



Native Plants: What's the Big Deal?

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Many of us first became enthralled with the natural world through a flash of color in the landscape. A trilling song, a complex mating dance, a smooth glide across the lake. Birding is a gateway to begin observing the natural world as a system we are part of, rather than disconnected from.

For many years we have been sold a bill of goods. The notion that a tidy, well kept lawn and landscape full of recognizable plants is a display of good citizenship on our part. Our residential areas are full of plants from across the globe, so common now one may believe they have been here all along. Turf products promise to rid your yard of unsightly dandelions, and mosquito beaters let us enjoy these spaces without the risk of annoying, itchy bites.

This has been the case for over 100 years, and we are just now beginning to understand the impact of the status quo. Bird, insect, amphibian, reptile, and mammal populations are crashing. The resulting ecological niches are quickly filled with invasive plants and wildlife which only serves to progress native decline more rapidly.



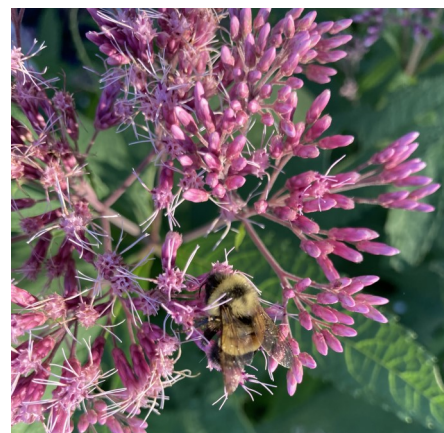
Common Eastern Bumble Bee on Wild Senna,
photo by Kristin Wegner

With such widespread habitat loss, invasive pressure, and chemically sterilized landscapes, how could this problem ever be solved? The answer is quite simple: It begins with you. This may seem overwhelming, too big a task for small folk such as ourselves but in fact it is easy, rewarding, and beautiful.

There is a bit of a learning curve. Success and failure is all part of landscaping! The first step is to familiarize yourself with native plants. We can all recognize a hosta, barberry, callery pear, burning bush, blue spruce, etc. but why? Because these are the plants popularized by outdated landscaping ideas. Cheap, fast, and pest-free was the way to go! The result is a residential landscape dominated by plants of little importance to our local wildlife.

Native trees, shrubs, and perennials have one main disadvantage: Folks simply don't know about them. These species attract insects to your yard.... who wants a yard full of bugs? Well, for starters, birds do. Those baby birds need to eat something, and black oil sunflower seed simply can't do the trick. Even better, once these native insects are around they begin to naturally control common outdoor pests such as mosquitoes and aphids without the need for chemical intervention.

Any location will do! Wet, dry, shady, sunny, clay, loam, sand... doesn't matter. There are native plants that will not only survive but thrive in any condition imaginable. Every native plant placed in our residential landscapes becomes a little ecosystem of its own.



Rusty-patched Bumble Bee on Joe Pye,
photo by Kristin Wegner

From a single container on a condominium patio to acres of restored prairie, every little bit helps. We don't need to rip out all of our existing landscape, that would be expensive! But when it does come time to replace a tree, shrub, or create a pretty little flower patch we should be selecting native species to fill in the gaps.

Start small, start simple. Once you have dipped your toes into the world of native plants you'll find the water quite inviting! It's a bit of a cliché, but true: If you plant it, they will come.

Winter is a time for learning! Here are a few recommendations to get cozy with.

- ▲ Johnson's Nursery, jniplants.com: Their Wisconsin Natives booklet is amazing!
- ▲ Agrecol Nursery, agrecol.com: A tremendous resource for native perennials!
- ▲ *The Gardener's Guide to Prairie Plants*, Neil Diboll and Hilary Cox: A fantastic text to find the right perennials for your site. The charts alone are worth the asking price.
- ▲ Doug Tallamy: Prolific and relatable author and entomologist! You really can't go wrong with any of his books. *Nature's Best Hope* is a great starting point.
- ▲ YouTube: That's right, YouTube. While you may need to sift through a few stinkers, there are some really top notch presentations free to watch!

Happy birding!

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Next Board of Directors Meeting:

February 15, 2024

We will continue to meet via phone and Zoom for now.

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To join Hoy, renew your Chapter Supporter membership, or make a donation, visit www.hoysaudubon.org/donate/

Newsletter Editor

Kristin Wegner

Ideas for the newsletter?

Send your suggestions, recaps of birding seminars/activities, fun facts, and birding tidbits to the Newsletter Editor at: Hoy Audubon, PO Box 044626, Racine, WI 53404 or email to: hoynewsletter@hoysaudubon.org

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**Adventures with John:
A Cattle Tyrant in Texas**

Back in mid November, a birding friend messaged me and asked if I was on my way to Corpus Christi, Texas. I asked why? She responded there *is a Cattle Tyrant there*. I thought to myself, “What the heck is a Cattle Tyrant?” I’d never heard of one. I looked it up and saw it as a vagrant way out of range, having never been reported north of Panama before.



Armed with that info, I waited a day to see if it would stick around. It was reported on Facebook the next day so I threw my always packed suitcase in my Jeep and headed for Corpus Christi, Texas.

Arriving just after dawn, I was pleased to see other birders there, so many eyes and ears were present. The bird had a favorite garbage dumpster it hung out at to feed on all the flies gathered there. This, plus the fact of being in the heart of the city, made it even more of an unusual place to look for a bird.

The day passed without so much as a hint that the bird was present. Many people got discouraged and left. As many people know, I do not give up easily, so I stuck it out. As I was getting a snack at about 4:30 p.m., another birder yelled “Tyrant”! There was a mad scramble to the location, and I was able to see it perched on, of all things, a window air conditioning unit in an apartment building. This is an urban bird for sure. Success! But I stayed longer to get better views.

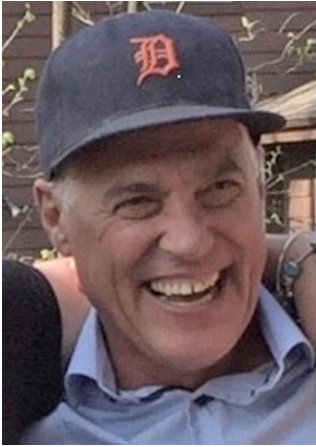
My persistence paid off as a little while later the bird showed up at the street corner it favored and put on a great show hunting for the many large Blue Bottle Flies in the area. It was not bothered in the least by all the attention and hunted obliviously at the feet of many of the thrilled birders and photographers. It was very adept at catching the flies either in the air or chasing them on the street or sidewalk. It is related to flycatchers, so it was an expert at doing just that, catching flies.



It is the first record of this species in the United States, and I was fortunate enough to get great views and pictures of this visitor to Texas!

- article and photos by John Dixon, Hoy Field Trip Chairman

Remembering John Joseph Raymond



John Raymond was the Field Trip coordinator for Hoy Audubon Society from July, 2004 to June 2009. He remained on the Board until November 2009. He was a past president of the WI Herpetological Society. His feeling was that birds are just reptiles gone bad. John had great sense of humor, and always enjoyed sharing birding outings and Hoy projects.

He helped install the four original bluebird trails in Racine and Kenosha counties in 2007, along with Rick Fare, Stan Rosenstiel, and myself. For one of our best field trips ever, he rented and drove a 10-person van to Chicago’s Magic Hedge. He then took us to a great neighborhood restaurant for lunch, and finished with a tour of the Monk Parakeets. John and I also installed wood duck boxes at Nicholson wildlife refuge in the winter—over the ice!

His efforts were well-appreciated, and he was universally liked. It was a loss to our birding community when he left the area.

Rest in peace John.

- Helen Pugh



Having fun pulling garlic mustard with John Raymond

Little Libraries Need Your Love

If you have any extra bird books, nature books, or field guides lying around, consider donating them to Hoy’s Little Nature Libraries. One is located at the DeKoven Foundation in Racine, and the other is at the Wind Point Lighthouse. This second location has proven to be very popular and has sometimes been temporarily emptied of books!

The library at the DeKoven Foundation doesn’t seem to be receiving much traffic, so it’s possible we may reconsider its location in the future. Time will tell.



Thanks to Sue Schuit for snapping this photo of the Wind Point library with its new plaque that shows Hoy donated the library in 2023.

Upcoming Activities

If you have questions or need directions to field trip locations, contact hoyfieldtrips@hoyaudubon.org.

Saturday, January 20, 9:00 a.m.

Hoy Field Trip: Waterfowl & Gulls on the Kenosha Lakefront

7825 First Avenue, Kenosha, WI 53143

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

Saturday, February 17, 9:00 a.m.

Hoy Field Trip: Gulls on the Racine Lakefront

Myers Park, Racine

We'll begin at Myers Park then make our way northward to the Racine Harbor. Bring your binoculars (and spotting scope if possible) and dress for the weather!

Friday, February 16 through Monday, February 19

The Great Backyard Bird Count!

A world-wide, joint effort by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada—open to all.

Visit birdcount.org for more information.

Thursday, March 7, 7:00 p.m.

Hoy Meeting: Topic and Location TBD

Watch Hoy's website and Facebook for details.

Saturday, March 16, 9:00 a.m.

Hoy Field Trip: Eagle Lake Waterfowl

23705 Church Rd., Kansasville, WI

We'll arrive at Eagle Lake park (north side) at 9:00 a.m. We'll bird the lake then check the wetlands near the intersection of Hwy 11 and 75 on the way back. **Check our website prior to the trip;** if the lake is still frozen by late March, we may postpone to March 23 or March 30 and try again.



Wild Turkeys,
photo by Kristin Wegner

◆ Visit Hoy on Facebook at

www.facebook.com/HoyAudubonSociety

A Crane's Journey



Eric and I reported this banded Whooping Crane in fall 2023. Thanks to the incredible efforts of dedicated scientists and crane lovers, you can read her life story [here](#).

- Kristin Wegner

Join Hoy Audubon or renew your Membership!

Renewals for Hoy Audubon Society "Chapter Supporter" memberships are due on **July 1** of each calendar year. Chapter Supporter dues are \$15 per individual. To join or renew online, visit www.hoyaudubon.org/donate/. To join or renew by mail, complete this form and send with a check payable to **Hoy Audubon Society**.

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