

# The Goldfinch

September  
2010

Davless County Audubon Society, [www.davlessaudubon.net](http://www.davlessaudubon.net)

## Experience the monarch miracle

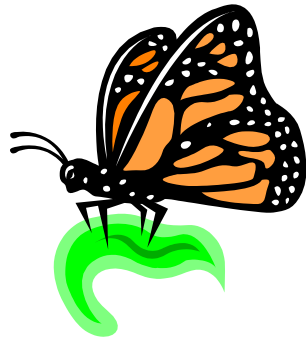
### Club to tag butterflies on their way to Mexico

Thanks to the Slough Wildlife Management Area in Henderson County, Western Kentuckians live near one of the prime rest stops as the monarch butterfly continues its journey to mountain peaks west of Mexico City — 1,400 miles away. The Sloughs feature large nectar-bearing plants, including swamp milkweed, one of their favorite food sources.

For the past several years, John James Audubon State Park has sponsored a tagging program for the Monarch Watch program, which provides scientists with key information about nature's winged jewels. Butterfly lovers capture them,

tag them and release them. These tags provide scientists with important data, such as migration dates and location, sex and whether the butterfly was raised in the wild. Up to 200 butterflies have been tagged in a single day, according to park naturalist Julie McDonald.

Monarchs are one of the largest and most recognized butterflies in our area. Help tag migration butterflies for the Monarch Watch Program Sept. 18 and 19. Tags and nets will be provided for 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. sessions. Please dress for potentially marshy conditions. The cost is \$5 per person; family rate \$13 (up to five members, extra members \$2.50 each). The Daviess County Audubon Society will carpool for the 1 p.m. session Sept. 18. We will leave from the back parking lot at Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn at noon.



## OCTC's Perkins to discuss winged wonders

Micah Perkins, associate professor of biology at Owensboro Community & Technical College, will present "Monarch: Natural History and Conservation" at the Tuesday, Sept. 7 meeting of the Daviess County Audubon Society. The club year begins at 7 p.m. at First Christian Church, Seventh Street and J.R. Miller Blvd.

Perkins puts his words into practice, involving students in conservation activities involving monarchs, as well as eastern bluebirds and state-protected snake species. He has been at OCTC since 2005, teaching such courses as Introduction to Conservation Biology, Zoology with Laboratory, Botany with Laboratory and Introduction to Biology.

Prior to coming to OCTC, he was the naturalist at John James Audubon State Park and was a wildlife research coordinator at Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center in Newton, Ga. He holds a bachelor's degree in wildlife biology from Murray State University in Murray and a master's degree in natural resources with an emphasis in avian conservation from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Neb.

The meeting will also include a review of the chapter's annual report and election of officers.

### From the President's Perch

## Planning ahead keeps us ahead

By Brenda Little

When the DCAS board of directors met in September for the first time last year, we had to deal with discontent.

Our attendance had dropped to alarming levels. There was an air of despair. It was actually feared that we had *been there, done that*, and that there were no more good ideas for workable programs and we were going to the same places for field trips year after year. Then someone asked if we could go back to the way we used to do things when we had a program committee that worked like a think tank, tossed out ideas and picked the ones they thought would be best for the coming year.

That is just what we tried last year, month after month a group

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### September 2010 calendar

\*Meeting, 7 p.m. Sept. 7, First Christian Church, Seventh and J.R. Miller Blvd.

\*Monarch field trip, leave at noon from back parking lot at Moonlite Bar-B-Q Inn, noon Sept. 18.



From left: Scott Harp attracts birds at Yellow Creek Park at the picnic; Jan Howard and Charles and Laura Morris enjoy potluck.

## Harp leads e-birding session at annual picnic

The club year wound down June 1 with a picnic at Yellow Creek Park. Members enjoyed the potluck meal and munched down on Henshawburgers.

State wildlife biologist Scott Harp demonstrated how a simple iPod and speakers make a relatively inexpensive e-birding tool. Outside of the shelter house, the sounds drew interest from such birds as indigo buntings, and within the park, members received responses from such species as Carolina chickadee and great-crested flycatcher. He also briefly discussed the ethical debate behind using such devices during breeding seasons, noting that it should be done responsibly.



Members of the Daviess County Audubon Society looks for grassland birds at Howell Wetlands in Evansville. (Ken Hurm photo)

## Varied habitats enhance Howell Wetlands birding

Before the brutal heat of the summer of 2010 took hold, the Daviess County Audubon Society journeyed to Howell Wetlands in Evansville June 5.

The urban nature spot gave members a potpourri of habitat: swamp, woodlands surrounding the waterway and a grassland plot which attracted a grasshopper sparrow.

The trip was highlighted by a nice look at a male and female blue grosbeak, a family of wood ducks – with nine ducklings – and nice audio from prothonotary warblers, spurred by guide Tim Griffith's device – before he dropped it into the water,

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*Clockwise from top left: Campers at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden and Cravens Elementary learned about building a hummingbird feeder, the parts of a bird, optics from Ken Hurm and migration from Charles Morris.*



## Camps keep kids learning all summer long

Two summer camps had a nature influence, as the DCAS went camping at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden and Cravens Elementary School.

In a joint effort with the Joe Ford Nature Library, Grace Ford and Mary Kissel presented June 9 programs at Cravens, including the "Build a Bird" program.

July 13, garden kids were thrilled with seeing baby birds around the garden, including active robin's nests and nests tucked

in the cattails at the frog-filled pond. A female red-winged black-bird let the kids know she wasn't thrilled by the attention.

Dodging showers, the kids learned from Ken Hurm about birding optics. Mary Kissel led a session on common backyard birds, and they helped kids build hummingbird feeders.

Charles Morris discussed the wonders of migration, noting that birds can travel about 18,000 miles in the search for habitat and food once the insect supply dwindles in late fall.

# How did the heat affect 'Hotford' nests?

## Cool spring actually more deadly for Ohio Co. bluebirds

By Brenda Little

I began monitoring bird nest boxes about a dozen years ago. At first I just dabbled with a box or two here and there. Then I put in a trail of a half dozen boxes on neighbors' properties up and down our country road located a few miles north of Hartford, KY. For the past decade I've branched out by putting up trails at 2 elementary schools, a half dozen boxes at the Ohio County Park, 4 boxes at the assisted living facility where my father lives, and one box near the Powell Bird Blind at the Girl Scout Camp until I reached my limit of 25 which takes about 3 hours of travel on roadways and hiking from box to box.

As the summer of 2010 went from a very cold and wet start to almost relentless and unbearably high heat, I wondered if the heat were just getting to me alone or if it were having a detrimental effect on the birds that have occupied the nest boxes I check each Sunday morning. The first thing I noticed was that the chickadees that have so faithfully used the same box early in the season for year after year did not nest in the box this year

nor anywhere else on the trails. It is possible that the paving of our driveway next to the box or the tilted angle of the post holding the box that we were slow in setting upright is what made the box less appealing to that delightful little bird.

As I wrapped up my year of monitoring for Cornell University's NestWatch under the auspices of the Lab of Ornithology on the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in August, I decided to use a spreadsheet software program to do an analysis comparing two years of data, 2009, which was a cool summer, with 2010.

What I found is that the extreme weather might have had the effect of decreasing egg production by 6%, 144 eggs laid last year dropped to 138. The number of chicks fledged dropped from 97 to 88, a 9% drop this summer, a percentage not high enough to pinpoint the cause of the decrease.

It was in deaths of baby birds that the difference this summer was the most stunning. In 2009 the deaths that occurred were due to predation by a snake and raccoons. The increase went from 9 in 2009 to 14 in 2010 which is a 55%

increase in deaths of nestlings. However over half of the deaths that occurred this summer are judged to be due to the weather but not due to the heat.

It was the cold in May that is believed to have wiped out 8 ready-to-fledge Eastern bluebirds. At least 4

of the other chicks that died likely succumbed to being in a clutch that was too large for the parent birds to handle, and all of us will likely agree that the high heat day after day put an added strain on the parents as well as on the chicks in the crowded



boxes.

I can add a further unscientific observation as this year of nest box monitoring ends. This is the first year when I grew weary of my volunteer efforts. It was the first year when I lacked excitement and anticipation about what I would find as I moved from box to box examining the contents and condition of the birds. There was a day when I truly thought that I would pass out before I made it back to my trusty old Jeep. Even though I cannot conclude that the heat was detrimental to the birds, it was certainly hard on this old bird!

## Howell

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offering a cautionary lesson about the perils of electronic birding.

Other species sighted included: great blue heron, turkey vulture, Canada goose, muscovy duck, red-shouldered hawk,

mourning dove, chimney swift, ruby-throated hummingbirds, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, eastern wood pewee, white-eyed vireo, red-eyed vireo, blue jay, American crow, bank swallow, barn swallow, Carolina chickadee, tufted titmouse, eastern bluebird, American robin, European starling, cedar waxwing, northern parula, black-and-white warbler, prothonotary warbler, song sparrow, northern cardinal, blue grosbeak, indigo bunting, red-winged blackbird, common grackle, brown-headed cowbird, American goldfinch and house sparrow.



# Ford library brings center back to life

## *Audubon shower discussed for October*

**T**he Joe Ford Nature Library has a new home. The Joe Ford Nature Center has a new lease on life. The U.S. 60 West site has welcomed the collection of the longtime Daviess County naturalist.

Director Grace Ford couldn't be more excited about the move from Brescia University. Thanks to hours of work from local volunteers, the library reopened Aug. 15 to delight nature lovers of all ages.

Having two rooms gives them much more room to display collections. One room features large display cases with resident snakes, an area dedicated to Joe's books and an expanded gift shop, which helps provide funds for the library and its programs. Joe Ford hopes to be available at the book corner on Mondays.

The other is filled with shelves of books and magazines, including those items donated by DCAS co-founders Bert and Millie Powell. Ford hopes the new arrangement will encourage more patrons to take advantage of publications devoted to bird watching.

Grace Ford said she's also grateful for the amount of wall space at the center, which helps in posting items from the Joe Ford collection.

With help from a network of friends in the community, the Fords have always offered hikes in the county and worked with various youth organizations to provide them with outdoor experiences. The new setting should allow them to expand programming. A Junior Naturalist program already has been announced, with at least a dozen "tweens" signed up.

She is hoping that the Daviess County Audubon Society will help establish a bird sanctuary on the property, providing year-round feeding for the resident birds. Even during 2010's poor Christmas Bird Count in Owensboro, one of the bright spots was the Ford property, which is a woodpecker's delight.

Board members are exploring having a "shower" for the Ford Center at its October meeting. Items for the shower could include bird feeders, thistle and black oil sunflower seeds and gift cards from local stores which supply nature-related items.

The formal grand opening of the library will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 10. However, the library is now open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Thursday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Friday and 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday.



*The library has much more room for its books and journals in the new setting.*



*Alice the python welcomes visitors to the library. One room is filled with display cases, Joe Ford's books and an expanded gift shop.*

**The formal grand opening of the new Joe Ford Nature Library will be at 2 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 10.**



## World traveler

A young contestant tries her hand at "Where in the World?" a bird migration game at the Owensboro Multicultural Festival Aug. 22. Daviess County Audubon manned a booth at the annual celebration to encourage global thinking of the environment.

## Planning

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of chapter leaders sat around Judy Adams' kitchen table raising ideas up a proverbial flag pole and counting salutes around the table. We knew we had to come up with some exciting and enthralling topics to get our attendance back up plus we faced the challenge to come up with dynamic presenters of those topics.

From time to time, someone would have a "Eureka!" idea, and we would be like kids at a pep rally shouting, "Call him! Call him now!" Another person would wink and say, "I know his wife. She owes me a favor. I'm sure we can get him to do a program for us." The enthusiasm was contagious within the committee and with the general membership.

The feeling of despair and discontent vaporized and were replaced by an energized group that touted our planned programs all over town. And that is just what we intend to do again this year except that we are trying to put together a plan for the entire 2010-2011 year rather than approaching the need month-by-month. We still welcome input from everyone, but we aren't wringing our hands waiting for ideas to come our way. We're trying to book what will sell using the Goldilocks approach: Not too cold. Not too hot. But something that tastes just right and is definitely not lukewarm.

A humorous phrase is often tossed around to describe something that is not likely to work: "We've got a committee on it." Well, we really do, and you know what? It's been working like a charm. Ours is the kind of discontent that works, and there is no cure for that kind of discontent but success.

## Yarnold assuming national presidency

**By National Audubon Society**

Environmental defender David Yarnold has been named the new president and chief executive officer of the National Audubon Society.

Prior to taking the reins Sept. 1, Yarnold served as executive director of Environmental Defense Fund and president of Environmental Defense Action Fund. Prior to that, he was a Pulitzer Prize-winning editor at the San Jose Mercury News.

"David brings proven leadership in the for-profit and non-profit sectors to Audubon at a time when efforts to protect birds, habitats and the resources that sustain us are needed more than ever," said Holt Thrasher, Audubon's board chair. "His leadership ability, his passion for conservation and grass-roots action, his communications skills and his organizational expertise all make him the perfect fit for the Audubon of 2010 and beyond."

Yarnold has been at EDF since April 2005, where he helped expand EDF's innovative corporate partnerships work, focused on EDF's international programs, particularly in China, and helped the organization grow from \$52 million to \$117 million in revenue. He was also president of the organization's Action Fund, its political action arm.

"Audubon's mission has never been more relevant. From the grass roots to statehouses to national and regional policy, its wingspan is unparalleled," Yarnold said. "I'm excited by the opportunity to work with a nationwide network of Audubon chapters and Audubon centers that combine local concern, knowledge and action to equal conservation that makes a difference on a grand scale. It will be an honor to lead an organization whose name has meant 'trust' and 'conservation achievement' for more than a hundred years."

**Yarnold helped the Environmental Defense Fund grow from \$52 million to \$117 million in revenue. He was also president of the organization's Action Fund.**