



## A Mission at Myers



*Hoy held an impromptu beach cleanup at Racine's Samuel Myers Park on Sunday, August 23. (If you didn't hear about it in time or couldn't attend, don't worry; we'll do others in the future!)*

Rain was predicted and the sky was overcast, but by 8 a.m., cars had half filled the lot at Myers, and Hoyers were out on the beach, be-gloved, bags in hand, bending to scoop up all manner of unnatural objects. Shorebirds continued feeding, unperturbed, sometimes coming quite close to those who crouched near the water and sifted through the sand.



*A Semipalmated Sandpiper threads its way through the trash (circled) prior to the cleanup; photo by Kristin Wegner.*

Some of the trash was so obvious and so lightweight that one can't imagine why the litterer didn't simply carry it away: empty water bottles, beer and soda cans, pocket-sized liquor bottles. Caps of all shapes and sizes, enough to suit any container imaginable, lay on the sand or half-submerged in the mud.

Dog waste was a sadly frequent sight. Many who had let their pets run freely on the beach (where dogs aren't actually allowed) had not cleaned up after them, and one person who *had* scooped the waste into a plastic bag had then left the bag sitting on the sand, festering in the sun, to become someone else's problem.



Much of the litter was subtle, hidden amidst innocent driftwood and rushes. Candy wrappers snagged in the sedges reminded one of the snarls of a House Sparrow's nest. Gobs of crumbling Styrofoam stuck in the mud like blobs of cottage cheese. Old cups and wrappers advertised their former contents to the slugs, to the toads, to the sky, to no one.

As I plucked up the stray bits of plastic around me, I thought of a video I'd seen on the Cornell website where researchers dissected a bolus coughed up by a young Laysan Albatross. It was distressing to see how much garbage its parents had mistaken for food and transferred to the chick. How easy would it be for the birds on our local beaches to gulp down gray, slimy cigarette filters, bright shards of plastic, unmentionable rubbers that wriggled like larvae, fishing lures parted from their lines? Especially when I, with the advantage of recognizing these items, had so much difficulty distinguishing them from their surroundings?

Cigarette filters were by far the most numerous offenders; we collected thousands. These and the various broken pens, coffee stirrers, popsicle sticks, and lollipop stems looked so much like bits of driftwood that only way to extract the bad from the good was to comb through the mess with one's fingers. Shotgun wads were beached everywhere, splayed open like miniature squid.



*A fistful of typical trash: foam, plastic, wrappers, and bottle caps*

Some of the detritus was ordinary abandoned beach fare: toy shovels, barrettes, a sock, a pair of flip flops. Some of the objects were truly bizarre: a perfectly serviceable ten-gallon bucket (now repurposed as a garbage pail), a pair of stiletto-heeled shoes, two paintbrush heads sans handles, a knob to a kitchen drawer, artificial flowers and leaves scattered among real ones, a large green comb, a handful of tiny plastic chickens, a rusted hoop of metal.

But our efforts were rewarded: sand once spattered with a rainbow confetti of unidentifiable plastic shards returned to a uniform color. The clouds gave us shade and forced the insects, and thus the birds, lower. Hungry swifts and swallows swooped above our heads with a constant twittering and bubbling that seemed to cheer us on. In less than two hours, we covered two-thirds of the beach and filled two dozen trash bags!



Many thanks to our crew of fifteen (some pictured above) who helped! You really made a difference for the shorebirds, terns, gulls, herons, rails, and waterfowl that rely on Myers Park!

*-Kristin Wegner, with photos by Eric Howe*



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Email addresses of Board members are available at: [www.hoyaudubon.org](http://www.hoyaudubon.org)

### Next Board of Directors Meeting: Thursday, October 22, 2015, 7:00 p.m.

All members are welcome to attend!

Location TBA—Contact a board member for location details.

**Field Trip Coordinator**

*Coordinator needed; contact Hoy to help!*

If you have suggestions regarding future programs or field trips please contact [hoyfieldtrips@hoyaudubon.org](mailto:hoyfieldtrips@hoyaudubon.org)

**Newsletter Editor**

Kristin Wegner

**Ideas for the newsletter?** Send your suggestions, recaps of birding seminars/activities, fun facts, and birding tidbits to the attention of Newsletter Editor at: Hoy Audubon, P.O. Box 044626, Racine, WI 53404 or email to: [hoynewsletter@hoyaudubon.org](mailto:hoynewsletter@hoyaudubon.org)

**The Hoy Honker** is the newsletter of the Hoy Audubon Society, Inc. PO Box 044626, Racine, WI 53404.

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## A Wetland of International Importance



The Chiwaukee Prairie/Illinois Beach Lake Plain supports some of the most diverse and biologically rich habitats in the Great Lakes region. In recognition of these globally significant natural communities, the Lake Plain (located between Kenosha, WI and Waukegan, IL) was officially designated a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention in September.

Ramsar is a global environmental and intergovernmental agreement that provides a framework for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands. The United States hosts 37 Ramsar Sites, including four sites in Wisconsin (Horicon Marsh, Door Peninsular Coastal Wetlands, Upper Mississippi River Floodplain Wetland, Kakagon Bad River Sloughs).

The 15 mile/3,716 acre coastal landscape of public lands within the Lake Plain meet three Ramsar designation criteria. 1) It contains vulnerable/imperiled high quality plant communities (six of them), 2) contains federally protected wetland dependent species (two of them), and 3) it is an important breeding habitat for wetland birds (such as the Red-winged Blackbird chicks pictured at the right) as well as a critical migratory bird stopover (for at least 310 species).



In addition, the Lake Plain's wetland and uplands host 930 native plant species (such as the Blue Flag Iris pictured below) and 300 animal species, including 63 that are state protected. The Lake Plain provides tourism for the local economies, drawing over two million visitors annually. Chiwaukee Prairie itself is also recognized as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service, a Wetland Gem by the Wisconsin Wetlands Association, and is designated a Wisconsin State Natural Area.



For volunteer conservation activities in Wisconsin, contact the Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund at [volunteer@chiwaukee.org](mailto:volunteer@chiwaukee.org) ([chiwaukee.org](http://chiwaukee.org)) in Wisconsin.

*-article and photos by Eric Howe*

## Much Ado About Myers

Over the course of the summer, the terrain at Racine's Myers Park has steadily evolved. Volunteers planted new vegetation to restore habitat and reduce erosion. On the east side of the park near the breakwall, a new dune was sculpted to curve around a pool of wetland freshly studded with arrowroot, some of it still in bloom in late August when Hoy visited for a beach cleanup (page 1). A woodchip path provides a welcome alternative to wading through the muck and mud that is so attractive to shorebirds but so difficult to clean off one's boots.

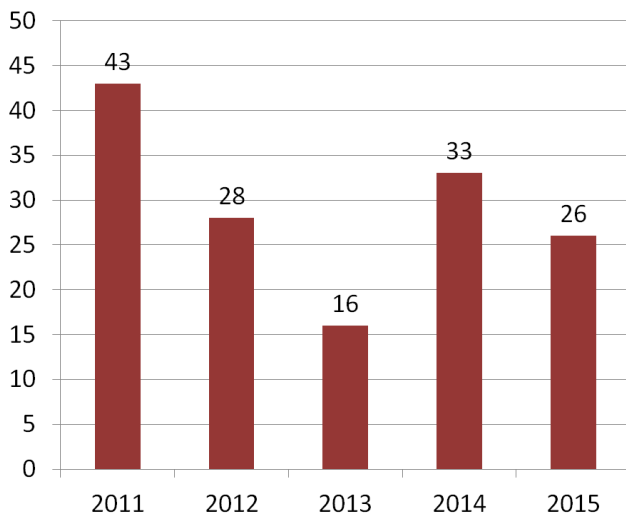
The restoration project at Myers isn't completed yet, but what has been done so far shows promise, and the birds (and birders!) certainly benefit from the results. In August, Myers hosted such notables as a Great Black-backed Gull, Stilt and Baird's Sandpipers, a Black-bellied Plover, and a Whimbrel. Earlier, during the breeding season, several birds chose Myers for their nests: a Herring Gull, a Spotted Sandpiper, and at least two pairs of Killdeer. This area has long proved its value as a migration stopover and a bird buffet, so we're happy to see it thriving!

- Kristin Wegner

## Big Sit Success

Although we weren't able to reach last year's 33 species total, our 2015 Big Sit at the Wind Point Lighthouse was a wonderful way to spend the day! We had a couple close encounters with Cooper's Hawks, got some nice looks at Palm and Blackpoll Warblers feeding on the sand and in the shrubs, and had fun just hanging out on the beach with fellow birders, lounging in the sun.

Strong winds from the north whipped up the waves, making for good beach photos (and favorable surfing for those who braved the water), but the noise made it difficult to hear passing birds and the birders who were trying to call attention to them. It wasn't until afternoon that the group finally picked up a Ruby-throated Hummingbird that been in the area—earlier attempts to point it out had been lost in the wind. The final total for 2015 was 26 different species of birds seen—not bad for a very windy day! Here's a look at our Big Sit numbers year-by-year:



- Kristin Wegner

## Solving a Myers Mystery

*Earlier this summer, a distant juvenile Night-Heron at Myers Park provided a bit of a mystery: Some features pointed to Yellow-crowned but other suggested Black-crowned...so which was it?*

*Fortunately, the bird eventually moved around enough that birders could get a better look at its characteristics and make the identification: The Myers mystery heron was a Yellow-crowned.*

*John Dixon snapped some definitive photos and provided these tips for telling juvenile Night-Herons apart.*

Telling a juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron from a juvenile Black-crowned Night-Heron can be tricky but here are a few field marks to go by:



In the photo at the left, the white streaks and dots on the bird are very well defined and not blurry as they are on a juvenile Black-crowned.

The bill is very thick and dagger-like, whereas the bill of a Black-crowned would be thinner and longer with a yellowish base. Normally a Yellow-crowned's bill would be all black, but all birds are different and this bird's bill just happens to be grayish at the base. This may be due to the age of the bird, which may be just out of the nest.

In the flight picture (below) the legs and feet extend far beyond the end of the tail, and the primaries and secondaries are very dark gray in contrast with the back feathers and other wing feathers.



In a juvenile Black-crowned, the feet barely extend past the end of the tail and there is very little contrast between the primaries and secondaries vs. the back feathers and other wing feathers.

- Photos and heron tips by John Dixon



## Hoy's 2015 Bluebird Batch

It is always fun to check the bluebird trail. There is the joy of watching the adults flying as they watch you and wonder why you are close to their nest and maybe some eggs or hatchlings. Meanwhile, the tree swallows may be buzzing you in defense of their nests and young.



Results for our Kenosha and Racine trails were somewhat disappointing this year. A third cold and wet spring keeps our numbers well below the peak year of 2012. With all boxes reporting, we had 712 Eastern Bluebirds, 974 Tree Swallows, 172 House Wrens, and 21 Black-capped Chickadees.

Last year, we had 695 bluebirds, 840 tree swallows, and 112 wrens. We will wait to see if this will be our new normal for the weather.

Thanks to all the trail monitors for their help and dedication!

If you are interested in becoming a monitor, please contact me at 262-694-2206. — Stan Rosenstiel



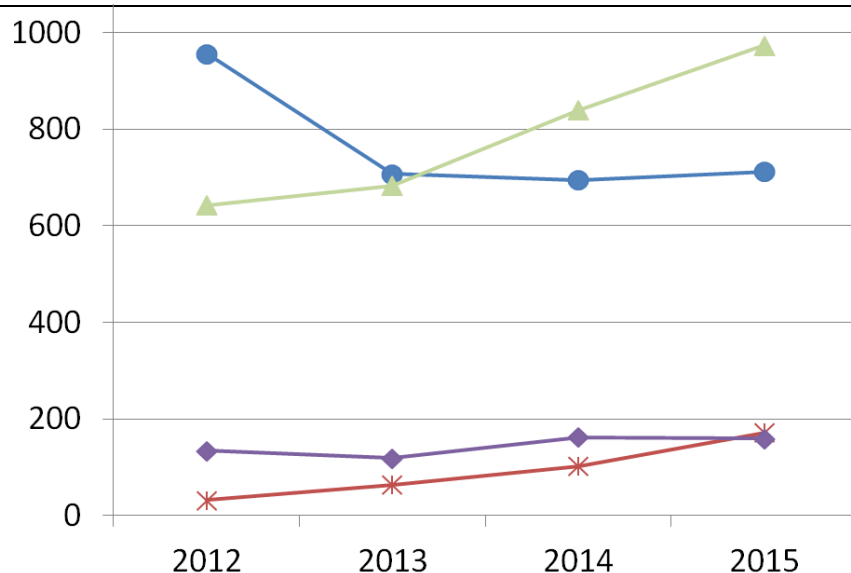
## Happy Birthday, Helen!

Hoy member Helen Norman celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on September 1, 2015! Best wishes and happy birding from all of us at Hoy Audubon!



## Purple Martins Holding Steady

Hoy's Racine-based martin houses fledged 159 Purple Martins this year, two more birds than last year, making it Racine's highest martin year yet! (Martins were not monitored in Kenosha this year, which accounts for the slight decline in the graph below.)



## Numbers of Fledged Birds from boxes monitored by Hoy

- Eastern Bluebirds
- ▲ Tree Swallows
- \* House Wrens
- ◆ Purple Martins



**Christmas Bird Counts—SAVE THE DATES!**  
Watch Hoy's website for details/updates.

**Saturday, December 19—Racine CBC**  
To sign up, contact Eric Howe at  
[cbc@hoyaclub.org](mailto:cbc@hoyaclub.org) or 262-498-3355.

**Tuesday, December 22—Kenosha CBC**  
To sign up, contact Valerie Mann at  
[naturalist@pringlec.org](mailto:naturalist@pringlec.org) or 262-857-8008.

**Burlington CBC Date TBA**

## Burlington School Forest

This excellent section of mixed pine, hardwood, and old field habitat lies adjacent to the western side of Bong State Recreation Area. The entrance with parking is on the west side of County J about one mile south of Highway 142. It is a locally excellent area for owls with Short-eared, Long-eared, Great Horned, Eastern Screech, and Northern Saw-whet owls having all been found here. Eastern Bluebird, Blue-winged Warbler, Field Sparrow, Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Wild Turkey can all be found during nesting season. A nice variety of hiking trails allows ample access to the interior of this area.

*-Jerry DeBoer, "Wisconsin's Favorite Bird Haunts"*

Hoy will be having a field trip to this area soon to go owling!

**Join the fun!**

## Advice for Winter Birding

**What to Wear:** Winter weather can be unpredictable, so warm layers are advised. Comfortable, waterproof footwear is a must, as are a warm coat, hat, and gloves. Hand warmers are highly recommended.

**Finding Your Field Trip:** Visit Hoy's website for driving directions and maps (when available).

**Watch the Weather:** Heavy snow, icy roadways, poor visibility, or other potentially hazardous conditions may cause a field trip to be cancelled. We post cancellations on Hoy's website and the Hoy Facebook page/group whenever it is possible to do so ahead of time. **If you are unsure whether a field trip will take place, please use good judgment when deciding whether to attend.**

## Upcoming Activities

Thursday, October 1, 7:00 p.m.

**Hoy Meeting, Program: Racine Zoo**

*Kenosha Northside Public Library  
1500 27th Avenue, Kenosha, WI 53140*

Beth Heidorn, the new Executive Director of the Racine Zoo, will discuss topics such as conservation and upcoming zoo programs.

Tuesday, October 27, 7:00 p.m.

**Northern Mockingbird—The Great Mimicker**

*Kenosha Southwest Public Library  
7979 38th Ave., Kenosha, WI 53141*

Rick Fare of the Hoy Audubon Society will present. The Northern Mockingbird is well known for its musical qualities and its ability to vocally mimic other birds. Learn about the mockingbird's annual life cycle, along with its behavior, range, and ecology, as well as its influence on literature, music, folklore, and politics.

Thursday, November 5, 7:00 p.m.

**Hoy Meeting, Program: Backyard Bird Feeding**

*Kenosha Southwest Public Library  
7979 38th Ave., Kenosha, WI 53141*

Brian Nett of the local Bird Nest store will speak about the variety of bird seed and feeders for the upcoming winter months. He will also have on display the some the newest feeder designs.

Saturday, November 7, 9:00 a.m.

**Hoy Field Trip: Shoop Park/Wind Point Birding**

*Shoop Park, Racine*

We'll meet at the parking lot at Shoop Park and walk north along the lakeshore trail to the Wind Point Lighthouse to look for fall migrants. Dress for cold and windy weather and wear sturdy walking shoes (it's 0.6 miles one way, and the trail may be overgrown). We'll bird here every Saturday morning in November!

Friday, November 13, 7:00 p.m.

**Hoy Field Trip: Owl Prowl at Bong State Recreational Area**

*Meet at DNR parking lot on north side of Hwy BB*

We will drive near and within the park to listen for owls. WI State Parks vehicle admission sticker required to park within Bong.

Saturday, November 14, 9:00 a.m.

**Hoy Field Trip: Shoop Park/Wind Point Birding**

*Shoop Park, Racine*

Saturdays, November 21 and 28, 9:00 a.m.

**Hoy Field Trip: Shoop Park/Wind Point Birding**

Thursday, December 3, 5:30 p.m. Setup; 6:00 p.m. Dinner

**Annual Holiday Potluck and Program**

*Location TBA—Watch the website or contact a board member*

Hoy's annual Holiday Potluck. Bring a dish to pass along with your own dinnerware and utensils. Hoy will provide coffee and napkins. We'll discuss upcoming events and share holiday songs.

Saturday, December 5, 9:00 a.m.

**Hoy Field Trip: Kenosha Lakefront Birding**

*7825 First Avenue, Kenosha, WI 53143*

We'll meet at the Southport Park parking area (just north of the Kenosha Sand Dunes).

## HOY AUDUBON SOCIETY

P.O. BOX 044626

RACINE, WI 53404

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



*Cleanup at Myers; photo by Eric Howe*

**Please take the time to renew your [Hoy Audubon Chapter Membership for 2015/2016](http://www.hoyaudubon.org).**

Annual renewals for Hoy Audubon Society "Chapter Supporter" memberships are due on July 1 of each calendar year. Please send a check payable to Hoy Audubon Society.

Chapter Supporter Dues: \$12 per individual

Total amount enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Send to: Hoy Audubon Society, P. O. Box 044626, Racine, WI 53404**



*Semipalmated Sandpiper at Myers; photo by Kristin Wegner*

**See the Hoy Honker "In Living Color."**

There are two ways to see our newsletter in color: view it on the Hoy website at [www.hoyaudubon.org](http://www.hoyaudubon.org) or get on the email newsletter distribution list by sending an email to [hoynewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:hoynewsletter@gmail.com) and asking to be put on the electronic mailing list. You can now find us on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/HoyAudubonSociety](https://www.facebook.com/HoyAudubonSociety)