



# 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)

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## Beating back the buckthorn

Field/grassland habitats are becoming rarer and rarer in this part of the state. Meadowlarks, bobolinks and grasshopper sparrows, among other species, have nowhere to nest. So we are trying to restore our buckthorn over-run fields to higher quality open fields and grasslands. We are not in favor of the use of herbicides as this disturbs the surface and sub-surface soil organisms as well as killing desirable plants. Mowing is working well and is showing great results.

In April of this year, the board approved \$5000 to remove buckthorn from the Molnar Sanctuary. Waiting until after nesting season so as to create as little disturbance as possible, Ken Kresina began the task of clearing about twelve acres of buckthorn-choked fields with a skidster tractor that had a



Ken Kresina attacks buckthorn at Molnar

mulching attachment. This field was much too heavily invaded and too far along for our brush-hog to handle. The mulcher did a very nice job and Kenny, with surgical precision and an eye for desirable trees, was able to save all the "good" growth and eliminate the invasive buckthorn.

We are going to plant the Lenore Molnar Conifer Living Memorial in the cleared area. It will take a number of seasons to complete but we are underway and hope to start planting this November. So keep an eye on Molnar as we have some exciting plans for these fields!

—Jim Tomko

## "Ornamental" buckthorn an out-of-control invasive

You've seen it. It's the lush green thickets in the Metro-parks, the national park, the ASGC sanctuaries. It's along shady roadsides and bike paths. It may even be in your yard.



Common, or European, buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) is a shrub or small tree that can grow to 22 feet in height and have a trunk up to ten inches wide. The crown shape is spreading and irregular. The bark is gray to brown, rough-textured when mature.

Leaves are broadly oval, rounded or pointed at the tip, with 3-4 pairs of upcurved veins, and may have jagged, toothed margins. Leaves appear dark, glossy green on the upper surface and stay green late into fall, after most other deciduous leaves have fallen.

Small black berries form in the fall. The plentiful fruit is eaten by birds and is known to produce a severe laxative effect, helping distribute seeds, often far

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Molnar field after mowing

## From the Nest...

The Education Committee needed very little prodding to agree to a name change for the Saturday Afternoon Backyard Naturalist series. While this name was very descriptive, it was a mouthful and I, for one, was very tired of writing it out. If I used its abbreviation, SABN, no one knew what I was talking about. So we have shortened it to The Backyard Naturalist. Still descriptive, but not as confining or



ridiculously long. Our programs will continue to be on Saturday afternoons (see page 3 for this month's schedule), but we now have the option of having them in the morning, or on Sunday, or who knows?

On the same subject, we are always open to suggestions for Backyard Naturalist topics and speakers. Our schedule currently consists of three programs in the fall, three in the winter/spring, and one family-oriented program in the summer. If you have been to a

program somewhere that you feel would interest our members, or have a topic you would like to see addressed, please contact us at [audubon.cleveland@hotmail.com](mailto:audubon.cleveland@hotmail.com).

I would like to welcome Kathy Cochran as co-chair of the Education Committee. She has been a dedicated volunteer for many years and was instrumental in organizing our Scout Day (page 4). I am looking forward to a great working relationship with her.

—Alison DeBroux, Editor

# What's happening at Novak?

At the Novak Sanctuary we have been strip mowing for several years. This means we are mowing a 25- to 30-foot strip several times during the growing season to knock back the woody (buckthorn) growth. The following year we move over to the next 30-foot strip and let the previous season's mowing grow all summer. Each growing season we will continue to move over a strip in order to create a

five-year rotation so that we will have all our fields with five-year successional stages from grasses the first year to asters, goldenrods and shrubby viburnums the fourth or fifth year. This variety of growth provides the most benefit for wildlife. It allows for winter cover in the unmown strips and a bounty of food in the various successional stages of growth.

—Jim Tomko



Stage 3: After 2+ years, high quality meadow returns



Stage 2: After 1 year, simple grasses return



Stage 1: Current year's mowing  
Photos: J. DeBroux

**“Ornamental” buckthorn**  
(Continued from page 1)  
from the parent plant.

Common buckthorn was introduced to North America as an ornamental shrub, based on its hardiness and ability to thrive in a variety of soil and light conditions. It forms dense thickets, crowding and shading out native shrubs and herbs. It is found from Nova Scotia to Saskatchewan, and south to Missouri. It prefers lightly shaded conditions, invading mainly open oak woods,

deadfall openings in woodlands, and woods edges. It may also be found in prairies and open fields. It is tolerant of many soil types, wet or dry.

Buckthorn is resistant to Roundup unless applied in concentrated form directly to cut surfaces. And, sadly, deer do not like it.

Once buckthorn is established, it requires years of vigilance to fully eradicate it from an area.

Source: [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)



## It's a bird! No, it's a...?

This parrot is in fact a female model who posed for Johannes Statter, a fine art body painter. Using breathable paint, he spent hours painstakingly turning this woman into the image of a parrot, brushstroke by brushstroke. The model's arm forms the parrot's head and beak, and her legs form the wing and tail feathers. Remember: things aren't always what they appear to be!

—Contributed by Randy Foith & Jim Tomko

## Critter Corner



Photo: NAS

## White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*

If you have not already seen them at your feeder, you will soon! This “spiffy” sparrow regularly visits our ground feeders during the cold half of the year, brightening our day.

Adults have two plumage types. One has bright white crown stripes bordered by black, and one has tan crown stripes bordered by dark brown. Most breeding pairs have opposite plumages. Both color types have a bright white, sharply defined throat patch.

They sing at their nesting grounds with a beautiful rendition of “sweet, sweet Canada, Canada, Canada.” They typically nest in the northern forests of Canada but sometimes as close as northern Michigan and upstate New York. The nest is an open cup on the ground, made of finely woven grass and pine needles, lined with plant fibers, moss, rootlets and hair. Four to five greenish-blue, brown-speckled eggs are laid and incubated for about 12 days.

Summer food includes insects, spiders, and other invertebrates which they expose by scratching the ground with both legs at the same time. They also eat some berries and buds. Winter food is composed primarily of seeds which is why they are so attracted to our feeders.

Enjoy these splendid sparrows at your feeder, and on a warmer, sunny winter's day, listen for their wonderful song.

—Jim Tomko



## In Case You Missed It!

*"Autumn Leaf Color Hike"*  
Hach-Otis 10/18/14

We almost had a repeat of last year's weather at the beautiful Hach-Otis Sanctuary, but the rain stopped just as we gathered at the trailhead. Once again John Lillich was kind enough to lead us on a wonderful historical and nature tour with the help of fellow board member and Hach-Otis neighbor Bill Kennelly. We saw the splendid yellows on the witch hazel and hickories and the

fantastic reds and oranges on the maples and oaks. A look across the gorge gave an artist's palette of color as we gazed at the ridge of Chapin Woods and Little Mountain beyond. To top it off, a 3- or 4-year-old bald eagle flew to our side of the river and perched for all to see. This was the peak weekend for color and the only thing that would have made it better would have been a little splash of sunshine. Thank you John and Bill for a fantastic fall foliage extravaganza!

—Jim Tomko

*"Symposium on Wind Energy & Wildlife"*  
Independence 10/19/14

This program was sponsored in partnership with Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society and Kirtland Bird Club, with approximately 90 members attending. Dr. Michael Hutchins of the American Bird Conservancy warned that little is known about the environmental impact of off-shore wind turbines. Much more study is needed to insure that the turbines do not devastate migratory birds and resident water birds. Dr. Lorry Wagner of the Lake Erie Energy

Development Corporation acknowledged that there would be a bird "take" that would need to be documented. Jen Miller of the Sierra Club also had concerns about the impact of the turbines but felt that we really need to find alternative sources of energy sooner rather than later. This informative program was the first time these three organizations were gathered together for a dialogue. Following the presentation, the panelists addressed audience questions and concerns. Stan Searles moderated.

—Jim Tomko

## The Squawk



"Recently, the Natural History Museum held a conservation symposium, with much emphasis about the need to protect threatened species. It seems that migrating birds lose habitat to sun-grown coffee plantations ... because of cutting down rainforests to grow coffee beans in the sun. Those attending the symposium were encouraged to buy shade-grown coffee as that allows the protective tree canopy to remain for birds who migrate. But, I had difficulty finding where I can buy shade-grown coffee in this area, much less any supermarket managers who knew what it is!"

—Peggy Patch

Peggy discovered shade-grown coffee at Trader Joe's: *Ethiopian Shade-grown Whole Foods: Organic Colombia El-roble* or *Costa Rica Dota* and via mail-order at [www.birdsandbeans.com](http://www.birdsandbeans.com)  
Thanks, Peggy, for this great information!

Send your comments, questions, or complaints to  
[auduboncleveland@hotmail.com](mailto:auduboncleveland@hotmail.com)

## Upcoming Events

### The Backyard Naturalist

### Field Trips

**November 22 3:00-5:00pm**

*"Birding by Habitat"*

Cheryl Harner  
Flora-Quest

Finding birds in the field can be improved by knowing their preferred habitats. Even novice birders know to look for ducks in or near water and woodpeckers in a forest. Cheryl will group birds by habitat and highlight some of the best plants and places for specific species. Once birders consider the plant life associated with the bird they'd like to see, it's easier to find the most desirable birds or even attract them to your yard.

\*This program features photos by Cleveland photographer Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr.

Cheryl Harner is interested in the connections between botany and

wildlife. She is an avid gardener and life-long wildflower and butterfly enthusiast. Her extensive volunteer work includes long-time leadership in Greater Mohican Audubon Society and Richland County Master Gardeners. She currently serves two land trusts and works as an environmental educator and advocate for nature. Co-founder of Flora-Quest, she writes a blog for its website: *W e e d p i c k e r ' s J o u r n a l* ([www.cherylharner.blogspot.com](http://www.cherylharner.blogspot.com)).

All Backyard Naturalist programs are free and held at our  
Novak Education Center,  
382 Townline Road, Aurora.

**November 8 10:00am**

*"Leaf Kicking Hike"*

Aurora Sanctuary

Remember the sound and feeling of wading through a carpet of leaves as a kid? Re-live those sensations with a walk in the forest. Most of the leaves will be on the ground by now and if the weather cooperates they may be dry and crunchy! We will have a chance to see a turkey flock but we are not announcing that because when we do they all take cover and remain out of sight. Maybe it is a pre-Thanksgiving protective strategy. Meet at the Aurora Sanctuary parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora.

**December 19 7:00pm**

*"Winter Solstice Hike"*

Novak Sanctuary

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*A Wry Smile*



“All it takes to fly is to hurl yourself at the ground...and miss.”

—Douglas Adams

**2014 Scout Day participants learn all about birds**

The ASGC sponsored our 2<sup>nd</sup> Scout Day on October 11<sup>th</sup>. Seventeen young scouts, from kindergarten through third grade, rotated through nine stations at the Novak Education Center, learning something different about birds at each one.

In “What Are Birds,” they found out the different parts to a bird. They also learned that birds have hollow bones which helps them fly, that different types of beaks are good for different types of food, and how nests are made and where the birds live who make them. They listened to bird songs, made pinecone bird feeders, and found out what owls eat for lunch.

We'd like to thank our helper scouts, graduates of the 2013 Scout Day, who earned a “Bird Buddy” patch for

teaching several of the stations. Our thanks also to Sue Graham, Andrea Storey and Jim Tomko who ran the remaining



stations and helped enormously with set-up and tear down. Kathy Cochran, co-chair of the Education Committee, was project coordinator for this event.

Our 2014 graduates earned a “Junior Birder” patch and included: Bethany, Bryn, Chloe, Addyson, Isabella, Raquel, Moriah, Rachel, Bella, Isabelle, Katie, Bailey, Kaylin, Addison, Ella, Phoenix and Emerson. Congratulations to all of you!



Photo: [bedfordaudubon.org](http://bedfordaudubon.org)

**Did You Know?** Common witch hazel (*hamamelis virginiana*) is the last tree to bloom in our area, often coming into flower after fall leaf drop. This is a native, deer resistant, shade tolerant, understory tree (sounds like we should plant more of them). Depending on the weather, it can bloom anytime from October to December. The fragrant, bright yellow flowers are something to behold! The fruit turns dark and woody, protecting the seeds until the following fall when it explodes, shooting its seeds up to 30 feet away!

—Jim Tomko

**DATED MAIL**

