



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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

Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

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Sax-Zim Bog

I had heard about Sax-Zim Bog in northern Minnesota for years and hoped some day I could go there to see great gray owls and other “winter specialties” that inhabit the area during winter. My “stars aligned” in February when two friends agreed to drive 800+ miles to Duluth, MN, with me to fulfill a dream and add some birds to our life lists.

The bog area is 300 square miles of birch/spruce/alder forest as well as open spaces from timber clear-cuts and agriculture. The “Friends of Sax-Zim Bog” and several private landowners sponsor feeding stations throughout the area that attract several species, but you still have to “car bird” the frozen roads to find many others. A curious thing at these feeders is deer carcasses, donated by local hunters after the meat is removed, that attract many birds.

The feeders we could see from the road provided great looks at hundreds of common redpolls, pine grosbeaks, red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, and downy and hairy woodpeckers. We had to walk a half mile down a snow-packed trail to see two boreal chickadees and two Canada jays at a remote suet



Canada jay (top) and boreal chickadee (left).
Photos: M. Valencic

feeder – well worth the walk! Ravens and crows were abundant throughout the area.

We found three black-billed magpies in trees, too far away for good pictures. Two northern shrikes were perched on treetops, far out in clear-cuts. We watched a ruffed grouse for five minutes as it ate birch buds 30 feet off the ground.

Driving down a dead-end road we saw a small flock of white-winged crossbills in a tree and two wild turkeys walking down the road.

We happened upon a birder focusing his spotting scope into a conifer planting. He asked if we wanted a look at a sharp-tailed grouse eating seeds under someone’s feeder on the other side of the trees. Of course, we did! We left

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Trail Crew report

Before the winter snows and colder weather descended a small team of trail crew volunteers were able to get out to the Novak Sanctuary beaver pond observation deck for one last project of 2021.

After greeting a bald eagle watching over the pond, the team, using left-over lumber and hardware from the deck

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Rick Deininger works on a bench in the Novak Sanctuary.
Photo: B. Twaddell

From the Nest...



I know you have heard them already: the song of the northern cardinal, the black-capped chickadee, and the tufted titmouse. They are singing due to the change of the season. Even though winter is still upon us, the days are lengthening, signaling the approach of nesting season and the stimulus to migrate. Soon other species will join in

the concert.

I have already seen two different bald eagle nests that are incubating eggs. The irruption of snowy owls will soon end for this year as they head back to their normal northern territories.

Along with the weather change we plan to resume our improvement of our wildlife sanctuaries with trail work and

the unending battle against invasive species.

Please consider joining us for these activities or just enjoying the spring unfold in the forest and field.

Good times are ahead!

—Jim Tomko, President

Spring Bird Walk Series 2022

The Annual Series of Spring Bird Walks are back in person!

Now in its 89th year, the series is one of the oldest community science partnerships between Northeast Ohio park systems, Audubon groups and other organizations. It is also a celebration of migratory birds, some that remain to breed in the many habitats of northeast Ohio and others that stop over as they travel north to other breeding areas. Walks are led by experienced birders and will be held on **Sundays, April 10, 17 and 24, and May 1, 8 and 15 at 7:30am** unless otherwise noted.

Please visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org for complete information, or contact the specific location below:

Aurora Sanctuary - Park east of Page Rd. on E. Pioneer Trail, Aurora. 216-337-2202.

Big Creek Reservation - Lake Isaac, Middleburg Heights. info@wcaudubon.org

Brecksville Reservation - Park at Station Rd. Bridge, Brecksville. 330-467-3664.

Gates Mills - Various locations. Call 440-463-5944 for details.

April 10 - Sunnybrook Preserve - 12474 Heath Rd. Chester Twp.

April 17 - Orchard Hills Park - 11340 Caves Rd., Chester Twp.

April 24 - Frohring Meadows - 16780 Savage Rd, Chagrin Falls.

May 1 & 15 - Squire Valleeview Farm, 37125 Fairmount Blvd., Hunting Valley.

May 8 - White North Property - 3160 Chagrin River Rd.

Geauga Park District - Contact info@geaugaparkdistrict.org or 440-286-9516.

Registration is required.

April 10 - Burton Wetlands - 15681 Old Rider Rd, Burton.

April 17 - Frohring Meadows - 16780 Savage Rd, Chagrin Falls.

April 24 - The Rookery - 10110 Cedar Rd, Chesterland.

May 1 - Eldon Russell Park - 16315 Rapids Rd, Troy Township.

May 15 - Swine Creek Reservation - 16004 Hayes Rd, Middlefield.

Hinckley Reservation - The south end of Hinckley Lake, Hinckley. 440-570-6192.

Hiram - James H. Barrow Field Station (Hiram College), Hiram. 330-527-2141.

Holden Arboretum (pending) - Corning Visitor Center, Kirtland. 440-946-4400.

Lake Metroparks - Lake Erie Bluffs, Perry Township. 440-256-1404, ext. 2112.

Lorain County Metro Parks - Cascade Park in Elyria. **8:30am** start time.

www.loraincountymetroparks.com/cascade-park

Mentor Marsh - Park at Shipman Pond, Mentor. 440-257-0777.

North Chagrin Reservation - North Chagrin Nature Center, Mayfield Village. 440-473-3370.

Novak Sanctuary - Park north of Rt. 82 on Town Line Rd., Aurora. 330-388-9279.

Ohio & Erie Canal Reservation - CanalWay Center, Cuyahoga Hts. 216-206-1000.

Rocky River Reservation - Rocky River Nature Center, North Olmsted. 216-924-0188.

Shaker Lakes - The Nature Center at Shaker Lakes, Shaker Heights. 216-321-5935.

River Styx Park - Medina County Park District, Wadsworth. **Saturdays, April 9 - May 14 at 7:30am.** 330-722-9364

Don't miss the migration!

Bog

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with a nice cell phone picture through the scope for our records.

But the BEST BIRD, on both days, was a great gray owl. Day one we watched it for about 30 minutes as it hunted a field containing several small trees. It intently watched from its perch before flying, hovering above the ground like a kestrel, then crashing down into the snow to catch a small mammal. What a special opportunity! We saw it again the second day, this time close to the road just sitting in a conifer and posing for pictures.

Two days of birding flanked by two,

13-hour travel days! Final count ... 26 species of which six were life birds!

Well worth the trip.

—Matt Valencic

Great gray owl
Photo: M. Valencic



Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Ruddy Duck (*Oxyura jamaicensis*)

Here is an example of a scientific name that describes the creature accurately. The Ancient Greek “oxus” translates to sharp and “oura” translates to tail.

Ruddy ducks belong to a tribe of ducks known as the “stiff-tailed ducks.” They hold their long stiff tails cocked upward in a wren-like fashion even while at rest. This is a great field mark along with the white cheek patch that the drake shows in all plumages.

The stiff-tailed ducks are far from aerial acrobats. It takes them a long run across the surface of the water to get airborne. Once in flight they have a low, labored and erratic pattern. To avoid predators, they prefer to sink underwater or dive and swim grebe-style. Their feet are huge for their size which allow powerful swimming and efficient running on the surface for take-off, but the legs are set far back and do not allow agility on land.

Another curiosity of ruddy ducks is their enormous eggs. A ruddy duck's egg is larger than a mallard's, whose body size can be 10 inches longer than the 15-inch ruddy duck. This large egg allows for a larger, more developed hatchling.

Ruddy ducks are rare nesters in Ohio. Usually, they migrate to the prairie pot hole region of the US and Canada, where they build a floating nest hidden among emergent aquatic plants.

They have a diet that is 70 percent plant material and 30 percent animal and includes seeds, tubers, pondweed, bulrush and widgeon grass, rounded out with aquatic insects, worms, and crayfish.

The breeding drakes are a fantastic chestnut red with a white cheek patch, a black head and tail topped off with a sky-blue bill.

They should be arriving here on their migration to northern nesting grounds shortly. I hope you get a chance to see them.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

"GBBC" February 20th

What a perfect day for a winter bird survey. There was very little wind and a clear blue sky with sunshine, allowing the temperature to reach almost 40 degrees.

Each year on the weekend of the Great Backyard Bird Count we bird the Aurora Audubon Sanctuary and submit the results to eBird. I had 16 nature lovers join me and we recorded 16 species of birds.

The black-capped chickadees and tufted titmouse were singing their territorial songs. American crows and blue jays announced our presence in the forest. We saw three red-tailed hawks soaring on the updrafts surveying their territory.

We saw tracks of gray squirrel, southern flying squirrel, eastern cotton-

tail, white-footed mouse, jumping mouse, raccoon, coyote, red fox, mink and white-tailed deer.

As we approached the end of the loop, we found the bridge had washed off its foundation, making it too dangerous to cross. But these intrepid hikers backtracked and bush-whacked with me until we found an alternative way back to the trailhead, adding almost a half mile to our hike.

If it were not for that detour, we would have missed out on the crowd-pleasing pileated woodpecker!

Thank you all for hanging in there with me and my apologies for not checking that bridge before the hike. In the future, I will make sure we can make the loop without a detour.

—Jim Tomko

Trail Crew

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project, fashioned a bench that fills the back wall along one side of the deck. Due to some settling of the deck it was necessary to customize the design as the work progressed, but it is barely noticeable in the finished product. The crew plans to add a matching bench later this year.

We are already looking at projects for 2022 and top on the priority list is the continuing management of invasive species in our sanctuaries. We hope that on a day when the snow has cleared and the ground is still frozen, a team can begin work in the field at the Novak Education Center. As we can't plan such weather dependent workdays far in advance, email trailcrew@clevelandaudubon.org and we'll contact you when we have a schedule.

—Ban Twaddell

GBBC results

Thank you to all who participated in the international Great Backyard Bird Count. Although the final results will not be available for weeks, 173 countries submitted over 278,000 checklists, sighting over 7,000 species of birds over the four-day period.

Colombia is leading with the most species at 1,226, followed by Ecuador with 1,033 and India coming in third with 1,015. The United States had 684 species, coming in 8th. But the United States had far and away more checklists submitted than any other country with 185,956 checklists. The closest second place was India with 30,409 checklists and 3rd was Canada with 27,053 checklists.

It was a fun and important weekend of citizen science, contributing to our knowledge of birds throughout the world. As the data is analyzed, trends in bird populations will be formulated and with that information we will be better able to help preserve them.

—Jim Tomko



Winter bird survey, Feb 20, 2022.

Photo: B. Philbrick

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday

Mar 17 7:00pm

"Songs from the Pond"

Via Zoom®

Birds aren't the only singers in the spring! From the earliest songs of wood frogs and spring peepers to the endlessly entertaining songs of green frogs, bullfrogs and American toads, there's always something to hear from the ponds and wetlands.

Lisa Rainsong will guide us to songs of NE Ohio's frogs and toads from the initial ice melt of March through the early summer songs of June. There may be a few more singers than you realized!

Apr 21 7:00pm

"Warbler Warm-up"

Via Zoom®

For new and experienced birders. Using over 150 photos, Kelly Kozlowski and Matt Valencic help get you ready for the return of warblers by reminding you of those important field marks, behaviors and habitat preferences. Tips for separating 'look-alikes' and special emphasis on songs of NE Ohio breeding birds.

Field Trips

Mar 26 9:00am

"Waterfowl Wander"

LaDue Reservoir

This is our annual "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 resplendent plumage to impress the females while at the same time astounding us! Early spring brings more than 20 species of waterfowl to rest and refuel during their rapid northward migration. Please join us with a full tank of gas. We will meet at the LaDue Reservoir boat ramp at the end of Washington Street in Auburn Township (Geauga County).

Register for these programs at www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events

DATED MAIL

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A Wry Smile



It's frustrating when you know all the answers but nobody bothers to ask you the questions.

An Audubon Moment



Field near Parkman, Geauga County.

Photo: P. Lozano

Birding the "Tundra"

Most of us will never see snow buntings on their breeding grounds in the high arctic tundra, but on February 19th a group of us came pretty close.

I was leading a planned winter car-birding trip into Geauga County for the Kirtland Bird Club, searching for those hardy birds that winter on the agricultural fields around Parkman and Middlefield. We planned the trip but not the weather!

We woke to high winds (30-40 mph), below freezing temperature and icy roads. The large, flat fields on either side of Soltis Road in Parkman were partially obscured by blowing snow, yet hundreds of horned larks and snow buntings were flying, landing, and foraging, always pointed into the wind. It was very special to witness how well adapted these birds are to such severe conditions, and good fortune that they landed within binocular range so we could stay in our cars to watch them.

Nature continues to amaze me!

—Matt Valencic



Snow buntings forage in all weather!

Photo: M. Valencic