



# The HOUSE WREN

## Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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

February, 2020

### Birds help feed the hungry?



Food donations make a great "admission fee" to a birding program! Photo: M. Valencic

Birds really benefit from well-stocked feeders during winter when their natural foods are covered with snow or ice. The rest of the year they do quite well for themselves in nature. But when people fall on hard times and funds are short they need alternative sources of food no matter the season. Churches, schools and other organizations often collect food throughout the year and take it to local food pantries for distribution

to those in need.

Recently St. Joan of Arc Church in Chagrin Falls held a unique food drive. They invited ASGC member Matt Valencic to present one of his bird talks from The Speakers Bureau, and the cost of admission was food items that would be donated to an area food pantry. The program was advertised in their parish bulletin, in the local newspaper and through email blasts. Even though there was freezing rain the evening of the program, 30+ people showed up and contributed food that filled two shopping carts. The next day many more people brought their contributions to church, apologizing that they chose not to travel in the bad weather. The program was a hit and they

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### What makes a bird a bird?

Find out at

#### Junior Birder Day

For boys and girls, K thru 3rd grade. Interactive stations will cover feathers, wings, beaks, feet, nests, eggs and birdsong. Try out binoculars, dissect an owl pellet and make a bird mask. New Junior Birders will take home a patch and other cool stuff. \$5 per child suggested donation.



#### February 8

Two sessions:  
10am - noon,  
or 1pm to 3pm.  
Novak  
Education  
Center, 381  
Townline Road,  
Aurora.

Register at

[info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org)

### New workshop for beginning birders offered

Would you like to identify birds with more confidence but don't know where to begin? This workshop is for you! Have you ever attended a guided bird walk and found it difficult to "get on the bird" with your binoculars? This workshop is for you! Would you like to be more prepared for this year's Spring Bird Walks? This workshop is for you!

This 3-hour workshop will spend about 45 minutes with 'classroom' material then move outside in small groups (4 or less/group) for a 2-hour "walk and learn" with experienced birders in the Novak Sanctuary. You will learn how to group birds by size and shape, how to get a general impression of

their movements, and what field marks to look for BEFORE you refer to your field guide. You will also learn how to use a field guide and how to care for your binoculars.

THIS FREE WORKSHOP IS FOR NEW BIRDERS and you must register to attend! We want you to feel comfortable asking ANY question, no matter how basic. The experienced birders who accompany you in the field will be focused on helping you become more confident, so you can get excited about visiting new places to find birds.

CLASS SIZE IS LIMITED TO 16 PERSONS/SESSION.

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### From the Nest...

My heartfelt thank you to all who participated in our Volunteer Appreciation gathering which occurred last month. What a great turnout! And we found some fresh and eager volunteers with skills and expertise that we desperately need. If you were not able to attend, please consider your own



strengths and passions that would benefit your chapter. You can contact us at [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org). Thank you for your help.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is upon us. This is an excellent way to participate in one of the biggest if not the biggest international citizen science projects that ever existed. It is a collaboration of National Audubon,

Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Bird Studies Canada to take the "pulse" of bird populations throughout the world. It has been an ongoing project for 22 years. All you need to do is take 15 minutes from Friday, February 14<sup>th</sup> through Monday, February 17<sup>th</sup> to record bird sightings and then submit them to [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). You can get more information at that website.

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## Merit Badge Challenge

At the second session of BSA Troop 269 Merit Badge Challenge, Barb Philbrick and Matt Valencic worked with 26 Scouts to earn their Bird Study merit badges. They learned to focus, use, and care for binoculars, including cleaning the lenses.

Once everyone had cleaned and focused their binoculars, we worked on using field guides. They needed to find eight different birds, identify the range of each bird, and record the information in their workbooks.

We also discussed careers in bird study. They had turned up some interesting options, such as Parakeet Rehabbers,

Wading Bird and Black Rail Project Technician, and Avian Specialist/Biologist.

We also started prepping them for the next merit badge session, where we will hike the grounds of the Aurora City School campus. They will need to find 20 birds by sight and 5 by ear, so we showed slides of common Ohio birds and played their songs.

Many of the Scouts did not have binoculars or field guides. A big thank you to the Novak Education Center and Matt for loaning binoculars and field guides to class so that each of the Scouts had a pair to work with.

—Barb Philbrick



Photo: M. Valencic

**Great Horned Owl** (*Bubo virginianus*)

The most fearsome denizen of our forests is likely the great horned owl. Other animals will not tangle with the great horned owl if they have a choice. Great horned owls have been known to evict bald eagles from their nest and claim it as their own. The force of their grip is equal to a rottweiler's bite.

Their favored prey is medium-sized mammals but they have the most varied diet of all our raptors. They will consume large insects, worms, scorpions, snakes, frogs, fish, birds as large as great blue herons, other owls, rabbits, woodchucks and even skunks. They apparently have such a poor sense of smell that the skunk spray does not bother them.

Great horned owls are active after dark especially just after sunset and just before dawn. If hunting is not successful, they will continue into the day.

At 22 inches in length with a three and a half-foot wingspan and weighing in at three pounds this is the largest year-round owl species in our area. Snowy owls are larger but are here rarely and only in the winter. This owl may be our most versatile owl, living from Alaska to South America in habitats from coast lines to forests to deserts.

Great horned owls are a beautiful palette of mottled browns and grays with black highlights and a white throat with rufous facial discs surrounding large yellow eyes.

Nest site selection is an abandoned crow's or hawk's nest or in a cavity of a tree or crack or crevice in a cliff face. Rarely they will nest on the ground. This owl is among the first birds to nest in the season with eggs laid in late February and March. Maybe you will be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of them nesting this month or hear their wondrous hoots in the night.

—Jim Tomko



Great horned owl mom and chicks.  
Photo: M. Valencic

### Did you know?

Great horned owls are so effective at incubating that they can do it successfully at -27 degrees F with a layer of snow on their back!

—Jim Tomko

### New birding workshop

(Continued from page 1)

Location: Novak Education Center, 382 Townline Road, Aurora, OH. For maximum convenience the same workshop is offered on two different days: Wednesday March 18<sup>th</sup> from 9:00am to noon and Saturday March 21<sup>st</sup> from 9:00am to noon. Register for only one session by emailing your name, email address and cell phone number to [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org). We will confirm your reservation by email.

Let us help you get ready for Spring Migration!

—Matt Valencic



Birders Kim Pease and Barb Philbrick lead a winter bird walk in the Novak Sanctuary.

Photo: K. Carter-Cohn

### From the Nest

(Continued from page 1)

Please put our Annual Meeting (Saturday June 6<sup>th</sup>) on your calendar! We always have a great afternoon and evening of food and events. This year's key note speaker will be a fun and tantalizing talk. We will be learning about the status of the search for the once thought extinct Ivory-billed Woodpecker from former Louisiana Ornithological Society president, Matt Courtman, who has organized a successful search for the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. Come join us for his talk- **The Ivory-billed Woodpecker: Past, Present, and Future.**

—Jim Tomko, President

### Feed the hungry

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are planning on doing another one in a couple months.

If your organization would like to do something similar, visit our website ([clevelandaudubon.org](http://clevelandaudubon.org)) and click on The Backyard Naturalist button on the right to review talks from our Speakers Bureau. Then contact us at [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org) to schedule a speaker. Good publicity by your group is important for the best turnout.

Now you know how birds can help feed the hungry!

—Matt Valencic

## In case you missed it

### Winter Track Walk

Our winter track walk started with snowflakes and freezing rain as we drove to the sanctuary. It converted to all freezing rain as we exited our cars. The roads were so treacherous that only four of us who live near the sanctuary were able to make it. During the walk it changed over to just rain.



Intrepid birders Debbie Ondrejka, Rob Swaney, and Barb Philbrick join Jim Tomko on the Winter Track Walk in January.

Most of the local wildlife had much better sense than we did as they remained holed up snug and cozy in their lairs. We only saw or heard six or seven species of birds. But, that included a bald eagle near its nest! We did see white-tailed deer, gray squirrel, and mink tracks. The mink trail came up out of an opening in the ice and slush on a stream. We could see the loping pattern follow the stream bed in the slush on the ice through the drain pipe culvert under the trail and off down the stream where it disappeared into the brush.

What a great reward for withstanding that kind of weather!

—Jim Tomko



Mink tracks.

Photos: J. Tomko

## Volunteer Open House

We are so pleased to have welcomed over 30 volunteers and potential volunteers to our Open House party January 19.

“Entertainment” for the afternoon amounted to food, food and more food! There was fresh fruit and cheese, cookies, cakes, pizza, stuffed mushrooms and did I mention cookies?

ASGC President Jim Tomko talked about volunteering for ASGC and

thanked those present who were already volunteers. He also thanked the trustees who came—and their service is invaluable.

I spoke about Education Committee opportunities, most specifically the immediate need to publicize our Junior Birder Day, coming up February 8. There were flyers to distribute and many attendees took several with them to post.

Matt Valencic talked about specific

opportunities and pointed out the comprehensive list he had compiled, detailing all the jobs we do, and need to do, as volunteers.

Thank you to all who attended, and thank you especially to those who stepped up and committed their time and energy to ASGC for our upcoming programs.

—Alison DeBroux

## Upcoming Events

### Field Trips, Etc.

**February 8 10am-12pm or 1-3pm**

*“Junior Birder Day”*

Novak Education Center

What makes a bird a bird? Find out the answer to this and many other questions about birds. Interactive stations will cover feathers, wings, beaks, feet, nests, eggs and birdsong. Look for real birds with binoculars! Check out feathers under a microscope! Dissect an owl pellet!

For boys and girls, K thru 3rd grade. \$5 donation per child requested. Sessions fill up quickly so reserve your child’s place today!

For reservations, email: [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org)

**February 15 9:30am**

*“Great Backyard Bird Count”*

Aurora Sanctuary

Help us complete our winter bird survey while participating in the international Great Backyard Bird Count sponsored by National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This walk is especially satisfying because we can see almost all the birds we hear as opposed to the summer season where they can be obscured in the canopy. It is also a great time for those just getting started in birding to learn about our winter resident species and techniques of finding our quarry all while contributing important citizen science information to

ornithologists anywhere in the world. Meet at the Aurora Sanctuary parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora.

**March 18 9:00am**

**March 21 9:00am**

*“Beginning Birding Workshop”*

Novak Education Center

In this workshop, learn to group birds by size and shape, what field marks to look for, and how to use a field guide and take care of your binoculars. Approximately 45 minutes of “classroom” followed by 2-hour bird walk. **FREE but registration is required.**

**DATED MAIL**

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*A Wry Smile*



“You do not really understand something unless you can explain it to your grandmother.”

—Albert Einstein

**50 years of the Cleveland Bird Calendar**

Found in a recently discovered collection of ASGC historical records, this is the program of the May, 1955, meeting of the Cleveland Audubon Society, held May 2<sup>nd</sup> at Higbee's.



The “Cleveland Bird Calendar,” compiled and edited by members of the Kirtland Bird Club and Cleveland Audubon Society, was part of this publication. Published four times a year since 1905, the Calendar reported on bird species seen in the area, summarized weather conditions, and commented on the season.

The “Cleveland Bird Calendar” originated the breeding bird census (or survey) that we continue to conduct every year. Starting in the 1930s, members of the Cleveland Bird Club (the precursor to the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland) kept records of species seen on every field trip, number

of individuals of each species, hours and miles covered, and types of habitats visited. Their studies helped initiate a country-wide survey of breeding birds by the National Audubon Society and contributed 14 of the 30 records in the first published Census.

Dr. S. Charles Kendeigh, editor of the Calendar from 1935 to 1938, wrote: “There is much fascination in

making such surveys and the scientific value of the data is immense. It is a wonderful hobby. It gives a person considerable satisfaction to feel he is doing something worthwhile. I give it to you as a challenge.”

You can become part of history by participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count on February 15th!

—Alison DeBroux