

Audubon Society News

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“Fascinating Snakes”

by Dr. Bruce Young

Tuesday, 7pm, February 13

**Topeka & Shawnee County
Public Library**

Dr. Bruce Young is an Associate Professor of Biology at Washburn University. His research work centers on exploring how the anatomy and behavioral ecology of snakes are interrelated. He is particularly interested in the bioacoustics of snakes and the physics of venom injection. Whenever possible he combines field work with laboratory-based experimental manipulation of snakes. His research work has been featured on National Public Radio, several television specials (National Geographic, Animal Planet, etc.), and covered in newspapers and popular publications.

His presentation will focus on his favorite group of snakes, the spitting cobras. Dr. Young will discuss some of his recent



research on the development and sensory control of venom “spitting,” arguably the most specialized defensive behavior in

vertebrate animals.

As usual there will be a no-host dinner at Annie’s Place at 5:30pm before the program meeting. All TAS members members are welcome.

Great Backyard Bird Count

What mid-winter activity is fun, easy, free, and helps bird conservation? What can parents and teachers do with children that connects them to a whole new world of natural wonders? This February 16-19 is the tenth annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), sponsored by National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The GBBC gives everyone a chance to discover the birds in their neighborhood and “Count for the Record.”

Count the birds in your backyard, local park, or other natural area on any or all of the four count days. Watch your bird feeders or take a short walk in your neighborhood or park. For each species of bird that you see, records the highest number of individuals that you observe at any one time during your count. Don’t add a bird every time you see one at your feeder; you could be counting the same individual.

Watch the birds for at least 15 minutes on each day that you participate. Or watch for as long as you like! Watch long enough to get a good sense of what birds are in your area.

Enter your count online at the Great Backyard Bird Count website (www.birdsource.org/GBBC) and use your State Checklist to submit your highest counts for that day.

View your results after you’ve entered your count for the day. See results from your town, county, state, country and continent.

National Statistics from 2006:

Total Checklists Submitted: 60616

Total Species Observed: 623

Total Individual Birds Counted: 7,590,882

Participants who want to hone their bird watching skills can learn more from the Great Backyard Bird Count web site, which offers identification tips and access to photos, sounds, maps, and natural history information on more than 500 bird species. People can also submit photos to an online gallery showcasing the dazzling array of winter birds found during the GBBC. Competitions add another element of fun, including a photo contest, rankings for most numerous birds, and the coveted “checklist champ” title for towns, states, and provinces with the highest participation.

Field Trip Report: Kittiwake Flies Rings Around Ringbills

Cold air and frozen ground may have had an effect on the turnout for Topeka Audubon's field trip to John Redmond and Melvern Reservoirs this morning, Dec. 2. Just five (Carol Morgan, Rhonda Simpson, Diana Busey, Richard Field and myself) members showed up for the 7:00 a.m. departure. We got to the east side of the JR outlet at 8:00 and were greeted by a horde of voracious Ring-billed and Herring gulls that were crowding the outlet tube that was letting out water. Sitting primly, high on a concrete chute, was the resident Black-legged Kittiwake overseeing the mad activity below. It would periodically drop from his perch

and race to the turbulent water and snatch a stunned minnow before a Ring-bill could count his change! Other species in the water on the backside of the dam were White Pelicans, D/C Cormorants, Mallards, Gadwalls, lots of Hooded



Mergansers, Northern Shovelers, Common Goldeneyes, and Great Blue Herons. Sitting stately in a leafless tree on the west side of the outlet were three Bald Eagles. They, too, were fishing, hunting, or scavenging when the opportunities arose. Down river, we saw several more Bald Eagles.

We stopped briefly at Melvern to scope the pond below the dam and found scores of Buffleheads and Hooded Mergansers, a few Lesser Scaup, Ring-necks, Canvasbacks, Gadwalls, and Common Mergansers. In the



beach area above the dam we picked out a Cackling Goose out of a foraging flock of Canadas.

Perhaps the most interesting sighting for the morning wasn't even an avian creature. As we were driving over the JR Dam, we looked out to the lake which was largely frozen and saw a beautiful red fox trotting away from the dam toward the open water. There were lots of ducks, gulls, pelicans, and geese lounging on the ice and the red fox obviously thought he couldn't pass up a try at finding a weak fowl. We didn't stay to find out the conclusion of this natural theater, but if the truth were known, more than one of us was pulling for the fox!

Field Trip Leader Dan Gish



If you are a member of National Audubon, you are automatically a member of Topeka Audubon. However, you have the option to become a member of our chapter without belonging to National. If you plan to continue your National membership, DO NOT send the \$18 for a chapter-only membership.

A hearty thank you to all who watch the address label on the newsletter and renew your chapter-only membership as it becomes due. This is a big savings to the chapter as your label is the only renewal notice you will receive. Let us know of an address change, too, as it costs each time we mail a newsletter to the wrong address.

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Topeka Audubon Society

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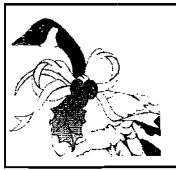
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CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT RESULTS



Twenty-one counters working in the field and another eight feeder watchers tallied a record number of species during the annual Christmas Bird Count on Saturday, December 16th.

Eighty-five individual species were recorded, which eclipsed the previous record of 83 species reported in 1990. The 27,579 birds reported did not threaten the record 32,920 birds reported in 1999.

The 107th Topeka Audubon CBC was conducted in almost balmy weather, which warmed from 43 degrees at 7 a.m. to a high of 65 degrees before the day was over. The unseasonably warm weather and light winds probably contributed to some of the unlikely species noted, including a turkey vulture reported by feeder watcher **Marilyn Morford** and two chipping sparrows reported each by Marilyn and **Sandy Bohnsack**, another feeder watcher.

Jim Malcom also reported two horned grebes, the only new species reported for the Topeka Audubon CBC. Horned grebes had previously been reported during count weeks, but not on an actual count day. Jim also recorded the first short-eared owls (three) reported since 1973 and found the first red-shouldered hawk since 1974. A record 10 Eurasian collared doves were reported on the count.

Once again, Canada geese were the most numerous species reported, with 6,465 tallied. They were followed in abundance by starlings at 4,328; robins, 3,644; red-winged blackbirds, 3,183; snow geese, 2505, and mallards, 1,844.

Participants in the 2006 count, including feeder watchers were, Judy Billings, Sandy Bohnsack, Jim and Joanne Brier, Diana Busey, Glen Caspers, Walter Cole, Richard Field, Dan Gish, Dean and Gladys Grisell, Gary Haden, Jeff Hansen, Ralph Hoover, Scottie Johnson, Dan Larson, Bob Lawson, Jim Malcom, Sara Merrill, Marilyn Morford, Carol Morgan, Larry Peters, Melody Pollom, Joanne Ramberg, Mark Roupe, Rhonda Simpson and Janeen Walters.

CBC Chairman Gary Haden

ASK AUDUBON:

“Can houseplants improve indoor air quality? Are certain types of plants better than others for this purpose?”

Former NASA researcher Dr. Bill Wolverton examined the effects of houseplants on indoor air quality. He determined that indoor plants can absorb airborne chemicals commonly found in homes and offices. About two or three plants for every 20-25 square feet of space should suffice.

The sources of indoor air pollution are varied. Some airborne toxins come from new carpets, shower curtains, furniture or dry cleaning that can release microscopic particles into the air. These volatile organic chemicals (VOCs) degrade the air quality, and continue to do so even after the new product smell has dissipated. VOCs can irritate the respiratory tract — causing headaches, sinus congestion, and fatigue as well as other health problems. Purchasing green or organic products whenever possible is another way to optimize indoor air quality.

According to the NASA study, the ten plants which are most beneficial to indoor air are Reed palm, dwarf date palm, Boston fern, Janet Craig dracaena, English ivy, Australian sword fern, peace lily, rubber plant and weeping fig.

It is not so much for its beauty that the forest makes a claim upon men's hearts, as for that subtle something, that quality of air that emanates from old trees, that so wonderfully changes and renews a weary spirit.

— *Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850-1894*

Field Trip Report: Not-So-Competitive Birding Contest at Lake Shawnee

Twelve members of the Topeka Audubon Society donned their warm coats and sweaters to go to Lake Shawnee (Jan. 6) for the annual birding contest that emphasizes fun more than competition. Dan Gish, field trip leader for TAS has been organizing the event for about ten years. We break the groups into teams of 2-4 birders and then each group makes a two and one-half hour drive/walk around Lake Shawnee and try to identify each species that they see. Today's winning team of **Jim Malcom and Paul Willis** tallied a whopping 44 species out of the group total of 48 species seen by all the groups combined. Some of the more unusual species seen were Bald Eagle, Merlin, Belted Kingfisher, Yellow-bellied sapsucker, Cedar Waxwing, and Ruby-crowned kinglet.

There was an article and picture in the Topeka Capital-Journal on Sunday, January 7, about our local Audubon Society and the Not-So-Competitive Birding Contest. Thank you to **Patsy Rush** for getting a reporter from the newspaper to come to our event and report on it!

Field Trip Leader Dan Gish

Calendar of Events

January 2007

20 **Field Trip*: Eagle Watch on Lecompton River Road and Lake Perry. Meet at Dillon's, 29th & California, 7:30am.**

February 2007

3 **Field Trip*: Tuttle Creek Reservoir and Pillsbury Crossing. Meet at zoo parking lot, 7:00am.**

13 **Program Meeting: Fascinating Snakes by Dr. Bruce Young, TSCPL** 7:00pm.**

16-19 **Great Backyard Bird Count. Check out www.birdsource.org/gbbc**

17 **Field Trip*: Lyon County St. Fishing Lake & Melvern Reservoir. Meet at Starlite Skating Rink, 7:00am.**

21 **Board Meeting: TSCPL** 7:00pm.**

March 2007

10 **Field Trip*: Clinton Reservoir, meet at Dillons, 29th & California, 7:30am.**

13 **Program Meeting: Laura Callwell, Friends of the Kaw, TSCPL**, 7:00pm**

21 **Board Meeting: TSCPL** 7:00pm**

24 **Field Trip*: Felker Park, meet at east end of parking lot at 7:00am.**

* Contact Dan Gish at gishbear@cox.net or 232-3731 for more information regarding field trips. If you carpool on a field trip with a fellow TAS member, please chip in for the gas.

**Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library

Topeka Audubon Society

An affiliate of the National Audubon Society

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If you have news or info you would like included in the newsletter, send it to crxmorgan@aol.com or mail to Carol Morgan, 2607 SW Westport Drive, Topeka, KS 66614-2513.

A hearty thank you to all who watch the address label on the newsletter and renew your chapter-only membership as it becomes due. This serves as your renewal notice. See renewal form inside this newsletter. Let Joanna Lacoursiere know of address changes, too.

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