



# THE NUTHATCH

[www.oaklandaudubon.org](http://www.oaklandaudubon.org)

**eBird**

Where your bird sightings  
make a difference!



## MAKE YOUR DAILY OBSERVATIONS COUNT

**Tuesday, January 11, 2011**  
**Speaker: Darrin O'Brien**

Darrin will present examples of how he uses eBird to track the results of his day-to-day birding activities and the potential of contributing one's records to this database. eBird is an online program that pools the checklists of contributors and makes the data available to the global bird community such as ornithologists, various agencies, and conservation organizations. Join us this evening and see how eBird can change the way you go birding.

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## AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND



**Tuesday, February 8, 2011**  
**Speaker: Don Burlett**

OAS President Don Burlett, who has taken us to many far-off places, will lead us to Australia and New Zealand this time. The sun goes in the wrong direction and the result is wildly different animals than found here in Michigan. (Just kidding!) Big kangaroos, echidnas and little penguins are just the beginning. Join us for this cavalcade of unusual species.

## President's Column



### **Birding and OAS – Does It Get Any Better?**

This past fall, it's been a bonanza of rare birds flowing through and into Michigan. Golden-crowned Sparrow, Anna's Hummingbird, Spotted Towhee, Common Ground-dove, Franklin's Gull, Little Gull, Saw-whet Owls, etc. On and on it went. As an avid birder, I've had a chance to add a few notches to my belt during this frenzy. It's always great fun to chase after a few of these rarer birds. At the same time, birding in general has been great. We continue to have some good field trips that offer opportunities to see lots of Michigan's birds.

That said, 2011 should be even better. We now have a field trip coordinator and another person to help lead trips. New enthusiasm and experience to help everyone enjoy field birding even more. Take a chance and get out there and see what we are up to now.

OAS also continues to grow and change. Our membership is increasing and our activities (programs and field trips) are beginning to generate new enthusiasm. We've added some new board members with new views and energy. They'll add experience in a while but you can't deny the surge in activity. Our newsletter has gone to color for electronic version, our membership continues to grow, and our field trip program has been expanded nicely. All this means a new, exciting OAS. If you aren't going to monthly programs or are missing out on our field trips, I can't put into words what you are missing.

This is also a great time to get involved with the organization. Opportunities abound to get involved. Hospitality, programs, field trips, etc. are all areas where we could use some assistance. Take over a board spot, help with a committee, whatever. If you are interested, please let me know. I'm sure that I can find something for you to do to be part of this renaissance. I'll stay near the phone.

Otherwise, I'll see you at a meeting or field trip and let me know what you think. See you soon.

Don Burlett

## Streaked Sparrows of Winter

By: Dan Reinking

Sparrows as a group are often considered difficult to identify by beginning birders, and at times even by more experienced birders. This month we'll discuss several of the fairly common, widespread, "streaky" sparrows that may be seen across much of the U.S. during winter and/or in migration. Five of these species, which all share some degree of streaking on their breasts, include Fox, Lincoln's, Song, Savannah, and Vesper sparrows.

As is so often the case when learning to identify birds, looking at the habitat a bird is in may prove almost as helpful as looking at the bird itself. For example, of the five species mentioned above, two are generally found in open habitats, such as grasslands, pastures, farm fields and the like. These two species, the Savannah and Vesper sparrows, would not be likely to be found deep in the woods. A streaked sparrow seen in winter in an open field would probably be one of these two, and with a good look the two are easily separated. Vesper Sparrows have a fairly distinctive white eye ring, but no obvious line above the eye. They also show distinctly white outer tail feathers in flight, forming a tail pattern similar to that of the Dark-eyed Junco. Savannah Sparrows are highly variable, with a number of subspecies varying geographically, but most individuals show a yellowish eyeline. Savannahs lack the pronounced white eye ring and white outer tail feathers of the Vesper Sparrow. Moving on to other habitats, including woodlands or brushy thickets, we must consider Fox, Lincoln's and Song sparrows to be more likely than Savannah or Vesper sparrows. Of these, the Fox Sparrow is generally the largest and the Lincoln's the smallest, although some subspecies of Song Sparrow may overlap in size with either of the other two species. Fox Sparrows are variable by subspecies, with west coast birds generally appearing dark, chocolate brown, while interior western birds have gray upperparts and reddish wings, and eastern birds appear quite reddish. All races appear somewhat stocky, with fairly heavy spotting or streaking on the breast, usually most dense in the center. Fox Sparrows are plain-faced birds, lacking the pronounced eyeline and crown stripes of Lincoln's and Song sparrows. As a useful behavioral clue for identifying this species, Fox Sparrows are often seen scratching in the forest litter with their feet, something the other common streaked sparrows rarely if ever do.

The widespread Song Sparrow has even more subspecies than the Fox Sparrow and is highly variable in size and in plumage, which ranges from dark brown to fairly bright rufous overall. The tail is fairly long for a sparrow, and rounded on the end. The head is boldly marked with a gray eyeline and a broad, dark stripe from the bill downward on either side of the throat. The breast is coarsely streaked with blackish to reddish streaks, which often converge into a central breast spot. The call note is very distinctive, and can readily be learned with some practice.

The Lincoln's Sparrow may at first appear similar to the Song Sparrow, both in life and in field guides, but closer inspection reveals several key differences. Lincoln's Sparrows have somewhat shorter tails, and a more delicate overall appearance due in part to their smaller size and in part to the narrower, crisp, black streaking on their breast. This streaking does not generally form a bold central spot, and is much finer compared to the broad, heavy streaking on the breast of Song Sparrows. The breast of the Lincoln's Sparrow has a pale tan or yellowish wash as a background for the fine breast streaking. As a final clue for identifying this species, Roger Tory Peterson provided a concise behavioral description when he penned the phrase "a skulker, afraid of its shadow" to describe this species.

All five of these streaked sparrow species can be seen virtually coast to coast during at least part of the year, particularly during winter and migration across most of the U.S. Grab your binoculars and a good field guide, and spend some time searching the woods and fields. With a little effort you will soon be naming these sparrows like a pro.

## THE WOLF IN THE CLIMATE MINE?



We have all heard about the canary in the coal mine, the bird that coal miners would take with them to help them detect a buildup of dangerous gases. If the canary died, it was time for the miners to skedaddle out of the mine.

In the Spring 2008 issue of *International Wolf* magazine, published by the International Wolf Center of Ely, Minnesota, there is information about two events that indicate that wolf populations are being affected by the increasing evidence of climate change.

Ellesmere Island in the High Arctic has been a wolf-research study site for many years. In 1997, snow arrived a month earlier than usual and continued at higher-than-usual levels while the temperature dropped to below-normal levels. This resulted in a severe reduction of the amount of vegetation available to the musk-oxen and arctic hares that are the main prey for the wolves on Ellesmere. In 1998, researchers found that many of the musk-oxen had starved, and there was no reproduction of wolves, hares, or musk-oxen that year.

In 2000, the snows came even earlier than in 1997, and in 2001 there was again no evidence of reproduction of the herbivores or the wolves, and there had been another die-off of musk-oxen.

These early snows and low temperatures were the most extreme that had been seen in more than half a century and are considered an indication of global climate change.

Closer to us, the famous wolves of Isle Royale are also having problems, not due to the cold but rather to the opposite. Their main prey, the moose, are experiencing problems because the increasingly warm spring weather is a boon to the ticks that feed on the moose in such numbers that the moose become anemic. Their population is declining and, of course, so is the population of wolves.

And Isle Royale isn't the only area where moose are in trouble. At the Michigan Audubon Society's 2008 annual meeting, one of the speakers talked about climate change and its effect on wildlife. One bad sign: from the 1980s to 2003, the number of moose in Minnesota declined from about 4,000 to only 237! Researchers said there were various reasons for this, but they felt that the main reason was climate change.

As more and more instances of climate change are studied, wildlife in more and more places is found to be negatively affected. It makes you wonder which species will be the next to try to warn us that our "mine" is getting more and more dangerous.

## OAS Welcomes its Newest Officers

### Dave Frye ( Membership Officer) & Ed Lewandowski ( Field Trip Officer)

Dave's OAS experience started with taking part in a number of Christmas Bird Counts. That led him to the website and there he learned of the field trip opportunities and, by January, he was hooked up as a fully paid-up member.

Dave isn't an experienced birder, but his experiences on field trips and meetings have really fired his interest. He thinks that the "intimidation" factor of joining a group that knows everything about birding (when he doesn't have that experience) was really no problem, at all. "The members were happy to have me along. They are friendly and engaging and have been VERY helpful for me. They've been understanding when I ask silly 'newbie' questions." One example that Dave highlights was on a field trip when he asked Don Burlett about a black bird on the shoreline. After Don had dropped what he was doing to come over to take a look, he smiled and, in a supportive way, replied "That would be a Red-Winged Blackbird, Dave."

Edward Lewandowski: I am a proud father of two little girls and dedicated husband. By trade I work for the Pontiac School District as a Reading Intervention Specialist.

When my busy lifestyle doesn't require immediate attention, I am off somewhere outdoors.

Growing up as a nature nut in a family mostly of hunters and off road vehicle junkies, I found my love and passion for birding an obvious fit. I have spent the last 6-7 years as an ambitious birder looking carefully at every park, puddle, and prairie in SE Michigan and places beyond. My passion for observing and recording birds is a regular part of my everyday life. I have been planning birding trips on a smaller scale with friends to various locations in the Midwest. I look forward to working closely with Oakland Audubon Society to develop a field trip program that sparks interest and is conducive to birders of all levels and abilities. I most enjoy birding with people that also love birding. As a new member, I look forward to new and exciting experiences with you.

#### OAS BOARD MEMBERS

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## “Coming This Spring” OAS Young Birder Program

Join us as we introduce our love for the natural world  
to the next generation of great birders.

(date & time to be announced)

### Membership Meetings & Programs 2011

DATE	TIME	EVENT	LOCATION
TUES., JAN. 11	7:30 pm	eBird: Observations Darrin O'Brien	First United Methodist Church, (see below)
TUES., FEB. 8	7:30 pm	Birding Australia & New Zealand Don Burlett	First United Methodist Church, (see below)
TUES., MAR. 8	7:30 pm	Cranial Capacity of Corvids Dorothy McLeer	First United Methodist Church, (see below)
TUES., APR. 12	7:30 pm	The Hidden Habits of Humpbacks Chris Zimmel	First United Methodist Church, (see below)
TUES., MAY 10	7:30 pm	To Be Announced	First United Methodist Church, (see below)

#### MONTHLY MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS

Monthly membership meetings are held on the second Tuesday of each month (except July and August) at 7:30 p.m., at the First United Methodist Church, 1589 West Maple Road, Birmingham, Fellowship Hall, Room 152. The facility is located on the south side of Maple Road between Southfield and Cranbrook Roads. There is plenty of lighted, free parking and barrier-free access. (Barrier-free access located at entrance off first parking lot on Pleasant St.) Our meetings are free and open to the public. For meeting cancellation information, check our website, call a board member or call the church at (248) 646-1200.

# OAKLAND AUDUBON FIELD TRIP CALENDAR 2011

(Check the OAS Website for details)

[www.oaklandaudubon.org](http://www.oaklandaudubon.org)

Date	Location	Trip Leader
January 15, 2011 8:00AM—2:00 PM	Belleville Area Gull Trip	Ed Lewandowski
January 29, 2011 8:00AM—3:00 PM	Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor “Winter Owls & Passerines”	Don Burlett
February 18-20, 2011 8:00AM—3:00 PM	Upper Peninsula Weekend Trip	Ed Lewandowski
February 26, 2011 8:00AM—2:00 PM	Port Huron / St. Clair River “Ducks, Gulls & Scoters”	Don Burlett

## Field Trip Reports

### Belle Isle – October 23, 2010

A group of 15 birders tracked around Belle Isle looking at ducks and other species of birds on a very nice October day (sunny and not terribly cold). We had 51 species, with a nice collection of special birds. We had a Peregrine Falcon near the bridge, posing nicely. We also had a Surf Scoter off the west end of the island near some Ruddy Ducks. We found a group of 6 Cackling Geese on the south side of the island amongst their cousins, Canada Geese. The trip ended with sightings of Fox Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows and an Eastern Towhee. Leaders – Don Burlett, Ed Lewandowski

### Western Michigan Shoreline – November 27-28, 2010

A group of 5 birders braved cold and windy conditions over the weekend to scan the break walls and shoreline for various lake birds. The trip ranged from New Buffalo in the south through Benton Harbor, South Haven, Allegan SGA, Saugatuck (Douglas Beach), Holland (Lake Macatawa), Port Sheldon, Grand Haven and Muskegon (break wall and wastewater facility). Under plainly difficult conditions, a number of nice birds were observed. We had a flyover Black-legged Kittiwake in Benton Harbor, Horned Grebes in New Buffalo and Muskegon, Snow Geese (Allegan SGA and Muskegon Wastewater) including three blue-phase birds, Little Gull at Lake Macatawa, Tundra Swans (Holland and Muskegon Wastewater), Northern Harrier (Allegan SGA), a late Sanderling (Muskegon beach) and hundreds or thousands of geese and gulls. We tallied 50 species on the trip. Leader – Don Burlett



## SCOTER ALERT!

The November-December issue of *The Nuthatch* contained a report that the American Ornithologists' Union had split the Black Scoter into 2 species: the American Scoter in North America, and the Black Scoter in Eurasia.

It turns out that the original report of this split by the AOU contained a serious error, which that organization has now corrected.

The Black Scoter has indeed been split into 2 species, but the proper name of the duck in our area is Black Scoter (not American Scoter), and the Old World duck is now properly called the Common Scoter (not Black Scoter).

An additional split that has not been previously reported in our newsletter concerns the Whip-poor-will, which is now 2 species: the Eastern Whip-poor-will in our area and the Mexican Whip-poor-will in the southwestern U.S.

And according to the November 2010 issue of *Birding* magazine (published by the American Birding Association), more splits are probably on the way. One concerns the Snowy Plover. It has long been considered to be the same species as the Kentish Plover, which occurs in Eurasia. However, we can look for these species to be separated due to various differences which have been detected.

Even more species may be added to the ABA's checklist (similar to, but somewhat different from the AOU's list). This is because some exotic species that have been around in the U.S. for many years may soon gain recognition for life-list additions, including the Purple Swamphen. Some others that have been spotted in the U.S. fairly recently, such as the Common Shelduck, may also be added.

As if that isn't enough, another article in that same issue of *Birding* suggests that our familiar Herring Gull should be considered specifically distinct from the Herring Gull in Europe (and should be called the Smithsonian Gull). Yet another article suggests that the Savannah Sparrow is really 4 species! These splits are not "official," just suggestions. But stay tuned!

## Sparrow Identification Quiz

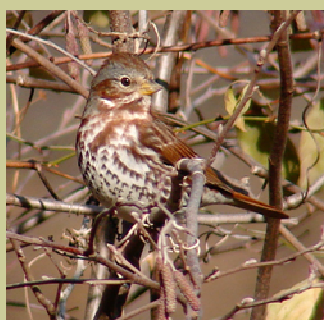
Who am I?



A) \_\_\_\_\_



B) \_\_\_\_\_



C) \_\_\_\_\_

### Nov / Dec Answers

A) Clay Colored Sparrow    B) Lark Sparrow    C) Nelson's Sparrow



# OAKLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP FORM



NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

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CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

MOBILE: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please advise of any personal information you do not want in the OAS membership directory.**

CHECK ALSO IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF:

\_\_\_\_ NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

\_\_\_\_ MICHIGAN AUDUBON SOCIETY

OAS NEEDS AND WELCOMES VOLUNTEERS!

PLEASE PARTICIPATE!

CHECK IF YOU WISH TO VOLUNTEER:

\_\_\_\_ TO BECOME A BOARD MEMBER

\_\_\_\_ LEAD A FIELD TRIP/PRESENT A PROGRAM

\_\_\_\_ FILL AN OPEN POSITION

POSITION (\_\_\_\_\_)

PLEASE CHECK APPROPRIATE LINE:

\_\_\_\_ MEMBER RENEWAL

\_\_\_\_ NEW MEMBER

\_\_\_\_ CHANGE OF ADDRESS

## *OAS Membership Fees*

- INDIVIDUAL \$10
- FAMILY \$15
- CONTRIBUTING \$25
- SUPPORTING \$50
- BENEFACTOR \$100

## *Our Mission*

- To provide, on a local level, access to the natural world through educational programs such as meetings and field trips.
- To advocate the preservation of wildlife habitats and endeavor to create interest in native birds, other animals and plants in Michigan.

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2780 SCENIC MEADOWS DRIVE

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