



# The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

P.O. Box 391037, Solon, Ohio 44139-8037 info@clevelandaudubon.org

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Visit our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org)

December, 2021

## December is Annual Appeal month

Our members' generosity this past year allowed us to hit the ground running. Our amazing volunteers have been busy in numerous ways to promote our mission of nature education and conservation:



Bird Quest 2021

We have engaged our membership with guest speakers through our Third Thursday "Zoom" programs.

We had the best and biggest Bird Quest ever and each year it gets bigger and better.

We have

continued to improve trails at the Hach-Otis Sanctuary in Willoughby Hills, including a new trail at the John and Carol Lillich Meadows section. The Bluebird Trail there added significantly to the local bluebird population.

The war against invasive species in the Aurora Sanctuary has escalated to battle-winning levels.

We have constructed a fabulous observation deck at the beaver pond in

*(Continued on page 2)*



Bluebird Trail, Hach-Otis

## The lucky birder

Want to become a luckier birder? It begins by understanding that LUCK is an acronym that stands for Laboring Under Correct Knowledge. Simply put, the more you know, the 'luckier' you become. If that makes you roll your eyes, let out a sigh, and say 'Duh', then consider that the term LIFE LIST is just that, a list you add to throughout your life. We don't complete it in our first year of birding, or even the first decade. That is the beauty of birding.

Since retiring I have become a much luckier birder. Having no employer bugging me, I could dedicate more time to birding and bird study. It was August of 2015, so I started by reviewing 'confusing fall warblers' in my various field guides and at [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org). I made a list of the fall warblers I already knew and those I did not, then spent more time on the latter. I

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## "Whistling Swans" return

The waterfowl migration had been disappointing this fall but on Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> things got interesting. More than 2,000 tundra swans (aka, whistling swans) landed at the north end of LaDue Reservoir in Geauga County to rest on their long journey from the arctic tundra to the Chesapeake Bay.

It was a sight and sound to behold!

Weighing in at about 15 pounds, the all-white adults stayed relatively close together and covered about 3,000 feet of water from west to east ("Thank you" Google Maps measuring tool!). I arrived about 11:00 am and some already had

their heads tucked under a wing sleeping, while others kept watch with fully stretched necks. Occasionally we could see small groups bobbing their heads and necks up and down! There was no feeding taking place in that deep water, just resting from what was probably a long, overnight flight from the north.

The cygnets (young of the year) were easy to identify with their dusky brown/gray plumage and pink bill. I wondered what they must be thinking during this, their first, migration. Their parents have

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Tundra swan in flight. Photo: M. Valencic

## *From the Nest...*

Time for Christmas Bird Counts! There are numerous opportunities available in our area and it is fun to help out with one of the longest citizen science projects in existence. You do not need to have any experience with bird surveys to participate and it will get you connected to other birders in the area. I encourage you to give it a try.



In addition, I always love to do my Christmas Card Bird Count. I am amazed at the number of species represented in these holiday scenes. Already I have three on my list. Let me know how many you receive!

This is also the time of year when many of us participate in holiday gift giving. We have recently sent out our Annual Appeal request. These funds are

necessary for us to meet our mission of education and appreciation of nature. This year trail improvements, invasive species control, youth and adult education and many other activities have taken place thanks to your past generosity. We thank you for including us among the other donations you make during the holiday season.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Photo: M. Valencic



### Did You Know?

A tufted titmouse will live its entire life within about two miles of its hatching nest. The oldest tufted titmouse known was 13 years, three months old.

—Jim Tomko



Observation deck, Novak Sanctuary

### Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



### Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*)

There at your feeder is truly one of “our” birds. You will hear its loud clear call which sounds like “Peter Peter Peter” all late winter, spring and into the early summer.

The tufted titmouse is a year-round, non-migratory resident that stays on territory all year. Its range is from the Gulf Coast and Florida up to our northern border just barely extending into Canada, and from the east coast just into Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas and Nebraska. Originally it was a southern bird that is extending its range north.

The preferred habitat is deciduous or mixed conifer-deciduous woodlands. When Europeans cleared Ohio’s forests, the tufted titmouse all but disappeared. Now with reforestation they are very common.

The name titmouse goes back to a Scandinavian word *tittr* or *tita* meaning a small bird and the middle English word *mase* meaning tiny bird.

This small but sturdy sprite has a dark gray, crested cap, back and wings, rusty flanks, and pale gray underparts. It has a large black eye.

For such a small bird it is surprisingly tame, easily adapting to offerings of seeds and suet from your backyard feeders. It eats a variety of invertebrates including insects, spiders and snails in addition to berries, acorns, beech nuts and seeds. It will cache seeds from your feeders, wedging the seed in cracks and furrows in the bark of trees to be eaten later.

They are cavity nesters but cannot drill their own hollows. They rely on abandoned woodpecker holes or decayed hollows in stranding dead trees. This is a good reason to allow dead trees to remain in the forest to provide nesting opportunities. They readily accept nesting boxes.

When it sits on your windowsill curiously looking in, freshen up the supply of seed in your feeders and enjoy the company.

—Jim Tomko

### Annual Appeal

(Continued from page 1)

the Novak Sanctuary in Aurora.

We have established a new committee to delve into our rich history going back to the early 1900s which we will share with our membership.

We have visited schools and children’s groups to instill an appreciation of nature.

All of these endeavors and many more would not be possible without your support!

These and other activities depend on your donations above and beyond the basic membership contribution. Once (and only once) a year we look to our membership for the financial help that allows us to accomplish our goals. Our annual appeal involves just our local Audubon chapter; therefore, your gift will benefit the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland chapter exclusively.

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland is an all-volunteer organization with no paid employees, and every penny contributed goes toward

Children’s programs



Invasive species control

achieving our purpose. Your entire donation stays here to help preserve wildlife in our area. Our chapter is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

We sincerely thank you for considering us as a recipient of your charitable donations. Rest assured that we will make careful and thoughtful use of your generosity.

Please return this form and your tax-deductible donation to:  
The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland  
P.O. Box 391037  
Solon, OH 44139

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization.

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Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.

## In case you missed it

“Wild Turkey Trek” November 13th

Once again, the wild turkeys evaded us but we had a wonderful November walk in the Novak Sanctuary. We were treated to a light snow flurry with some wondrously shaped snowflakes which melted almost on contact.

Surprisingly many of the leaves were still on the trees. Some had spectacular colors but a considerable number were still quite green.

Bird-wise it was a quiet walk with only 10 species of birds. Among the celebrities were a bald eagle, a Northern flicker and some white-throated sparrows.

As a very special highlight we found witch hazel trees in bloom with their unusual pale-yellow petals. I put this question to you: Are they the first trees to bloom or the last?

—Jim Tomko



Witch hazel

Photo: J. Tomko

## Lucky birder

(Continued from page 1)

got out and birded a lot during September and it paid off. I guess you could say I got LUCKY!

Later that year I decided to get better at gulls (a moment of weakness, I assure you!). I knew the regulars (ring-billed, herring, Bonaparte’s and great black-backed) but wanted to learn the unusual

Golden-winged warbler  
Photo: M. Valencia



## Swans

(Continued from page 1)

been bonded, some for up to 20 years, and have made the trip many times in both directions. The cygnets don’t know it now, but they will be passing this way again in mid-March as they journey back to their birthplace on the tundra.

Tundra swans eat all manner of plant material as well as mollusks and arthropods. On the Chesapeake Bay they will dig up clams, using their bill and feet, and swallow them whole, assuming the gulls don’t steal them first. They also graze on recently harvested corn and soybean fields where they may be sharing it with another tundra breeder, the snow goose.

Now I’m anxious to see more waterfowl in December. An eared or red-necked grebe would be nice!

—Matt Valencia



Tundra swans and cygnets.

Photo: M. Valencia

ones. I studied the books but got more confused. It was not until I went birding with someone who knew gulls that things clicked, at least some of them! Let’s say that gulls are a work in progress!

Spring warblers, flycatchers and vireos were the project for April through July, 2016. This is where the birding app on my phone paid off, learning the calls and songs of the birds that looked similar but had different songs. I get better each year, but it requires annual review.

This past May I heard what I thought was a golden-winged warbler where I usually hear blue-winged warblers. I shared this with a friend who knows warbler songs and together we found the golden-winged warbler in traditional blue-winged warbler habitat. It was very satisfying.

What I am trying to say is this ... be patient with yourself but always be learning. At home use field guides, books and online resources like eBird and allaboutbirds.org. Learn the habitat preferences of resident and summer breeding birds, as well as their songs and calls.

And most importantly, go birding with folks who know more than you do. Buy them lunch or coffee as a thank you. Then ‘pay it forward’ by taking a new birder for a walk. You will surprise yourself with how much you know, and that should encourage you to continue learning.

—Matt Valencia

## Upcoming Events

### Third Thursday

**Dec 16 7:00pm**

“Why Field Guides Change”

Via Zoom®

Why does my field guide keep changing?

Dr. Andy Jones from the Cleveland Museum of Natural History will explain changes in taxonomy and why bird names change.



Register for this program at  
[www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events)

### Field Trip

**Dec 17 7:00pm**

“Winter Solstice Hike”

Novak Sanctuary

Come and celebrate the closest Friday night to the Winter Solstice without interfering with Christmas Eve activities. These are among the longest nights of the year and we can enjoy the peace and quiet of the winter woods one night short of the full moon. Owls may call, coyotes may howl, beaver may announce us but these natural sounds are good for the soul. Meet at the parking lot about 1 mile north of State Route 82 on the east side of Townline Road on the Aurora/Mantua Border.


**DATED MAIL**

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**Trail crew update**

The trail crew continues to chip away at the enormous task of clearing invasive plant species from our sanctuaries.

On October 12th, a team of nine tackled the area near the bench overlooking the small peninsula that juts into the eastern edge of Fulton Pond in the Aurora Sanctuary.

On November 5th, another team of 14 returned to finish clearing the peninsula area and begin tackling some of the area going northward along the bank. Armed with loppers, herbicide daubers and a power trimmer, the group cleared and treated an area roughly 3,000 square feet or about the size of a



Matt Valencic (right) taking our new power brush trimmer 'to the edge' with Rob Swaney clearing the cut brush.  
 Photo: B. Twaddell

tennis court.

The effort will undoubtedly broaden and beautify the view of the lake from the bench next spring as wildflowers and native grasses emerge in place of the dense buckthorn bushes.


The crew will continue to make smaller efforts to maintain and improve the trails, weather permitting, during the winter months.

Email [trailcrew@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:trailcrew@clevelandaudubon.org) if you're interested in helping in the sanctuaries.

—Ban Twaddell

***A Wry Smile***

Cop: You were going too fast.  
 Me: I was just trying to keep up with traffic.  
 Cop: There isn't any.  
 Me: I know! That's how far behind I am.




Fulton Pond in winter.

*From the archives*