

Special Issue  
2020 Photography Contest  
Volume II No. 1, Spring 2021

# The Rectrix

A Newsletter of the Missouri River Bird Observatory



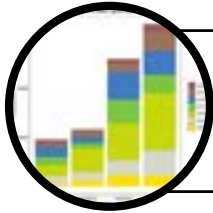


# Our Mission



## Conservation

To contribute to the conservation of Missouri's migratory and resident birds through scientific research, community outreach, and education.



## Science

To gather information about avian communities and habitat use that will assist state, federal, and private natural resource managers in their efforts to implement conservation programs.



## Education & Outreach

To provide opportunities for Missourians of all ages to learn about species and their habitats.



## Advocacy

To advocate for sound, science-based conservation policy that benefits bird, other wildlife and environmental quality.

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Contest administrated by: Paige Witek

Welcome to the *Rectrix* issue featuring all of the photos entered in MRBO's annual photo contest! 2020 was the fifth year of the contest, entitled Hope is the Thing with Feathers. This title is based on the 1891 poem by Emily Dickinson, and we chose it because we believe that our beautiful feathered friends inspire hope and joy. Never were these needed more in recent memory than during the year 2020!

After receiving input from some of the photographers from previous years, we framed the contest around several categories. These were categories by bird guild - Vireos, Flycatchers, Shorebirds, and Wrens, Chickadees and Titmice. We also had a special category this year called "Of Time and Space". Entries in this category were pictures that the photographer might not have gotten if it weren't for the changes wrought in our lives by the pandemic. Photographers were asked to provide a description of how they came to be in the time and space where the photo occurred, and/or how birds have brought them joy despite last year's many challenges. We have printed many of these descriptions in this *Rectrix* as space allowed.

Our heartfelt thanks go out to the photographers that entered the contest this year, as all of the photographs gave us joy and hope! We also greatly appreciate the contest sponsor, Wood & Huston Bank of Marshall, which has funded the contest prizes every year. This means that all of the proceeds from entry fees go to MRBO's education programs! We would also like to express our gratitude to the contest judges joining us from outside MRBO. They have all been involved in judging the photo contest several times and their expertise and insight are indispensable to this contest. Finally, the Missouri Bird Records Committee helped us discuss and identify the species in several of the photos - vireos, shorebirds and flycatchers are some of the toughest species to ID!



*Hope is The Thing With Feathers 2020*  
The Missouri River Bird Observatory's  
Fifth Annual Photography Contest

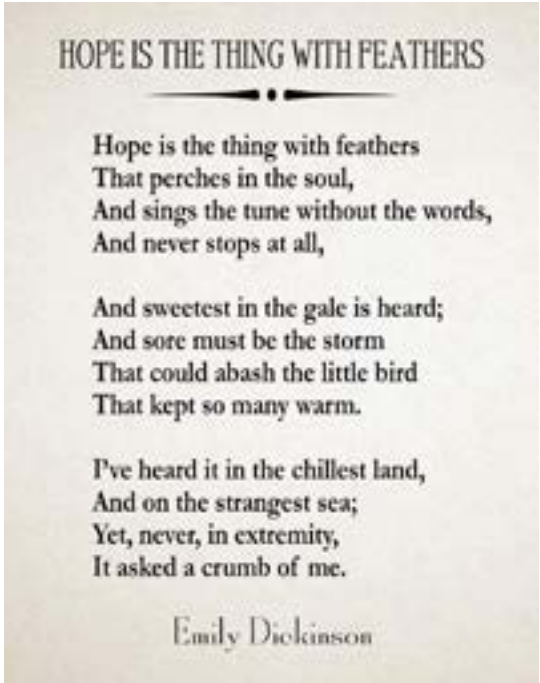


Photo Contest Sponsor  
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# Award Winning Photos 2020

## Of Time and Space



### **The Referee**

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (and Monarchs)  
Photographer: Lisa Saffell  
Location: Overland

Because of the pandemic I didn't travel as much as I normally would have to get out and enjoy nature. I started spending more time in my own back yard. Thankfully I was into my second year of converting my yard over to native plants so I had a good supply of insect and bird activity in my yard to keep me occupied. I got into the habit of taking my camera and walking through my own little habitat several times a day. I would also sit on my patio every afternoon and watch all of the butterfly and hummingbird activity around my marsh milkweed plants. One warm afternoon I was enjoying the sun and watching this young male Ruby Throated Hummingbird try to keep the other Hummingbirds away from the three feeders and the Cardinal plants. He stationed himself on a small branch over my bird feeding station where he could have views of all three feeders. While I was watching him preen and stand guard I noticed he became very keenly interested in something that was happening on the marsh milkweed. Anticipating some hummingbird antics I grabbed my camera and looked over to where he was looking. I saw that the Monarch Butterflies were becoming very aggressive with each other around the plants and then I spotted three of them in a tussle. As I raised my camera to take a photo of this butterfly action, the little male hummingbird flew in and tried to break up the fight. It was comical to watch him move in and around the butterflies, frantically trying to make them stop fighting, and chattering at them the entire time. He was finally able to break them up and returned to his branch to keep a watchful eye on the feeders. I nicknamed him the referee and I always knew it was him because he favored this particular branch in the yard and would sit there for extended periods of time. As inconvenient as the pandemic has been, the one thing it did do was allow me to appreciate the beautiful nature right in my own back yard. I spent some quality time just sitting and watching the diverse little ecosystem I had created.



### **Youth Winner**

#### **Awakening**

Barred Owl

Photographer: Jacob Walter, age 15

Location: Claire Gemp-Davidson Memorial Conservation Area,  
Sunset Hills

Throughout this pandemic, I was no stranger to the indoors. During this unprecedented time, staying inside and staying safe was the main priority of my family. Staying safe is important, but it is not always fun. Even after a few days inside, I often long to be outside in nature. Being out in nature is a regular necessity for me. This meant that during the pandemic, finding a small, safe place near our house to get out into nature was a very important task. We ended up going to Claire Gemp-Davidson Memorial Conservation Area. This small area is heavily wooded in the middle of south St. Louis County. It has a pond where fish and turtles are abundant. While this area is small, it feels like you are truly out in nature while you are still in the suburbs. While walking some of the small trails around the park, we managed to catch sight of two barred owls flying into the trees. After seeing the owls, we drove home to get my camera and hopefully the owls would still be there. Luckily they were, and I managed to catch this photo of one yawning, while the other hides behind some leaves. After sitting and watching the birds wake up in the early evening, we left. During the course of this pandemic, whenever my mom and I wanted to get out of the house, we would visit Claire Gemp-Davidson. Everytime we went, we would see the family of barred owls without fail. They were often in different spots, and sometimes we only saw a glimpse of them, but we always saw them. We got to see the owls behave and rest in different spots at different times. While the COVID-19 pandemic has been a tough time, it allowed me to see these amazing owls over and over again and connect more deeply with nature.





# Award Winning Photos 2020

## Vireos

## Shorebirds

### **Vireos II**

White-eyed Vireos  
Photographer: Bill Duncan  
Location: Weldon Spring  
Conservation Area,  
St. Charles County



### **Youth Winner**

#### ***I Spy a White Eye***

White-eyed Vireo  
Photographer: Chelsea Mosteller, age 16  
Location: Garth Nature Area,  
Columbia



### **Far Away Traveler**

Marbled Godwit  
Photographer: Aaron Jungbluth  
Location: Flooded field at Mertz Road and Highway H,  
St. Charles County





# Award Winning Photos 2020

## Chickadees, Wrens & Titmice



***There Was An Old Woman  
Who Lived in a Shoe***  
Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
Location: Christian County



**Youth Winner  
Feeding Time**  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Photographer: Jacob Walter, age 15  
Location: Valley Park



***Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in Flight***  
Photographer: Amy Watts  
Location: Joplin Athletic Complex,  
Joplin



**Youth Winner  
Sitting Scissortail**  
Scissor-tailed Flycatcher  
Photographer: Chelsea Mosteller, age 16  
Location: Random old parking lot in  
Warsaw



# Every photo won our hearts!

Thank you, photographers!



**Vireo I**  
Warbling Vireo  
Photographer: Bill Duncan  
Location: Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary,  
St. Charles County



**Foraging**  
Carolina Wren  
Photographer: Michael O'Keefe  
Location: Tree Trail, Burr Oak  
Woods Conservation Nature  
Center, Blue Springs



**Curious Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**  
Photographer: Jerlyn Jones  
Location: Robert E. Talbot Conservation Area,  
Lawrence County



**Golden Hour**  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Photographer: David Seidensticker  
Location: Glendale



**Semi-palmated Sandpipers with  
Least Sandpiper at Binder Lake**  
Photographer: Paul Winn  
Location: Cole County





**Bell's Vireo**  
 Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
 Location: Christian County

**Atop the World**  
 Tufted Titmouse  
 Photographer: Julie Brown Patton  
 Location: Wildwood



**Pause**  
 Carolina Wren  
 Photographer: Michael O'Keefe  
 Location: Burr Oak Woods Conservation Nature Center,  
 Blue Springs



**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on the  
 Cockleburs**  
 Photographer: Amy Watts  
 Location: Turkey Creek Water  
 Treatment Plant, Joplin

**Here's Looking at You**  
 White-eyed Vireo  
 Photographer: Aaron Jungbluth  
 Location: Lost Valley Trail, Weldon  
 Spring Conservation Area,  
 St. Charles County







***Surprise....Yellow-billed Cuckoo***  
 Photographer: Amy Watts  
 Location: Joplin



***Look at Me, Not My Nest***  
 Killdeer  
 Photographer: Julie Brown Patton  
 Location: Wildwood



***Tufted Titmouse in Burning Bushes***  
 Photographer: Amy Watts  
 Location: Joplin

2020 has been a great year...for backyard birding! Generally, our Spring is filled with the sound of bats making contact with softballs, the glorious sound of a ball hitting a glove in just the right spot, the crunch of gravel under the cleats of players running excitedly to the concession stand after a game has ended and the ever questionable weather of early Spring at the ballpark. We missed out on those early Spring sights and sounds, but we were given the opportunity to enjoy the sights and sound of our own backyard far more than any Spring before the Spring of 2020.

Had our weekdays been full of school and extracurricular activities and our weekends full of softball tournaments as usual, we would have missed out on the opportunity to save a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker that had crashed head first into our patio window, the chance to watch the Brown Thrashers gather nesting materials, build their nest and bring delicious insect meals to their young. We would have missed out on the chance to watch our Eastern Bluebird couples bring up 3 to 5 broods of baby Blues. We would have missed out on the Scarlet Tanager and first year Summer Tanager that spent all of 10 seconds in the Hackberry tree. We would have missed out on the opportunity to see the creature that we had so often heard in our backyard, but had never seen.

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo would have been missed! We would have never seen it! We would have missed its slow and deliberate head movements searching the space around it for its next meal. We would have continued to hear its strange, rubber duck-like call and continued to wonder what in the world was making that crazy sound. As chance would have it, I walked by the back patio door that day and looked out, as I always do, and noticed a bright white patch in one of the Elm trees in our backyard. I quickly grabbed my camera, it's always charged and ready to go because you just never know when you might need it! I yelled excitedly, "There's a different bird out there that I've never seen, come on." My youngest daughter and I ran out the door and I started snapping pictures. I probably fired off 20 shots of this bird that I had never seen before in my life, before it flew off, never to be seen again, only heard. I immediately came in and loaded the pictures onto my computer, looked up an ID and realized that this lovely bird, with the white, black, brown and chestnut feathers and the yellow bill was the beautiful creature making that strange noise we had been hearing in our backyard. While it was a brief encounter it was certainly a memorable one. It was a memory that would not have been made had we not been in that space at that time.

***Eye-catching Flycatcher***  
 Scissor-tailed Flycatcher  
 Photographer: Karen Wienberg  
 Location: North of Hi Lonesome Prairie  
 Conservation Area, Pettis County



***A Squirrel's Demise***  
 Barred Owl  
 Photographer: Jamie McGuire  
 Location: Tower Grove Park, St. Louis





**A Berry Happy Chickadee**  
 Photographer: Julie Brown Patton  
 Location: Wildwood



**Winter: Great Blue Heron**  
 Photographer: Paul Moffett  
 Location: Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary, St. Charles County



**White-eyed Vireo**  
 Photographer: Amy Watts  
 Location: McDonald County



**Vireo in the Berries**  
 Bell's or Warbling Vireo\*  
 Photographer: Brian A. Stamper  
 Location: Forest Park, St. Louis

\*Certain ID cannot be concluded!



**My Only Birdie of the Day**  
 Flycatcher  
 Photographer: Steve Rinne  
 Location: Swope Municipal Golf Course, Kansas City







***The Joy of Birds in Trying Times***

Bald Eagle  
Photographer: Kyle O'Bryan  
Location: Marshall

With a year of so much and dealing with the virus and trying to social distance it made taking pictures of these beautiful birds so much more enjoyable and to get to take more time enjoying them and the environment around. It made going outside to search for these creatures with more time and to ease the sorrows that this year has brought. It is truly a blessing to be able to go out take these pictures with joy! I am so excited to see all these photos because it will bring so much joy to all of our faces!



***Beauty in a Year of Sorrows***

Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
Photographer: Kyle O'Bryan  
Location: Blackwater

***Tufted Titmouse Exploring Mossy Tree Cavity***

Photographer: Alexis Ann Raben Miano  
Location: Ballwin



***Early Morning View***

Spotted Sandpiper  
Photographer: Karen Weinberg  
Location: Stockton Lake



***Killdeer***

Photographer: Amy Watts  
Location: Turkey Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, Joplin



***White-eyed Vireo***

Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
Location: Christian County



***Bird, Watching***

Eastern Phoebe  
Photographer: Kathleen Henrikson  
Location: Burr Oak Woods Conservation Area, Blue Springs





**Titmouse Snow Maze**  
Tufted Titmouse  
Photographer: Julie Brown Patton  
Location: Wildwood

**Lucky Find on a CBC**  
Marsh Wren  
Photographer: Ryan Steffens  
Location: Chapel View Prairie  
Conservation Area



**A Goldfinch's Goods**  
American Goldfinch  
Photographer: Jamie McGuire  
Location: Shaw Nature Reserve, Gray Summit

On the afternoon of August 23rd, I decided to take one last photography adventure before students began school virtually the following day and headed to Shaw Nature Reserve. Being an educator, I knew I would no longer have the flexibility that I had during the summer to disappear with my camera for a few hours. I gradually became more and more discouraged with the birds' uncanny ability to hide from me no matter how quietly I thought I was moving. When I began making the trek to my car, I noticed a juvenile American Goldfinch land in a cluster of dying flowers just off the path. I snapped a few pictures before cautiously inching to a different spot with better light. It watched me as it picked out the flower's seeds and never seemed nervous that I was there.

While quarantining forced me to slow down, taking pictures of birds has been the driving force behind learning to enjoy stillness and silence and to truly appreciate the immense beauty in small moments. As I watched the Goldfinch forage for seeds as the sun began to go down, I couldn't help but feel fortunate about being there at the right time.



**The King of Tower Grove**  
Eastern Kingbird  
Photographer: Aaron Jungbluth  
Location: Tower Grove Park, St. Louis



**Chickadee**  
Carolina Chickadee  
Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
Location: Christian County



**Colors of A Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**  
Photographer: Jerlyn Jones  
Location: Robert E. Talbot  
Conservation Area







**Carolina Wren Exploring the Woodlot**  
 Photographer: Nancy Boyd Schanda  
 Location: Yard in Southwest Missouri



**White-eyed Vireo II**  
 Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
 Location: Christian County



**Curiosity**  
 Red-eyed Vireo  
 Photographer: Mary Moore  
 Location: DeSoto



**Reflection**  
 Wilson's Snipe  
 Photographer: Paul Moffett  
 Location: Creve Coeur Lake



**Egg Drop!**  
 Eastern Bluebirds  
 Photographer: Michael O'Keefe  
 Location: Residence in Independence



**Fluffy Chickadee**  
 Carolina Chickadee  
 Photographer: Cathy Wilhelmi  
 Location: Montauk State Park







**Great Blue Heron**  
Photographer: Julie Brown Patton  
Location: Pacific



**Crooner**  
White-eyed Vireo  
Photographer: David Seidensticker  
Location: Weldon Spring  
Conservation Area



**Tufted Titmouse/Grey Background**  
Photographer: Amy Watts  
Location: Joplin



**Wren In Winter**  
Carolina Wren  
Photographer: Michael O'Keefe  
Location: Residence in Independence

**Photo Bomb Hummingbird**  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird  
(with Monarch)  
Photographer: Kathleen Henrikson  
Location: Burr Oak Woods  
Conservation Area



**Spring**  
Warbling Vireo  
Photographer: Paul Moffett  
Location: Columbia Bottoms  
Conservation Area

**Bell's Vireo**  
Photographer: Amy Watts  
Location: Shawnee Trail Conservation Area,  
Mindenmines







**Bird's Eye View**

Photographer: Debby Fantz  
Location: Near Otterville



**Red-eyed Vireo**

Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
Location: Christian County



**Vireos**

White-eyed Vireos

Photographer: Bill Duncan

Location: Weldon Spring Conservation Area,  
St. Charles County

**Lesser Yellowlegs**

Photographer: Paul Winn  
Location: Cole County



**Homemaker**

House Wren

Photographer: David Seidensticker

Location: Glendale



**Verily Vireo**

Philadelphia Vireo

Photographer: Joe McAtee

Location: Crooked River, Ray County

The pandemic situation provided welcome flexibility in my schedule during the spring of 2020, just when extra time and flexibility are most welcome to an amateur nature photographer. Some friends and I found this White-throated Vireo nest immediately next to a trail during a birding hike along the Lost Valley Trail at Weldon Spring Conservation Area in late April. As bird nests are one of my favorite subjects to photograph, I was elated at the find, even more so when I determined that the pair were still incubating eggs. This meant I had loads of potential opportunities to make some meaningful images over the course of the nesting.

Working from home due to the pandemic allowed me to spend more time at the nest than I normally would have had. As long as I was able to attend critical meetings and meet my work goals, I was able to spend an hour or two every morning at the nest and longer on the weekends. It was a pleasure seeing other bird watchers and nature enthusiasts on the trail when I could show them the nest. Sometimes trail runners, cyclists and families out for a walk would stop and ask what I was doing and I introduced them to the nest as well. Although a common bird, the White-eyed Vireo usually places its nest within thick vegetation.

Finding this nest, in such an open and accessible view, was a very unusual circumstance. Were it not for the unique situation this spring, I would not likely have had the opportunity to make this photograph nor been able to share this natural wonder with others.





**Wren by the Water**  
 Carolina Wren  
 Photographer: Amy Watts  
 Location: Banks of Shoal Creek at Shoal Creek  
 Conservation Education Center, Joplin



**Don't You Dare Turn Your Back on Me, Young Man**  
 Eastern Kingbird  
 Photographer: Steve Rinne  
 Location: Kansas City

**Carolina Wren With Nesting Material**  
 Photographer: Paul Winn  
 Location: Cole County



**Yellowlegs I**  
 Lesser Yellowlegs  
 Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
 Location: Rodgersville



**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher on Back Roads Barb Wire**  
 Photographer: Jerlyn Jones  
 Location: Robert E. Talbot Conservation Area





**Dinner Time** (above) and **Just Killing Time Before Dinner** (right)

Cooper's Hawk  
Photographer: Steve Rinne  
Location: Kansas City



**Marsh Wren**  
Photographer: Lisa Saffell  
Location: Grand Pass Conservation Area

*Of Time and Space (An ode to COVID-19)*

I wish you were through.  
Because of you, I shelter in place.  
Out of an abundance of caution,  
I sit too often at my window.  
And stare into space.

On rare occasion,  
At my window station I am rewarded by sights,  
Not unknown.  
I grab my iPhone.  
My vision is recorded.  
A ravenous raptor,  
looking to capture a sumptuous evening meal.  
A dove or a squirrel,  
He'll pounce in a whirl on his prey  
With talons of steel.

One plus to COVID 19  
Are the visions seen, beholding nature's spectacle.  
We stop to observe, taking in with verve,  
Our environment, ineffable.



**Momma's Duty**  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Photographer: Laura Pinkstaff  
Location: Wildwood



**Winghead**  
Bald Eagle  
Photographer: Scott Vilmer  
Location: Neir



**Wired Bluebird**  
Eastern Bluebird  
Photographer: Scott Vilmer  
Location: Richwoods

I enjoyed nature before the pandemic. Getting out in nature is one of the greatest things I love to do. I do miss my other photography I do for the American Cancer Society's Relay For Life Jefferson County. I volunteer all my time and talent to this cause. There was no Relay For Life this year because of the pandemic so I had more time to spend in nature. After my 8 hour work day I try to enjoy nature in the evenings and on weekends.





**Untitled**  
Photographer: Alexis Ann  
Raben Miano  
Location: St. Louis



**Vireo With Breakfast**  
Bell's or Warbling Vireo\*  
Photographer: Brian A. Stamper  
Location: Forest Park, St. Louis

\*Certain ID cannot be concluded!

**Looking at You**  
Green Heron  
Photographer: Cathy Wilhelmi  
Location: Innsbrook



**Tufted Titmouse in a Red Bud Tree**  
Photographer: Colleen Crank  
Location: Florissant



**Pretty Little Chickadee**  
Carolina Chickadee  
Photographer: Amy Watts  
Location: Joplin

**Owl in Early Morning Glow**  
Barred Owl  
Photographer: Kathleen Henrikson  
Location: Burr Oak Woods  
Conservation Area







***Do You Want to Know A Secret?***

Bald Eagles  
Photographer: Cathy Wimhelmi  
Location: Innsbrook

The most challenging aspect of the pandemic has been the inability to visit my children and grandchildren. This has been such a void. I filled this void by joining an Eagle family. I started in the beginning of lock down observing this family. In the void I had much time to sit in the kayak and just watch. These birds are amazing in their care and efforts toward the young. I was in awe so many days with their activity. As autumn came the eaglets found their way to other places. I observed the eagle parents together one day standing close and appeared to almost be telling a secret. I felt in so much kinship with them as they also fledged their young and felt the void of missing them. I know their secret must be "things will be ok we did a good job and life moves on". I am so grateful for the opportunity to be in the presence of such beauty in the middle of a pandemic.



***Morning Song***

Tufted Titmouse  
Photographer: Kathleen Henrikson  
Location: Burr Oak Woods  
Conservation Area

***Just Hanging Around***

Carolina Chickadee  
Photographer: Cathy Wilhelmi  
Location: Innsbrook



***Migrant Friend***

Black-throated Green Warbler  
Photographer: Aaron Jungbluth  
Location: Tower Grove Park, St. Louis

My wife Angie and I were so excited for 2020! For our first time, we were planning for almost a year to attend "The Biggest Week in American Birding Festival" in May in hopes to tally up to 38 species of warblers. It would have been sponsored by the Black Swamp Bird Observatory in northwest Ohio along Lake Erie. We did the early-bird signup to attend multiple guided field trips, bird ID presentations, sketching and art training, and networking events. We made lodging reservations to stay at the State Park hotel, and even in a campground yurt. We also made plans to visit some family relatives while on the road after the Biggest Week was over. Then, COVID-19 hit. Sadly, everything was cancelled...

With this huge disappointment, we still wanted to find the time to experience the miracle of bird migration. So rather than "a big week" and since I was deemed an "essential worker," we stayed local finding places in the St. Louis region and birded hard for four weekends in a row! It was phenomenal to spend time with my wife scouring local birding hot spots for our visitors from the south, and experiencing these long-distance friends. We headed outside in the fresh air! Upon one of our visits to the bird migrant-trap of Tower Grove Park in the city of St. Louis, we happened upon a small, babbling creek running through the park.

Seeing some movement on a branch which had fallen over the creek, we went in for a closer look. A small, fast moving bird with yellow..."Warbler!" After getting better, and better looks, we saw the facial pattern, white wing bars, and a somewhat black throat. It was a female Black-throated Green Warbler getting a drink of water before heading off to Canada!

All in all, we still were able to find 29 species of warblers during our St. Louis area trekking, adding our discoveries to the citizen scientist eBird database. Not quite the birding experience we were originally planning in the Spring of 2020, but we made the most of it! Even without a pandemic in future years, we decided that we need to take time each Spring to seek out the places in our extended backyard to experience these wonders of nature and record our findings.



***Welcome Visitors***

Pine Siskin  
Photographer: Paul Moffett  
Location: St. Charles

Covid has disrupted many of our lifestyles and activities. Although I am a retired hospital worker, my entire family continues to work in healthcare including my wife, son, daughter and my son in law. With the exception of my daughter all have direct patient contact. Two have contracted Covid. Myself, I have limited my birding and photography to a few places of isolation and my deck, which oversees the feeders. I had never seen pine siskins in my area and when they showed up it was a pleasant surprise and lifted our spirits. To date we have 50 of the little birds. Sometimes the best place to bird is right in your backyard....







**Yellowlegs II**  
 Lesser Yellowlegs  
 Photographer: Marvin De Jong  
 Location: Rodgersville



**You Found Me?**  
 Indigo Bunting  
 Photographer: Debby Fantz  
 Location: Near Otterville  
 My husband and I recently retired and have been looking forward to incorporating new birdwatching opportunities into our travels. Plans for 2020 included a spring trip to Kearney, Nebraska to see the Sandhill Crane migration (our first!) followed by a visit to coastal Louisiana. Then Covid-19 struck and sadly our trips were postponed.  
 I decided to refocus my spring birding to local birds near our home in Otterville, and picked the small Indigo Bunting as my “pandemic bird of special interest”. They did not disappoint! This photo was taken in April 2020 when the dandelions were producing plenty of seeds for birds to eat. I was happy to be home to catch this molting bunting hiding in the vegetation!

**Mooommm, I’m Hungry!**  
 Carolina Chickadees  
 Photographer: Amy Watts  
 Location: Joplin



**Red-eyed Vireo Sees a Spider Snack**  
 Photographer: Brian A. Stamper  
 Location: Little Creve Coeur Ecological Area, Maryland Heights



**Oriole**  
 Orchard Oriole  
 Photographer: Tom Tucker  
 Location: Hartell Conservation Area, Clinton County  
 Stir crazy after 2 months of limited outdoor/ nature time, my wife and I saw an article about Missouri Conservation Areas and found there were several within 45 minutes of our house. This image is from the first we explored, Hartell CA. Figuring that midweek there might be few other people around, we found no one and had several hours to explore in solitude. We heard the loud and beautiful sound of this lovely bird first, then finally spotted this immature oriole high in the trees near a pond. Missouri Conservation Areas are great to explore and seldom crowded.

**Afternoon at the Lake**  
 Ruddy Duck  
 Photographer: Karen Weinberg  
 Location: Springfork Lake, Pettis County  
 I decided to retire after over 40 years in the nursing field. With more time on my hands, I wanted to combine my love of bird watching and photography. The pandemic made this more possible because traveling and other activities were out of the question. This year has shown me the natural world has so much to offer.







***An Eastern Bluebird that Touched My Heart***

Photographer: Nancy Boyd Shanda  
Location: Backyard in Southwest Missouri

In March of 2020 I stood at the precipice of complete depression. I alternated between feelings of bewilderment, disbelief, resignation, disappointment, sadness, resentment, and discouragement. For the last several months prior to March of 2020 my dog, Kimber, and I had been working hard to prepare for the American Kennel Club National Agility Championships that were to be held in Perry, Georgia the end of March.

While my husband, Ron, and our Shetland Sheepdogs Rocket and Kimber, and I live in Missouri, we traveled in our motorhome to

Florida in December of 2019 so that we could attend weekly agility trials during the winter months. Kimber and I were honing our skills and working hard to prepare our bodies for the strenuous physical requirements of running in a national competition. Kimber turned four years old in August of 2019 and was at a prime age for the big competition. I am a senior well beyond my prime, and had been wondering how much longer I would be able to continue in this sport. But I had dieted, I had exercised, and I felt like I was in great shape. Kimber and I had been winning a lot of placements at the local agility trials, and I truly felt like this was our last, big chance to achieve a top standing at a national agility competition.

On March 13, 2020, just a couple of weeks before the scheduled national agility event, our simple life came to a sudden halt. We received notice that the competition in Georgia had been canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The same day, we learned that our remaining camping reservations in Florida, where we were planning to stay prior to traveling to Perry, Georgia, had been canceled and the campground evacuated. It felt a little bit like running straight into a brick wall. All of our current plans had been sidelined. That evening we packed and prepared our motorhome for traveling back to Missouri the following morning. While we were going through the physical motions of packing, I couldn't help but feel like I was also packing away my hopes, my dreams, and possibly my last chance for success at a national agility competition. But there was little time for feeling sorry for myself.

We had to think about strategizing for safely traveling home across four states. We would be stopping for fuel, stopping for lodging, and all the while needing to protect ourselves from contracting the dreaded Covid-19. Groceries were another big concern. We had emptied our freezer and our pantry at home in preparation for our three-month absence. When we arrived in Missouri, we stopped at a grocery store to stock up on essentials before going home. We were surprised to find that a case of green beans was about the only thing on the shelves that was on our grocery list. We grabbed what we could, and drove home. We gradually managed to restock our pantry and our refrigerator/freezer, learned how to keep ourselves safe at home by using curbside and delivery grocery service. The initial panic subsided, and we found ourselves living a sort of new reality. No travel, no visiting with friends or family, and no dog agility trials or training classes. And I think most disturbing was that there was no end in sight for this lonely reality.

I sank into an even deeper sadness. And while physically I was just fine, and blessed that all of my family and friends so far were healthy, I found myself going to bed earlier, and, with nothing to look forward to but the continuing sadness, I was not in any hurry to get out of bed the following morning. But I still had my lovely dogs, and they demanded to be fed and exercised. So get out of bed I did. I would feed them, take them for a walk, and then drop back into sadness. Something about being outside made me feel a little better, so I fell into the habit of grabbing my morning cup of coffee and taking it out and sitting on the back patio.

My patio soon became my window to the world of wildlife that was my multi-acre back yard. While sitting on the bench drinking my coffee I began to see "my" animals. I saw box turtles moving slowly far away from the house. I went to investigate and grabbed my camera phone to take their picture. Taking their picture was easy....they moved slowly and I could walk right up to them and take a close-up picture. I shared my turtle pictures with my friends and family on Facebook. I laugh now thinking about it, because I'm sure no one was impressed to see pictures of my turtles, but it was a way I could share my life and experiences at a time when it was otherwise difficult to do so because of physically distancing.

And soon I began to see the birds. American Robins were the first to show up. They seemed so calm and unafraid and would stand in one place for several minutes. Watching them was fun. I tried taking their pictures with my camera phone as well, but I quickly learned that taking a picture of a small bird from a distance resulted in just a small blob in a big picture, and no one could tell that it was a bird, let alone what type of bird it might be. The resultant pictures were not something I was proud to share with my friends.

I had a bird bath, but it had not been filled in a few years. We traveled so much with dog agility that we weren't home long enough to keep up with one, so we just didn't set it up. But sitting on my patio watching the birds made me realize the animals were probably thirsty. In addition to being in the midst of a pandemic, in Southwest Missouri we were in the middle of a drought. So the bird bath was filled, and the birds immediately showed up to enjoy the water. I was so happy to see them showing up. It was a bright spot in my otherwise dull days. I began to see many different types of birds, and again, I so wanted to capture their pictures to share with my friends, but found my camera phone just wasn't able to capture the type of photos I wanted.

Ron had a nice digital camera and a telephoto lens. He was always our family photographer, and I never had any interest in it other than to point at what I wanted him to photo! The same day the bird bath went up, I announced to Ron that I wanted to learn how to take pictures with his camera. I knew absolutely nothing. Ron was really surprised at my proclamation, but he agreed to help me, and the lessons began. I learned the functions of the various knobs and buttons on the camera. I learned about aperture, ISO, shutter speed, and the relationships between them. I learned how to zoom and focus. I learned how to take pictures of "my" birds at the bird bath...and I was so thrilled to be able to capture not only their pictures, but the splashing water drops! My heart was happy, and for the first time since our pandemic nightmare had begun, I began to feel a sense of inner peace.

But I quickly realized that just photographing the birds at the bird bath was not enough. I wanted to take their pictures out on the ground and in the trees far away. Once again I found myself disappointed because Ron's zoom lens, which was 55-210 mm, did not allow me to capture the photos I wanted. After some study I learned that it was possible to get a lens with further reach that would allow me to get better photos of the closer birds and also capture photos of the birds that were further away. We made the decision to purchase a stronger telephoto lens. But the old camera/new lens combination was not ideal, which led me to wanting a better camera. But Ron was not convinced I would stick with the photography, and hesitant to buy something new. He bargained with me that if I would really practice and learn to take good photographs, we could buy a new camera.

So practice I did! I began taking pictures of every bird I could find. And I eventually began posting daily pictures on Facebook of "my" birds. I didn't want to post pictures of birds I hadn't identified, so I bought different bird field guides and began to study the birds. So along with their pictures, I posted interesting facts about each bird. I joined different birding Facebook groups, and also shared my pictures with them. And I didn't want to embarrass myself by posting less than stellar pictures, so I practiced and practiced....sometimes spending 8-10 hours a day and more, taking pictures. And the better the captured photographs, the more I wanted to take the pictures.

I finally learned enough about the camera and lens and taking photos that Ron gave in and bought me my own camera...a really nice mirrorless digital to go with our new and stronger telephoto lens. I truly became "crazy bird lady" when I discovered a "new" bird type. There was no stopping me. I felt good again. I felt alive again. Taking photographs of birds did something magical to my soul and my heart. It was something I felt but found difficult to describe to people. I began to say that the pictures went directly from my lens to my heart, and I wanted to share them so that they would touch other people's hearts as well.

My only conclusion is that there is just no way to look at all that amazing beauty, up close and personal, and not feel the calming effects of seeing all that beauty. It touched something deep inside me that quenched the flames of the pain that was pulling me down. My photo of the Eastern Bluebird on the tree stump was a defining moment for me. It was a photo that made me realize, for the first time, the power I held in my hands when I took a picture. Had the pandemic not forced me to stay home and aroused my interest in birds and photographing them, and had I not held the camera and lens in my hands, I would have never seen the close-up beauty that existed right there in my own little world of my yard. Of course this beautiful bird had been there all long, flitting around and playing on that stump, but it would have gone completely unnoticed and undocumented. I hope that my photo, which went right from my lens to my heart, will serve to warm the hearts of others.







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