birds are Safe: Predators use stealthy from above to catch prey. A smaller mobbing bird has more maneuverability than the larger predator does. Cooper's Hawks are aerial acrobats and can easily navigate through shrubs and trees and when small birds find them, they send out the alarm call while hiding.

Additional Species Mobbed: Birds will also mob cats, snakes, dogs, and foxes. If a person comes close to an active nest, some birds will dive-bomb to protect their young.

References: *What's going on when I see little birds going after a big bird?*

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/sometimes-i-see-little-birds-going-after-a-big-bird-why-do-they-do-this/>, *Mobbing: When Smaller Birds Join Forces to Fend Off Larger Birds*, <https://www.audubon.org/news/mobbing-when-smaller-birds-join-forces-fend-larger-birds>, *When Swarms of Birds Attack Other Birds, They are Using a Mobbing Technique*, Emilie Le Beau, Lucchesi, 9/12/24, <https://www.discovermagazine.com/when-swarms-of-birds-attack-other-birds-they-are-using-a-mobbing-technique-46599>, *Why Do Little Birds Mob Big Birds?* Matthew L. Miller, *What Is Bird Mobbing and Why Do Birds Do It?* <https://biologyinsights.com/what-is-bird-mobbing-and-why-do-birds-do-it/>.



Northern Flicker

Judi Manning

Colaptes auratus

This fairly large woodpecker spends a lot of time on the ground or perched upright on horizontal branches.

In flight they have a conspicuous white rump patch and the topside looks brownish. The male has a moustache. Their diet is mainly ants and beetles. They can be seen hammering into the soil to reach ants underground snaring prey with their barbed tongue that extends two inches beyond the end of the bill. They can eat thousands of ants a day. In winter they eat berries, seeds, and can be seen at suet feeders. Other woodpeckers search for food by hammering on wood.

In spring they search for objects to drum on that make the loudest sound. This is a form of communication and territorial defense. The jackhammer-sound in the right conditions can carry up to a half mile away. Some flickers reuse cavities from previous years, create new cavities, or use one made by a woodpecker.

This species can be found in many different habitats that have trees and some open ground for foraging. They have a loud call that sounds like wicka-wicka-wicka.

They are either year-round residents in the south or short-distance migrants breeding in the north.

There are four subspecies:

Yellow-shafted (bright yellow underside of wings and tail with a red crescent on nape): eastern U.S. to Texas, Great Plains across the boreal forest of Canada to central Alaska

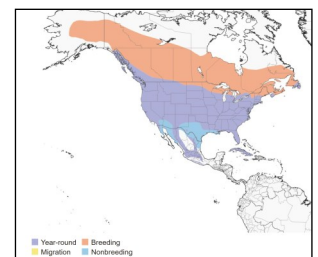
Red-shafted (bright red underside of wings and tail and no crescent on nape): Western N. America from Southern Alaska to Oaxaca, Mexico.

Cuban and Grand Gayman Island: Each found on their namesake island and look similar to the yellow-shafted.

There are hybrids of the yellow-shafted and the red-shafted and found on the edges of each territory.

In 2024 ornithologists recognized the fifth subspecies should be a species called the Guatemalan Flicker, based on vocal and genetic differences.

References: [https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern Flicker/id](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Flicker/id), <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/northern-flicker>, *Northern Flicker (Overview)*, Melanie Cruff, <https://birdfeederhub.com/northern-flicker/>

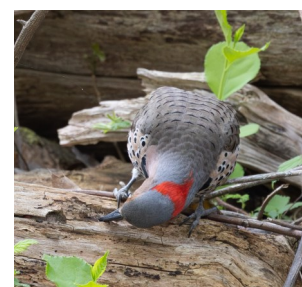


Male

Female



Fledgling



Skunk Cabbage

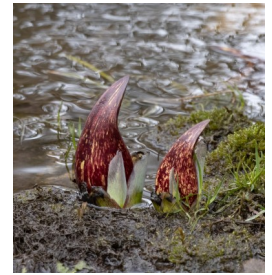
Symplocarpus foetidus

Judi Manning



The flower of this perennial plant emerges very early spring through the frozen soil and snow when temperatures still drop below 32 degrees. Cyanide resistant cellular respiration inside the spathe generates an internal temperature of 70 degrees for almost two weeks.

The increased temperature melts the snow so the flower that looks like a hoodlike leaf called a spathe will begin to emerge.

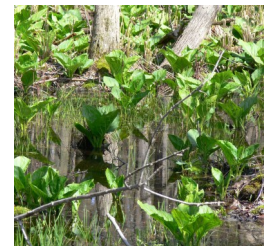


The rotting meat flower scent lures cold-blooded, early-emerging pollinating carrion-feeding flies, gnats, and other insects to enter through the narrow opening on the side to pollinate the flower.



When the temperature warms up, the leaves emerge and grows rapidly.

The leaves unfold in a spiral pattern. The leaves can grow up to 36 inches long and a foot wide. If a leaf gets cut or crushed it also has a pungent skunk-like odor.



Skunk cabbage grows in moist habitats. The massive, unbranched, fibrous root system pulls the plant deeper into the soil each year. It does not produce seed until it is five to seven years old. An individual rhizome can live for decades.

When trees are fully leafed out, the skunk cabbage leaves wither away and decay.

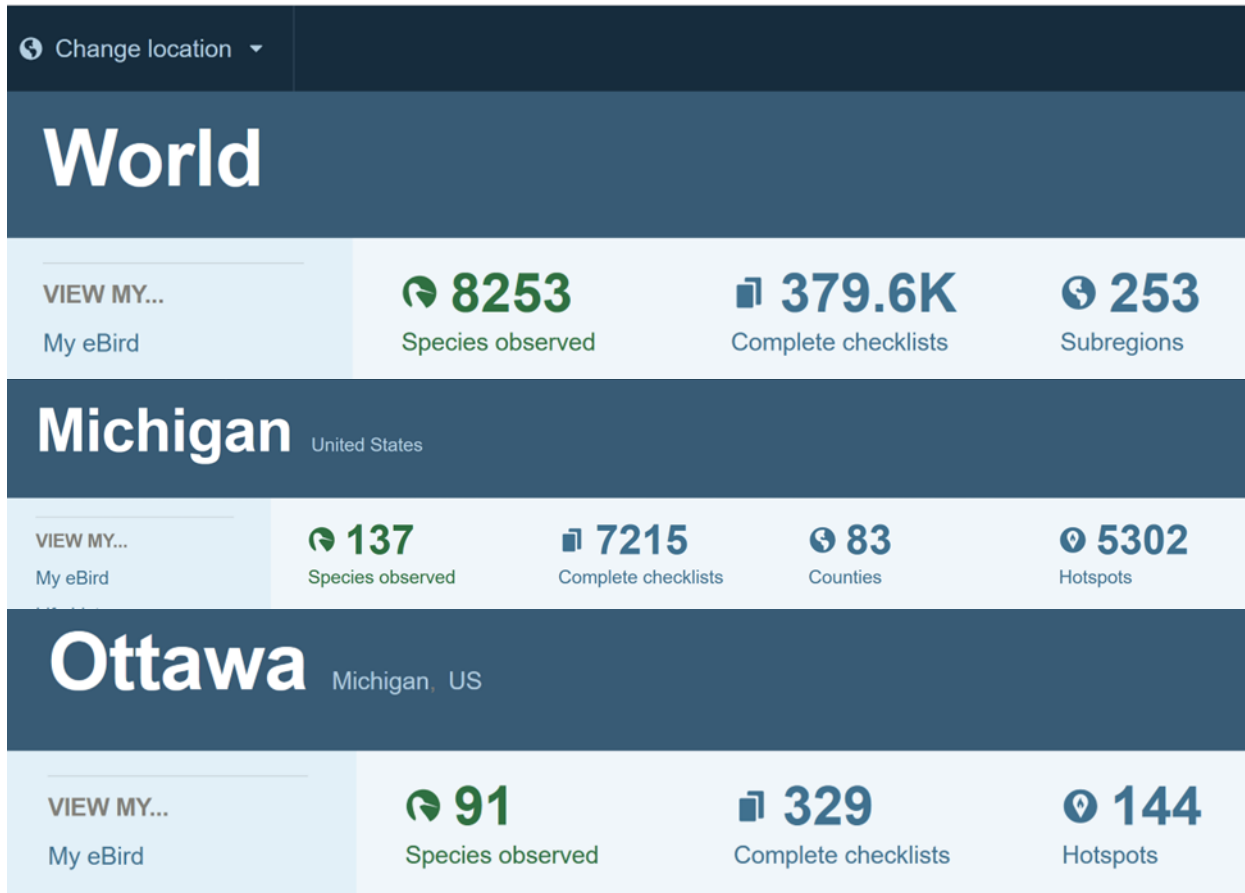
If an animal eats skunk cabbage it causes a burning sensation. Native Americans used it for coughs and headaches.

References: <https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Plants-and-Fungi/Skunk-Cabbage>, <https://www.nps.gov/miss/learn/nature/skunkcabbage.htm>, <https://hort.extension.wisc.edu/articles/skunk-cabbage-symplocarpus-foetidus/>, <https://naturenearby.org/skunk-cabbage/>

https://www.fs.usda.gov/wildflowers/plant-of-the-week/symplocarpus_foetidus.shtml

The Great Backyard
Bird Count

2026 Results



8,078 species of the world’s known species, that is **158 more than in 2024** was reported. Hundreds of thousands of people from all over the world were birding during those four days in February. The whole is more powerful than the sum of the parts.

- ### In a Snapshot
- 8,078 species of birds identified
 - 217 countries or eBird subregions
 - 387,652 eBird checklists
 - 655,549 Merlin Bird IDs (step-by-step, sound, or photo)
 - 189,741 photos, videos, and sounds added to Macaulay Library
 - 838,113 estimated global participants
 - 409 reported community events

There is a lot of additional information on the referenced website.

Excerpts: <https://www.birdcount.org/results/>



Far Flowing Water is published eight times per year. If you would like to contribute a complete article for the next issue, please have your article to me by April 1st.

FAR FLOWING WATER

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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

P.O. Box 1654

Holland, MI 49422

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