

GBBC coming up in February

The 2011 GBBC will take place Friday, February 18, through Monday, February 21. Please join us!

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent.

Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period. They tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report their counts, they fill out an online checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count website:

www.birdsource.org/gbbc/

As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada.

Scientists use the counts, along with observations from other citizen-science projects, such as the [Christmas Bird Count](#), [Project FeederWatch](#), and [eBird](#), to give us an immense picture of our winter birds.

Birds are to see, to hear, to store in memory. *Allan D. Cruickshank*

Featured Tawas Point Birding Festival Speakers



Don and Lillian Stokes

We are fortunate to have been able to acquire Don and Lillian Stokes as speakers at the Michigan Audubon Annual Meeting dinner at Wiltse's in May.

Known as "America's First Family of Birding," Don and Lillian Stokes have been trusted authorities and educators of birding information for more than 25 years. This husband and wife team are leading television personalities as well as best-selling birding authors.

The Stokes created and hosted the first birdwatching TV shows on national television, with more than 40 million viewers tuning in to their PBS series.

They will present their newest work, "The Stokes Field Guide To The Birds Of North America," and tell how they designed it for you, the birder of today. Six years in the making, and covering 854 species with over 3,400 color photos, this is the most comprehensive, national photographic field guide ever published.

In their lively presentation, Don and Lillian will take you behind the scenes into what's involved in producing a work of this magnitude, teach you how to fast forward your bird identification skills, and show favorite photos from the book, taken by Lillian.

The Stokes have published 32 colorful, informative, user-friendly Stokes Field Guides and books, including Stokes Field Guide To Birds, selling more than four and a half million copies to date!

Additional seminars at the Birding Festival will include:

"Warblers"- Roger Eriksson

"Rainbows, Halos, and Glories"- Myles Willard

"Bird Journaling"- Harold Eyster who was voted young birder of 2010 by American Birding Association.

"Invasive Plants"- Caroline Henne

"Hawk I.D."- Gerald Wykes
"What Does The Future Hold For The Kirtland's Warbler?"- Chris Mensing (USFWS)

Aliens vs. Natives

By Emily Kemnitz

You know how it works: plants capture the sun's energy and produce food that sustains all life on Earth. Animals eat the plants and their products: leaves, seeds, fruits. Plants and animals evolve together and become interdependent. Our favorite fauna, birds, eat not only the seeds and fruit but the insects that feed on the leaves. They need insects for their nestlings. But, if our native insects have not had evolutionary time to learn to eat plants that evolved in another corner of the World they will be absent. In addition, some of these alien plants have no enemies in their new environment and grow so very well without their natural enemies that they crowd out native plants and consequently resident insects that breeding birds depend on for their broods. New generations of birds will not be as healthy and their numbers decline.

When we plant beautiful alien plants in our gardens they may seem benign, but they often don't support the insect populations necessary for breeding birds. In addition, because they have no native insect predation control it is often not many years before they spread and become invasive, as have autumn olive, Japanese honeysuckle, knotweed and barberry as well as garlic mustard.

The Au Sable Valley, as well as Michigan and all North America are having serious consequences from invasive alien plants plants that lessen insect production,

crowd out native vegetation, alter frequency of wildfires, absorb surface or ground water, decrease the soil biota diversity, deplete soil nutrients, degrade aquatic habitats, increase competitive pressure on endangered plant species and degrade wildlife forage.

Now, in mid-winter, we might begin to dream and plan next season's gardens. By favoring native plants, we help sustain biodiversity. We need to tolerate a few ragged, chewed leaves of natives, knowing that we need those insects for our birds. When you see a "perfect" garden, it will be a reminder that alien plants are not helpful and may be harmful to our birds, eventually to ourselves, as more and more habitat is lost.

I suggest that you go to:

www.michiganplantsuppliers.org

and

www.michiganplantproducersassociation.org

for lists of native plant species



Photo courtesy of L. VanWagoner

Looking Ahead

Our **February 8** meeting at Oscoda High School will feature Paul Thompson, our local USFS expert biologist who will present a program on wild turkeys. And Carol Plunkey, president of the Pine River Van Etten Lake Watershed Alliance will make a brief presentation on the work her group is conducting with the aid of Huron Pines to improve the water quality of our lakes and streams.

Our **February 19** field trip will take us to Harrisville State Park to check out Frank Apsey's birds.

At our **March 8 meeting in Tawas** Roger Eriksson will present photos and commentary to help us identify warblers. Members can also sign up for the Bluebird box workshops

Wendy Tatar of Michigan Audubon will be at our **April** meeting to help us prepare for the May Tawas Point Birding Festival

Go to:

<http://ausablevalleyaudubon.org>
for periodic updates

A question frequently heard, especially from persons trying to make conversation, is, "How did you first become interested in birds?" Strangely enough, this question is seldom asked among birders themselves. *Roger Barton*