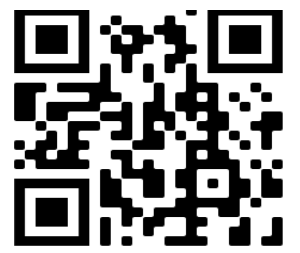
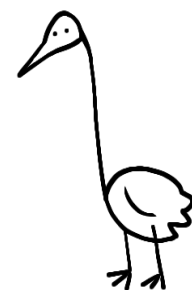


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Birding News: Rare Birds Sighted in Albion



A limpkin hunts for snails in the Kalamazoo river. Throughout the year, a wide array of bird species call the city of Albion and the Whitehouse Nature Center home (Photo courtesy of Wes Dick).

Killian Altayeb
Staff Writer

On the outskirts of Albion College, the limpkin, a bird species native to Florida, has captured the attention and curiosity of both seasoned birdwatchers and casual observers alike.

Albion College Emeritus Biology Professor Dale Kennedy, who first spotted the bird in early September, said that “last year, the first one ever that was recorded was seen in Michigan, and this year there have been multiple sightings.”

The bird has been spotted 14 times in Michigan this year, according to eBird, a platform used to identify birds. Kennedy said the limpkin continues to be seen around the Whitehouse Nature Center.

“I encourage all readers – if you haven’t, come and take a walk.”

Doug White, who also taught biology at Albion College, said he believes the limpkin may have traveled north due to climate change; it may be part of a recent trend of displacement in bird populations.

“In New Jersey, if you saw a white ibis, it was rare. This year, they had 100 nesting pairs

just north of Cape May, and it could increase,” White said. “In Jackson a few years back there was a spotting of a black bellied whistling duck, which is a Florida bird.”

Emeritus History Professor Wes Dick, who first spotted the limpkin on Oct. 1, said he’s “more worried about the limpkin’s well being than any harm it might bring to us.”

Since Oct. 1, Dick said that he’s been “bonding with the bird,” adding that he’s also caught sight of a black crowned night heron on a Whitehouse Nature Center trail.

The black crowned night heron, according to Michigan State University’s bird tracking database, is a “year round resident in many coastal areas, the lower Mississippi and Ohio River valleys, and parts of the lower Great Lakes.” The heron commonly hunts at night, meaning a daytime sighting in Michigan is rare.

Albion resident and self-proclaimed “bird enthusiast” Thomas Hunsdorfer said that the birds may wind up in new places because of “long migratory routes, where the wind will blow or they get tired and they land where they’ve never been found.”

“Evolution can happen pretty rapidly, particularly with a species where the lifespan is only two or three years, the next generation is maybe just 24 months away,” Hunsdorfer said. “In a very short amount of time, they adapt.”

Students looking to catalog their own sightings of the limpkin and other birds may do so through eBird.

Kennedy said the platform allows users to “start a checklist and record the time you saw (the bird). The nature center is what’s called a hotspot in eBird, and all of those sightings are accumulated in one database.”

“A few hours after a limpkin sighting was logged, people were already looking for it,” Kennedy said. “It shows how organized birders are.”

Another option for tracking rare birds in Albion is the Merlin app, founded by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The app allows users to answer three simple questions about a bird they are trying to identify and then gives them a list of possible birds.

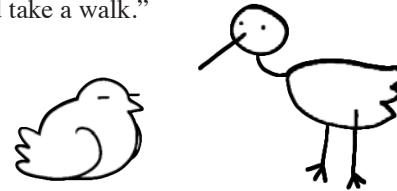
“If you see a bird and have no clue what it is, this will get you the answer,” White said.

Hunsdorfer said students looking to get into birding are welcome to take advantage of The Whitehouse Nature Center’s trail hours.

“The nature center is just a gem of a resource (for birding),” Hunsdorfer said. “I encourage all readers – if you haven’t, come and take a walk.”



A great egret catches a fish near the Whitehouse Nature Center. Closeby bodies of water contain food sources for various bird species home to Albion (Photo courtesy of Thomas Hunsdorfer).



A black crowned night heron perches on top of a branch in the water. The heron has been spotted by Wes Dick multiple times near the Whitehouse Nature Center (Photo Courtesy of Wes Dick).



Juan Rodriguez
Opinions Editor

Opinion: The Reality of Taking Up Arms



I bought my first firearm over the summer: A Ruger 10/22 takedown model. I bought it with the intention of using it as a varmint rifle, something to have handy in case a snake tried to eat any of our chicks in the middle of the night.

As the days went on this past summer, I made an effort to practice my aim with my Ruger, doing the occasional bit of plinking – informal target shooting done for pleasure – when not attempting to run serious shooting drills with it. Ammo was cheap, after all.

Soon enough, I began going down the rabbit hole that is accessorizing my rifle. That process has been anything but cheap. Currently, I’ve set up the Ruger with a sling, a red-dot optic and an extended magazine. That’s on top of the four ten-round magazines that already came with the rifle.

The entire time I’ve been buying ammunition and hunting for gun modifications though, I’ve found myself in very distinct spaces. I do most of my business out in East Texas: Tyler, Texas, in particular, since it’s the nearest city with a population over 100,000 and most of the gun shops are fairly close to one another.



A bear, symbolic of “bearing arms,” sits behind two semi-automatic rifles, with a pride and Chicano flag on one side and a blue lives matter and U.S. flag hybrid on the other. The bear is exhausted by the prospect of gun ownership in the name of protecting their basic rights (Illustration by Killian Altayeb and Bonnie Lord).

I can’t help but feel a pang of worry every time I step into these stores though. I frequently catch sight of the typical flags I have to constantly be on the lookout for: Blue Lives Matter paraphernalia paired with the USAmerican flag.

And yet, I have to suck it up and keep my worries to myself if I want access to the equipment needed to defend myself from a rising tide of hate crime.

I’m privileged that I present and identify as a man; it’s a bit harder for me to hide my Latine heritage, though. I can’t help but worry that my skin color or my name will give me away; that people around me will look at me as someone encroaching on their space.

Whenever I enter a gun shop, I become more conscious of the skin I wear; of the way I present myself and the way I act.

I don’t pronounce my last name in these shops the way I normally would elsewhere; I can’t use my accent to say my name properly, as much as it hurts me. I don’t talk about who I support politically. In fact, I avoid politics as much as possible, only ever expressing vague anti-authoritarian sentiments when the need presents itself. More than anything, I keep discussions to the topic before me because I can’t afford to say something that marks me as an outsider.

“Opinion: The Reality of Taking Up Arms, Respect Our Existence or Expect Resistance” continued on back.

Opinion: The Reality of Taking Up Arms, Respect Our Existence or Expect Resistance

News flash though: I have as much of a right as any to defend myself. Second amendment or not, any individual part of any marginalized group has a right to their own defense; old dead white men don't get to give us that right when people like them were the ones keeping it out of our reach for so long.

This isn't just my experience though. I know for a fact that there are many others out there who have felt something similar to this.

In 2020 for instance – out of 8.5 million first-time gun buyers – 40% were women, according to a CBS News article. Alongside that number, purchases made by Black folk rose 56% when compared to 2019 data. As hate crimes continue their upwards trajectory, I expect those numbers to increase.

Steadily, the image of the stereotypical gun owner is shifting away from the profile of the straight white man.

With an influx of new faces to the firearms world, there is a need for spaces that actively encourage the membership of marginalized folk. It's not enough to say that "all are welcome," it takes effort to reach out to marginalized communities and show them that they are indeed welcomed.

By default, most firearm communities, as they exist now, tend to be predominantly white. 38% of gun owners are white, according to a Pew Research poll from Sept. Republicans and Republican-adjacent independents, according to the same poll, are twice as likely

to own a firearm when compared to Democrats and Democrat-adjacent independents.

There will come a need for communities that encourage marginalized folk to seek training and camaraderie within their ranks. As it stands, either existing communities will have to soften up on their messaging or new communities will start forming.

I'm part of that new generation of gun owners trying to find a community that welcomes and accepts me, someone who actively pushes back against bigotry of any sort. It's not enough to make your stance known nowadays; there must be a willingness to back it up with action.

As it turns out, words without action are not enough to combat discrimination. The communities marginalized folk are part of must be willing to fight for their members' right to life.

Groups like A Better Way 2A, Yellow Peril Tactical and the Latino Rifle Organization are crucial in this regard; they provide the sort of spaces that have been uncommon within firearm communities. Typically, mainstream gun groups like the National Rifle Association (NRA) have a history of overlap with neo-Nazis and neo-Confederates in the fight against gun control. White supremacist groups, in this regard, have been crucial allies to the NRA; maybe their presence isn't as prominent as it was in previous years, but these sorts of individuals still linger in NRA spaces.

Organizations like the three listed above make it abundantly clear what their goals are. They are trying to, at the very least, create a space where queer folk and people of color can comfortably practice their shooting. At the very most, they are advocating for the right every individual has to live a good life.

Fundamentally, everyone has a right to live their lives how they see fit. If there's anyone who wishes to violate the autonomy of an individual, there will be a need to defend oneself. Marginalized folk can't rely on the state for protection, not when police ranks are littered with racists and extremists.

“One can't be peaceful without being capable of violence.”

If firearms are the tool by which marginalized communities assert their autonomy, then so be it.

In a Sept. 21, 2021 post on X, formerly known as Twitter, journalist and podcast host Robert Evans described his feelings towards both social media and firearms.

“If I could get rid of them entirely I would. But as long as my enemies make use of them, I will as well,” Evans said in the post.

So long as marginalized communities are targeted, they will have to defend themselves

and continually assert their right to exist.

In an ideal world, this wouldn't be true, but we do not live in an ideal world.

Firearm ownership is a reality of this world we inhabit; one can't be peaceful without being capable of violence. It's a reality that folks on the margins of society have been recognizing, as of late. The existence of organizations like those previously mentioned is evidence of the fact that people are looking for a specific kind of community, those that can provide resources necessary to facilitate an individual's well-being, all while knowing that they are welcomed and accepted by said group.

There can be no rest until that ideal world comes into view on the horizon.

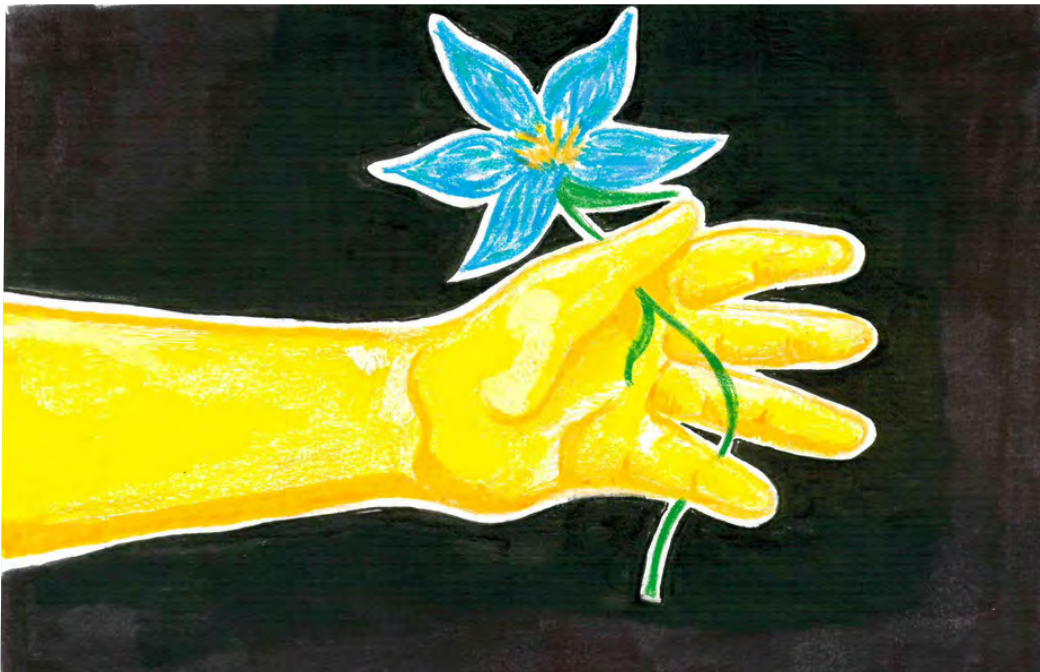
I hate that this is the world we live in, that I have to consider arming myself in order to assert my right to my life. If I have to do it though, I'd rather do it with people who can commiserate with me, who can encourage me to fight for a better world.

When I return home, I intend to save my money to buy an AR-15 and fully train with it. I love my Ruger, but it's not optimized for self-defense. I'd rather have a properly built AR – one with a sight, sling and flashlight.

I hope I never have to use it, but I'd rather keep it under lock and key – rather than not have it at all.

Better that than rolling over and dying.

Opinion: To all the Friends I Have Lost, I am Fulfilled in My Loneliness



An outstretched hand holds a blue lily, which to some is a symbol of serenity and new beginnings. Sometimes things once deemed painful and unfair in your mind can provide you with the utmost happiness and freedom in the end (Illustration by Phoebe Holm).

Phoebe Holm
Staff Photographer

Maybe my judgment was too quick.

I gave individuals who were once in my life more benefit of the doubt than they deserved. I let them get away with too much. I deteriorated my sense of self to be accepted by others.

There is a sort of sadness in watching one of your friendships crumble before you as you

watch all the emotional turmoil you put yourself through go to waste.

To watch every time you comfort them and push aside important responsibilities for them – all for nothing. I've felt this too often throughout my 20 years of life not to be familiar with the pain it creates in both the heart and mind.

It's possible there was a flaw in where I allocated my time.

I miscalculated who truly deserved my energy. It is hard to reflect on all the unreciprocated actions and emotions, to finally understand that those people didn't truly care for you. In the end, I am to blame for trusting other people with my comfort and thoughts.

Maybe the loss of these friends was a sign from whatever higher power rests above. Maybe it saw the unhealthiness of my bonds and saw that I was being taken advantage of emotionally.

Maybe it was simply my own personal will taking control of my life again.

I am not trying to sound cynical. I don't seek to denounce relationships and friendships. Sometimes those things are the only good and positive divisions of people's lives. But, that is not the case for me; it has been revealed that they are not for me.

I understand that I was and still am a difficult person. I am not here to say that I have never made a mistake or been selfish from time to time; to act like I am holier than thou. There were things that I did to upset my friends – to strain those friendships.

I am not innocent. In many moments I crumbled under the pressure of everything and my unfavorable behavior arose from continuous negativity strewn upon me.

People can feel however they want towards me for sticking up for myself and setting boundaries.

I will no longer be okay with violations of my mental health or being the brunt of gossip and hateful words. I will no longer allow myself to feel used. I am sick and tired of being “the friend group's therapist,” constantly having to regulate others' emotions rather than focusing on my own, slowly watching them deteriorate, both mentally and physically harming me.

The negative of my old friendships now outweighs the positive.

I still think of my friends and the memories I made with them in quiet moments, but my mind is now filled with disdain. I feel a sort of resentment towards them. They don't have the right to think about me and I don't want to be reminded of them.

I would have predicted the opposite revelation, that I would feel rage and then come to a sense of clarity. Instead, here I sit, now fully understanding how much those individuals treated me and how they truly hurt me.

These are not the five steps of grief I am familiar with.

There is no desire in me to have these people come into harm or any sort of anguish. There is still hope that they are doing well. But, I do hope that they recognize the wrong they have done. Not only to me, but to everyone they have belittled, treated with disrespect, used or directed any sort of negativity towards.

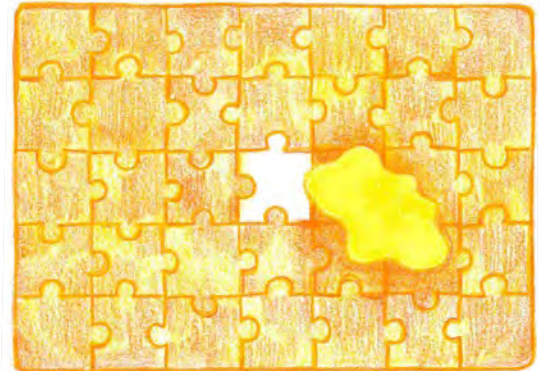
Grand scheme and all, it seems like every phase of my life has been ruled by an instant rejection from my peers without any action on my part. I just exist – and it's simply too much for people. Judgments from others just come too quickly to me. I get no chance to prove myself to anyone. The amount of emptiness I feel in a room of my peers is disheartening.

As cliché as it sounds, I have never felt like I fit in. There is a sort of shame I feel for allowing people to make me feel this way. It makes me want to scream at myself rather than my tormentors; those who look down upon me. To wake up some sort of sense in myself, to help me escape from the turmoil of emotions I was put through.

In preschool I found myself being called ugly by my peers, simply for putting on a princess dress and having short hair, to the point I cut it shorter myself in protest. In kindergarten I was too boyish, none of the girls would talk to me for weeks on end. In elementary school I found myself feeling ugly again, constantly ridiculed by backhanded comments made by female classmates. Tormented for my appearance.

When I talked about how I felt, people told me I was being dramatic. If I tried to mediate disagreements or said drama, I was controlling.

In middle school, I was the new girl who came from a small charter school. No one wanted to talk to me until it was obvious I was the last open option for a friend. I was dragged into endless, emotionally draining friend groups and used as the scapegoat when things got difficult. I was to blame for every issue, even when I simply tried to avoid the drama.



An organic yellow shape struggles to fit into the empty space in the puzzle. It's hard to feel at peace within a group of people that has been so unwelcoming and harsh in their judgments (Illustration by Phoebe Holm).



Childhood mementos lay scattered as a symbol of innocence. They represent the heartbreak caused when childhood is muddled by the cruel words of one's peers and social media (Illustration by Phoebe Holm).



A figure drawn to represent the author is surrounded by imagery of things she loves. Since accepting loneliness as something rewarding, she has had the time to delve into these passions and hobbies, and truly make them her own (Illustration by Phoebe Holm).

Continue the story or view the first installment of Holm's “To All the Friends I've Lost” at albionpleiad.com.

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