



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

March, 2020

Three new trustees join ASGC Board

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland has always been blessed with a wealth of intelligent, talented people. At our January Board of Trustees meeting, we were delighted to add three more. They are: Matt Bartolotta, who is interested in trail-building at the Hach-Otis Sanctuary; Jim DeBroux, who is interested in using his database skills to organize the documents from ASGC's past; and Nora Kelly, who is interested in Education.

Matt Bartolotta is 34 years old and engaged to new trustee Nora Kelly. They live in Lyndhurst with their dog and cat. He works in emergency medicine as a paramedic. He holds a BS in Parks and Resource Management and spent several years employed by Lake Metroparks, The Cleveland Museum of Natural History and the National Park



Service. In high school he completed an Eagle Scout project at Hach-Otis Sanctuary under the guidance of ASGC trustee John Lillich. His hobbies include hiking, bird watching and photography.

Nora Kelly received her BS from Bowling Green State University and has a passion for leadership growth and development. She currently serves as Manager of the Talent Management and Succession Planning program at Cleveland Clinic. Prior to joining the Clinic, she was a high school Biology and Environmental Science teacher at Saint Joseph Academy in Cleveland. Additionally, she served as moderator to the Environmental Concerns of Students (ECOS)



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New committee strives to make order out of chaos

We are "Documentum" and our goal is to organize, store, restore and find documents from ASGC's past. We want to make these documents accessible to anyone that wants to look at them or possibly do research.

In January we received several boxes from Dan Melcher's Estate with lots of documents and other miscellany. We realized what a trove of information this was, plus there were more boxes and piles of documents in the attic of the

Novak Education Center. While there was a lot of useful historical information available, it was not organized in any way. Without organization ALL of those documents are useless and would remain piles of paper. We needed a way to retrieve the treasures of information. Hence a committee was born.

Already, after the first meeting, we have found many interesting pieces of information from ASGC's early years,

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From the Nest...

The Great Backyard Bird Count was a great success! My thanks to all of you who participated. Tabulations continue to come in but as of now, 224,636 checklists were submitted with 6,666 species represented and almost 37 million individual birds recorded. You may continue to submit check-lists for



the GBBC weekend at birdcount.org through March 1st after which you may submit them through ebird.org. If you have a check-list there is still time to submit it.

My thanks to Alison DeBroux and Matt Valencic and their crew for another fantastic young birders day that was well attended and chock full of fun educational content that allowed the

Save the Date! ASGC 2020 Annual Meeting

Please join us **Sat June 6th** for an exciting bird walk, a cordial wine and cheese hour, a delicious meal, and an intriguing keynote presentation. Matt Courtman will convince us that the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is not extinct but is alive and living in the backwater bayous of the southern swamp forests!

March(ing) toward migration

March ushers in the most exciting time of the birding year – spring migration – and the first to arrive are the waterfowl – ducks, geese, swans, grebes and loons. As I write this in mid-February, ducks have started to appear on LaDue, Mosquito and Berlin Lakes.

Twelve new duck species were reported in eBird this week with more than 20 species expected by



Northern pintails

Photo: M. Valencic

the time migration peaks. Special for me was a flock of 40 northern pintails. The males were bright in their mating plumage with signature tail feathers pointing upward. These hardy ducks begin nesting in the 'pothole country' of

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children to learn without realizing that they were in class learning!

Spring is on its way! My harbinger is the red-winged blackbird which I heard for the first time this year at the Novak Sanctuary on Sunday February 16th. I also noticed that "our" Bald Eagle is already incubating! I wish them luck.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Migration

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the upper Midwest and Canada as early as April. They were accompanied by redheads, gadwall, wigeon, common mergansers and more.

Watch the flocks of Canada geese for snow geese or the occasional greater white-fronted goose. Corn stubble fields are likely habitat or wherever you see Canada geese.

Four species of grebes are possible in migration – horned and pied-billed are very common, red-necked less so but expected on most lakes, and eared grebe being very uncommon.

All are active divers that eat fish, frogs, tadpoles, crayfish and lots of invertebrates. They can be found on open lakes and flooded wetlands.

March brings Wilson's snipe, tree



Turkey vulture

Photo: M. Valencic

swallows, red-winged blackbirds and killdeer to wetlands and nearby fields. Rusty blackbirds and wood ducks return to bottomland forests along lakes and rivers. Look for eastern meadowlarks in agricultural fields and large, grassy expanses (like the Geauga Fair general parking fields in Burton) and fox sparrows in dense thickets but possibly under your feeders!

Finally, it wouldn't be March without the "buzzards" (turkey vultures) returning to Whipp's Ledges in Hinkle Reservation (and everywhere else in NE Ohio). Type 'buzzard fest' into your browser for details.

March is the warm-up for April and May. Check next month's newsletter to learn what April will be bringing us.

—Matt Valencic

Critter Corner



Photo: AllAboutBirds.org

Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis Phoebe*)

Don't you just love it when the bird you are listening to is saying its name? I am frequently asked how to learn bird songs and calls. The best way to begin is with a small group of four or five birds and once those calls are learned add a new one to your memory banks.

A good place to start is with the "name-sayers". And the eastern phoebe does in fact say its name. But listen to a recording! As a 10-year-old in the woods I was sure that I was hearing a phoebe then after some careful observation (I didn't have recordings back then) I discovered that I was listening to the territorial call of the black-capped chickadee!

Eastern phoebes are medium sized, olive-drab flycatchers famous for NOT having field marks. They do not have eye-rings, they do not have wing-bars, their crest is so short that it is almost never noticed.

The unique trait they do have is almost constant tail pumping while perched.

Phoebes find our dwellings and bridges appealing for their nests. They build a cozy moss and mud nest under an overhang on a small ledge. Phoebes are among the first insectivores to arrive in our area sometimes even before the snow cover has melted. They survive because they are able to shift their diet from insects to fruit and berries. That is an amazing feat for a flycatcher.

They may return any day now. Listen for the FEE-BEE call and look for that pumping tail.

—Jim Tomko

Documentum

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starting when it was known as the Cleveland Bird Club. It is a slow process because there is so much interesting history in these documents that we get distracted.

Our first official meeting was February 14. Our next meeting is scheduled for March 19, from 9:00am to approximately noon. After that we will meet on the 2nd Thursday of each

month, starting in April. All meetings will be at the Novak Education Center.

We currently have six members but if going through historical documents interests you, please join us, even if it is for one time only.

—Jim DeBroux

(Editor's note: for more information, contact Jim at info@clevelandaudubon.org)

New trustees

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committee, which was responsible for initiating a schoolwide recycling program. She spent her formative years at the Lake Erie Nature and Science Center where she served as a Wildlife Rehabilitator. She lives in Lyndhurst with her fiancée, Matthew Bartolotta, dog Henry and cat Walt.

Jim DeBroux has degrees in Math and Chemistry and retired from BASF in 2016 after 37 years of being a chemist, the last 10 years as lab manager. Under his direction the lab implemented ISO9001 using a highly computerized system that he designed. He is skilled at programming, database design and

maintenance. He still does math stuff and is a

member of SABR (Society for American Baseball Research). He is an information junkie and was inspired to join the Board when he discovered the need for a

documents database (see accompanying article on "Documentum.") He lives in Twinsburg with fellow trustee Alison DeBroux, two dogs and a very old cat.



Did you know?

John James Audubon is thought to be the first American to "band" a bird to monitor when it returned from winter migration and see if it was the same bird. In 1804 he tied a silver thread to the ankle of a nestling eastern phoebe. And sure enough, it returned!

In case you missed it Winter Bird Survey

Our annual winter bird survey as usual occurred during the weekend of the Great Backyard Bird Count. We enjoyed a cold hike that started at seven degrees but quickly warmed up all the way to 19 degrees before we were done.

We were treated to a few fleeting glimpses of a furtive barred owl in the white pine grove. We heard a belted kingfisher which was working the ice-free sections of the Aurora Branch. Our

Cats: The cuddly killers

Millions of our precious aviary friends are being killed by domestic cats. When authors Peter P. Marra and Chris Santella (*Cat Wars: The Devastating Consequences of a Cuddly Killer*) set out to scientifically investigate just how many, the results were astounding. Many species of birds, amphibians, and even monk seals are threatened with extinction.

Monk seals? Decimated by cats? How can this be? To answer this question, the problem of huge cat colonies must be addressed. For example, one colony located in Oahu, Hawaii, numbers in the hundreds. Located near an estuary, waste washes into the ocean, becoming fully invested into the food chain. This affects not only the monk seals, but many other oceanic animals and plants as well.

ponds were frozen so no waterfowl were present except for the ubiquitous Canada goose flyovers.

We did discover some southern flying squirrel tracks in the snow in addition to mink, squirrel, rabbit, mouse/vole and deer. We marveled at the amazing blue in the sky contrasting with the white winter wonderland that we were hiking through.

—Jim Tomko



Another serious issue are the zoonotics, diseases that transfer from animals to humans and include rabies, black death, cat scratch fever, and toxoplasma.

Toxoplasma alone has been found to cause schizophrenia, terminate pregnancies, and is fatal to many varieties of wildlife. Both wild and domestic cats can host these diseases.

Marra and Santella also address the complexities of various solutions, including the Trap-Neuter-Return program for feral cats, and licensing of pet cats.

I am donating a copy of *Cat Wars* to our Audubon Chapter. Sharing insight into a complex matter can only help solve the problem, and benefit both our aviary and feline friends.

—Betsy Siman

COAC Spring Gathering

Co-hosted with the Grange Insurance Audubon Center and Columbus Audubon. Here is a sneak peek at the schedule:

April 3

COAC Meet and Greet - meet at Grange Education Center at 5pm; hike with dinner and social afterwards

April 4

9am Bird Walk

10am to 4pm Spring Gathering

Special break-out sessions

4pm Bird Walk

Our keynote speaker is Kendra

Wecker, Chief of the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

For more information: email info@counciloac.org.

Gear up for Spring Bird Walks

The 87th Annual Series of Spring Bird Walks is a citizen science partnership between Northeast Ohio park systems, Audubon groups and other organizations. It is a celebration of the return of migratory birds whether they travel through our area or stay in northeast Ohio for the breeding and summer seasons. For dates and locations, visit our website (Cleveland.audubon.org) and click on *Birding* then *Bird Counts/Walks*.

Upcoming Events

Field Trips, Etc.

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. Register at info@clevelandaudubon.org.

March 28 9:00am

"Waterfowl Wander"

LaDue Reservoir

Join us for a "caravan style" field trip to witness the awesome breeding plumage of the wonderful waterfowl that move through our area on their way to northern breeding grounds. The drakes are in their showiest, fancy plumage to impress the females and at the same time astound us! Early spring brings more than 20 species of waterfowl to rest and refuel during their migration. Join us with a full tank of gas and some lunch money as we gather at a restaurant to share our checklists and stories of the morning's birding. Meet at the Ladue Reservoir boat ramp at the end of Washington Street in Auburn Township (Geauga County).

March 24 7:00pm

"Warbler Warm-up"

Mingo Lodge, Sand Run Metropark
1501 Sand Run Pkwy, Akron

Some of the prettiest birds on the planet are in NE Ohio from April through October. This presentation uses actual photographs to help group birds by appearance AND preferred habitat. See all the warblers with eye rings on one slide. Learn about behaviors like tail wagging, skulking on the ground and walking along branches to help narrow down choices. We even send you home with a list of mnemonics like zay zay zay zoo zee (Black-throated Green Warbler). Approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours in length.

DATED MAIL

**AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)
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To contact an individual trustee, send an email to info@clevelandaudubon.org

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A Wry Smile



If you're paying \$3.00 for a bottle of Smart Water, it isn't working.

Jr Birder Day

A total of 26 children, aged kindergarten through 3rd grade, attended our Junior Birder Day (formerly Scout Day) on February 8th. Divided between two sessions, the kids were quiet and attentive, and many gave our volunteers a run for their money with their bird knowledge!

Each session started with a story expertly read by Betsy Siman. Then the children divided into their respective "flocks" —a bird-oriented way to create groups of three or four—and moved through the stations.

Our interactive stations included Feathers, where the flocks could look at feathers under a microscope and learned that it's the feathers that make the bird. No other animal on Earth has feathers!

Then it was on to Beaks and Feet, where the flocks learned how birds have adapted to different habitats and different food sources. At the Nests and Eggs station, there were real nests to examine and an eagle's nest to "build." The Sight and Sound station offered birdsong and the Binoculars station



Junior Birders learn it's the feathers that make the bird!

showed how to use binoculars and look for real birds. The flocks rounded out their day by dissecting an owl pellet and making a bird mask.

Many volunteers are needed to make this day a success, and the Education Committee would like to thank everyone who gave their Saturday to our new Junior Birders. Special thanks go to our first-timers: Cathy Green, Joan Demirjian, Dave English, David Factor and Mara Hanson.

Hope to see all of you for another fun Junior Birder Day next year!

—Alison DeBroux