



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

Volume XXXIX, Number 1

January, 2021

Winter raptors

Some northern raptors think NE Ohio is a dandy place to spend the winter! This is great because most of us will never get to the boreal forest or arctic tundra to see them in their breeding territories. The big question every winter is, "where do we go to find these birds?" The answer is always the same: look for their desired habitat.

Rough-legged hawks (RLHAs), short-eared owls (SEOWs) and northern harriers (NOHAs) have similar winter preferences. In general, they all prefer open fields and prairies, with SEOWs and NOHAs also hunting over wetlands. Small rodents are their primary prey while harriers might also take some



Rough-legged hawk (light morph)
Photo: M. Valencic

birds.

How can they all coexist in the same habitat? Hunting style offers one explanation. RLHAs tend to perch high in trees or on fence posts, looking for
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Native trees

Did you lose any trees during the December 1st snowstorm? We lost two, mature hawthorns, about 20 feet tall, both brimming with berries. Nearly every branch broke at the trunk and bowed to the ground (the deer immediately cleaned off all the berries within reach!). Now we must decide what native trees to select as replacements.

Why native trees? Because they have evolved over millennia with the birds, insects and plant diseases in this part of Ohio. Native trees attract the most species of pollinators, which attract spring migrating birds and help assure good seed/fruit production.

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More about owls

Did you attend Jim Tomko's December Backyard Naturalist program about NE Ohio owls? Here is another member of the owl family that we may not see in Ohio, but it's worth looking for if you ever travel to the American Southwest:

As twilight deepens along a dry West Texas streambed, a tiny owl peers out from a hole in a sycamore tree. It's an elf owl, the smallest species of owl in the world.

Standing less than six inches tall, feathered in gray with big yellow eyes, the elf owl weighs less than a golf ball.

And it's a determined predator. Flying out from its tree cavity at dusk, the elf owl hunts beetles, crickets, and spiders, plus the odd lizard or mouse. Larger prey

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Silky dogwood berries
Photo: M. Valencic

help assure good

From the Nest...



Happy New Year!

My heartfelt thank you to all who have contributed to our Annual Appeal. This fund drive is ongoing and it is never too late to consider supporting your local chapter to help us achieve our goals of fulfilling our mission statement of education and appreciation of birds

and wildlife.

We have had quite a year with the adaptations and alterations that were necessary in our attempts to do our part in controlling the COVID 19 pandemic. Our education committee is up to their usual and innovative *modus operandi* of inventing novel ways to engage our membership. Stay tuned as their ideas evolve.

We were lucky enough this year to

have a "White Christmas". I hope you get the chance to experience the beauty and wonder of the winter woodland with the songs, tracks and signs of our natural neighbors.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Raptors

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prey during the day, then hovering in place over the field like a kestrel before descending on it. NOHAs course low over the vegetation, turning quickly to drop on their prey. SEOWs also course low but only during twilight (they are crepuscular). It is not uncommon to see Harriers and SEOWs over a field around 4:00pm, each trying to exert dominance over the other.

Long-eared owls (LEOW) use the same habitat but because they are strictly nocturnal, they don't directly compete. Count yourself lucky to find a LEOW on its daytime roost near these habitats. They usually seek very dense cover to sleep during the day.

Snowy owls (SNOWs) are born on the tundra, that treeless expanse of grassland at the top of the world. They hunt small mammals (lots of lemmings) as well as larger mammals and waterfowl. In winter they seek equally open habitat at airports and agricultural fields to look for small mammals. They also are along Lake Erie on the break walls and boat docks where they hunt a

Merlin at Pekin Marsh.

Photo: M. Valencic



variety of waterfowl.

Merlin nest in trees across Canada, usually near open or semi-open spaces where they can hunt birds on the wing. When they get to NE Ohio, look for them in large, urban cemeteries! The arboretum-like habitat supports many small birds, and adjacent homes with bird feeders make for easy pickings.

To find where to look specifically, go to eBird and do a species search for each bird. See separate article for step-by-step instructions.

—Matt Valencic

Species search in eBird

Go to www.ebird.org

1. Click on EXPLORE then click on SPECIES MAPS
2. Enter your species name (Snowy Owl) then enter a location (Cleveland, OH)
3. Move the map around with your mouse and find RED markers (sightings within last 30 days)
4. Click on a marker to see recent sightings at that location
5. Click on the date to view the eBird checklist for that sighting

Owls

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such as scorpions — with the stingers carefully removed — may end up cached in the nest for later dining.

Elf owls live in woodlands and desert cactus habitats in southwest Texas and southern Arizona. In desert habitats, they often nest in woodpecker holes in tall saguaro cactus. They depart the United States by October for the warmer latitudes of Mexico, where insects are more available in winter. But spring comes early to the American Southwest, and the minuscule owls return by late February or March, ready to begin their breeding season.

—Michael Stein

Excerpted from *BirdNote*,
National Audubon Society



An elf owl in the American Southwest.

Photo: B. Arrigoni (Flickr CC)

Critter Corner



Photo: J. Tomko

Northern Short-tailed Shrew

(*Blarina brevicauda*)

Just out of sight right in your own backyard lurks a fearsome, insatiable, venomous predator that can consume up to its own body weight in food in a single day!

It is one of America's smallest mammals and one of the few venomous mammals in the world. It is often the most numerous mammal in appropriate habitat. I'm talking about the northern short-tailed shrew.

This tiny five-inch long (including its tail) creature has an average weight of less than one ounce. Even though it is mouse-sized, it is not closely related to rodents. It is in a completely different order called Insectivora which it shares with hedgehogs, moles, and tenrecs.

Short-tailed shrews have such a high metabolic rate that they have to be constantly on the search for fuel. Their prey are centipedes, beetles, slugs, worms and other invertebrates. But it does not stop there. They also eat small frogs, salamanders, mice, birds, and other shrews.

The larger prey they subdue by chewing their poisonous saliva into the bite wound. It is not enough to kill but enough to paralyze prey which can then be stored as a fresh meal for leaner times.

They are active all year around day and night but most active at twilight. It is believed that they have poor vision but can navigate through their tunnels with their flexible, sensitive snouts that are equipped with long whiskers, a fine sense of smell and echolocation similar to bats.

Shrews are very important in keeping our garden pests under control, devouring them in huge quantities. You are lucky to have a few of these backyard neighbors keeping nature in balance.

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Native trees

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They exist today because they have survived and adapted to the pressure of insects and disease. There are many species to select from so the outside aesthetic of your yard can also be considered.

Our likely prospects include oaks, dogwoods, willow, hackberry, maples, crabapple, serviceberry, bayberry, elderberry and holly. We need to consider the location (sunny with well-drained soil) because “the right tree in the wrong location will not do well”.

I am leaning toward crabapple because of its shape, abundant flowers in May when warblers are migrating, and habit of producing lots of fruit for birds through the winter.

If you are considering adding or replacing a tree in your yard this spring,



Crabapple with berries.

Photo: M. Valencic

check the National Audubon Society “Plants for Birds” website at Plants for Birds (audubon.org). Just put in your zip code and be treated to a bounty of information about native trees and plants for our area.

—Matt Valencic
Master Gardener Volunteer

The Squawk



Send your comments, questions,
or complaints to
info@clevelandaudubon.org

Looking for a speaker?

Did your civic, volunteer or nature organization have in-person speakers before the pandemic? Many groups have gone to Zoom® to connect with members and get back to business. Many public speakers have also gone to Zoom®.

ASGC’s Backyard Naturalist Speakers Bureau was presenting 25 – 30 talks a year before COVID 19. We are slowly getting back to business as groups find virtual meetings the ‘new normal’.

If your group is looking for a speaker on nature topics you can see the list of talks available on our website (www.clevelandaudubon.org) by clicking the Backyard Naturalist (with speakers bureau) button on the right side of the homepage. Then contact us at info@clevelandaudubon.org to book a speaker.

Talks are presented at no charge (part of our Education outreach), but if your organization has a speaker’s budget, we gladly accept any contributions. All speakers are volunteers and 100% of contributions go to work in ASGC chapter activities.

Northern Short-tailed Shrew

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This winter look for their furrows in the fresh snow and the openings that they dive through to get under the surface. They are out there working for us day and night.

—Jim Tomko

Did You Know?

Even with their diminutive size, short-tailed shrews are robustly built for a shrew and are the largest of Ohio’s five species of shrews.

—Jim Tomko

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday Series

January 21 7:00pm

“A Bird’s Eye View”

Via Zoom®

Did you know that a bird’s eyesight is more than seven times keener than yours? Birds experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the world in a radically different way than we do. Learn about some of the amazing ways birds make sense of their environment.

Presented by Sarah Mabey.

To register for these programs, go to www.clevelandaudubon.org and look under EVENTS.

February 18 7:00pm

“A Birding Trip to Cuba”

Via Zoom®

Cuba is the largest island in the Caribbean. Although it is separated from mainland America by less than 100 miles, Cuba has many endemic bird species, which draw birders from around the world. Join us for a birding trip across this naturally-gifted island to see special endemic birds such as the bee hummingbird, the smallest bird in the world, sharing space with North America’s wintering birds.

Presented by Ami Horowitz.

March 18 7:00pm

“Don’t Touch that Nest”

Via Zoom®

Did you know that you may be breaking a federal law by disturbing nesting birds or possessing a feather or egg collection? Learn about the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1916 and how it is intertwined with the beginning of the National Audubon Society.

Presented by Jim Tomko.

DATED MAIL

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A Wry Smile



When can we start using 2020 as a swear word?

You know:

“That’s really 2020’d-up.”

“That’s a piece of 2020...”

An Audubon Moment

My nephew recently began living on a 250-acre wooded property near the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. He was excited to show me around and explore the forest and local wildlife. We had just received about eight inches of fresh dense snow and we were enjoying the tracks left by deer, squirrel, coyote, mink and mice.



Screech owl imprint.

Photo: J. Tomko

I was curious about a long, one-inch-wide furrow on the surface of the snow and began to follow it. Every now and then a one-inch diameter hole appeared and the furrow disappeared just to reappear from a hole in the snow a few feet farther down the line. I wondered if this was left by a shrew or a mouse plowing through and diving under the snow. Shrews have five toes on each foot whereas mice have four toes on the front feet but the impressions were not clear enough to make out that kind of detail.

We persisted none-the-less, and all of a sudden, the track stopped. We then saw the reason: there was the impression of feathers the size of an eastern screech owl on the snow right where the trail ended. I presume the shrew became a tasty meal for the owl.

—Jim Tomko

Website photo contest

You’re invited to submit your photos representing the best of the **winter** season from one or more of our sanctuaries. The winning photo will be featured on our website’s homepage and the winner will receive a \$10 Subway gift card. Winter pictures accepted until **January 7**. Check www.clevelandaudubon.org for full contest information.

Missed the winter deadline? We’re having another contest for spring! So get out those cameras and click away!