



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

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Chase waterfowl early and often

As I write this it is 15^o and the inland lakes are frozen. But I assure you as soon as the ice melts those lakes will be full of ducks, geese, swans and grebes, resting and feeding briefly as they head for their breeding grounds in the upper Midwest and Canada.



Northern pintails

Photo: M. Valencic

There is an urgency in spring migration – the rush to get prime nest sites in trees (mergansers nest in tree cavities), wetlands, along lakes, and on islands. Ducks like the northern pintail start nesting in the Northwest Territories as soon as the ice breaks up in late April. That means an early start from their

wintering grounds in the southeastern states.

Tundra Swans will be heading to, well, the tundra above Hudson Bay. They will stop on larger lakes like LaDue and East Branch in Geauga
(Continued on page 3)

SEE INSIDE THIS EDITION

**Hardy winter birds
Pg 2**

Native plant list available

In the last two newsletters I wrote about the importance of native plants for birds and pollinators and suggested you consider adding some to your home landscape. Native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants support more caterpillar species for birds and attract more pollinators than horticultural varieties. So, what plants do you consider? I'm glad you asked!

We created a two-page reference of 51 native herbaceous plants that would do well in NE Ohio. You can download the FREE pdf from our website (www.clevelandaudubon.org) under Docs/Info. Beside the common and scientific name of each plant, the sheet identifies the flower color, plant height, month(s) it blooms, and how much



Wild bergamot: *Monarda fistulosa*

(Continued on page 2)

Surviving the cold

How do birds survive big storms and bitter cold? The answer is threefold: Location, preparation, and adaptation.

When bad weather hits, birds generally seek shelter inside a thick hedge or on the downwind side of a tree. Dense evergreens provide better cover than the bare branches of a deciduous tree in winter. Birds that nest in cavities hide out in their tree holes.

Fat birds have a better chance of surviving a storm. When birds sense changes in air pressure they tend to forage more or flock to feeders.

Birds have evolved to withstand bad weather. Their lanky legs and little feet have what are called counter-current circulation. Birds have cold blood in their feet, which means

(Continued on page 3)

From the Nest...



stay locked in your house suffering from “cabin fever”.

Who would have imagined last March that we would still be battling COVID-19 one year later? Hopefully later this year there will be adequate control and we will be able to reinstate our regular programs and field trips.

As of now we are not offering any in-person events. But that is no reason to

Migration is underway and as March marches forward, the amazing waterfowl will be streaming through our area, speeding to nesting grounds to our north. I eagerly look forward to the brief visit of many spectacular species.

We continue to provide our Third Thursday Zoom speakers series. They

are an interesting and enlightening way to learn about our wildlife. More information and registration can be found on the website.

Better weather is coming. I've heard and seen some red-winged blackbirds which means spring is not far away!

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Hardy winter birds

(Photos & text by Matt Valencic)

Critter Corner



Horned Larks inhabit most of the continental US all year round! Because they prefer to forage for seeds and insects on the ground we see them better in winter, especially on bare, agricultural fields. In spring, females will make a nest in a depression on bare ground and weave a basket-like nest from grass and other plant material.

Snow Buntings blend well into our snowy agricultural fields during winter where they forage for spent grains as well as weed seeds and insects. Soon they will leave for the tundra where the males secure a nest site in rocky areas, waiting for the females to follow. Because rocks are cold, she sits on the nest almost constantly, relying on her mate to bring her food.



In winter, **Lapland Longspurs** could be overlooked as just another LBJ (little brown job – aka, sparrow), except that most of our sparrows don't inhabit open fields during winter. They nest in the high tundra where it is estimated they eat over 3,000 seeds and insects EACH DAY!



Because they eat mostly insects, **American Pipits** go all the way to the southern US to spend the winter. That means we have to enjoy them in late fall and early spring during migration. They can be hard to see because they blend in well with the fields and mudflats they forage.

Plant list

(Continued from page 1)

moisture and sun it needs. This information is useful when you consider the following:

Try to have something blooming early spring through fall, especially for the pollinators.

Layer plants with taller behind shorter to prevent casting shadows on low plants.

The right plant in the wrong spot will not do well. Consider the soil moisture and amount of sun at the site.

Create your own color palette! Mix natives with your other favorite plants to achieve 'the look' you want – it's YOUR garden!

To locate nurseries/suppliers of native plants and seeds, use the interactive map on the LEAP (Lake Erie Allegheny Partnership) website (Home - LEAP for Biodiversity (leapbio.org)). Look under RESOURCES, then NATIVE PLANTS and scroll down to NATIVE PLANT NURSERIES. You can also check Prairie Moon Nursery in Minnesota.

If it looks overwhelming, consider that these are perennial plants, and you can add a few every year. Once they are established you can sit back and enjoy them, knowing you have helped the birds and the pollinators!

—Matt Valencic



Photo: M. Valencic

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*)

Whoa! It looks like a periscope out at the far end of the pond! Now it disappeared with hardly a ripple on the water's surface.

The pied-billed grebe is one of the few submarine-style water birds. It can sink and swim with just its eyes and nostrils above the surface until danger has passed.

It is a small, brownish, chunky bird about the size of a bufflehead. Even though they act like ducks, they are not ducks at all. Instead of webbed feet the toes have flattened lobes.

During breeding season, the bill turns from brownish to silvery gray with a black ring around it and a dark throat patch forms.

They are widespread and fairly easy to find during migration. This species is often overlooked because of its mysterious way of sinking under water, swimming to another area, then quietly resurfacing.

Most nest north of us but many do nest in our ponds, lakes, and marshes where there are emergent aquatic plants and the water is at least nine inches deep. The nest is a floating mat of vegetation anchored to emergent plants such as cattail or bulrush. They lay three to ten greenish-white eggs and continue expanding the nest as more eggs are laid.

The chicks leave the nest within one day of hatching. They'll spend some time riding on the parent's back, often tucked under the wing even during feeding dives by the adult.

Their most common food are crayfish, aquatic insects, snails, and other aquatic invertebrates, in addition to small fish, salamanders, and frogs.

This month the pied-billeds arrive! If you hear a maniacal laughter from the lake, look for and welcome the instantaneously vanishing Water Witch!

—Jim Tomko

Chase waterfowl

(Continued from page 1)

County, Mosquito Lake in Trumbull County, and West Branch in Portage County. You may see a few dozen or sometimes a few hundred.

Experience has taught me to “go early (in March) and go often”. There will be a variety of waterfowl on the lakes throughout March, but the large numbers tend to arrive early in the month. I recall one year a disappointed group of birders who scheduled a waterfowl walk along LaDue Reservoir for March 25th, just because all their walks were at the end of the month. That year the bulk of the migrating birds were seen during the first two weeks of March. I felt bad for them and resolved to encourage birders in the future to get out earlier.

Visit your favorite lakes more than once a day if convenient. Some birds fly



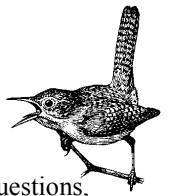
Photo: M. Valencic

at night and rest in the morning while others stop to spend the night. The mix and number of birds will change throughout the day if you are lucky enough to stay and watch them.

Finally, remember to create an eBird checklist for each visit. Your checklists are very important as scientists monitor bird populations all over the world.

—Matt Valencic

The Squawk



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

Cold

(Continued from page 1)

very little heat is lost when they are standing on cold ground.



Tree sparrow fluffed against the cold.

Photo: A. DeBroux

And their feathers are the perfect insulation. The down underneath a bird’s contour feathers trap air, holding in the warmth from its body and preventing cold air from reaching its skin.

So, while we cozy up with our hot chocolates, there’s no need to worry about the birds—they are well-equipped to survive the cold and snow.

--Emily Silber, adapted from Audubon.org/news

Did You Know?

Pied-billed grebes eat a large amount of their own feathers and also feed them to their chicks where they form a feather ball in the stomach. It is thought that this feather ball may act as a filter trapping bone and shell fragments from their diet, preventing injury to the digestive tract. The feather ball is regularly regurgitated.

—Jim Tomko



Pied-billed grebe, non-breeding plumage.

Photo: M. Valencic

Counting birds for eBird

Don’t waste the pandemic – keep learning new things!

There are some easy-to-learn ways for counting large numbers of birds. Grab a cup of coffee or tea and go to www.ebird.org, click on HELP (far right on your screen) and scroll down a bit to find [How to count birds](#) in blue type.

Click on it and start reading. Use the Quick Links after the initial article to learn more.

Then resolve to ALWAYS ESTIMATE NUMBERS on your future eBird checklists. The eBird scientists appreciate your efforts.

—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday Series

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.

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

April 15 7:00pm

“Lights Out Cleveland”

Via Zoom®

Bird-building collisions are a significant source of bird mortality, especially during spring and fall migration. Dr. Jones will update us on the progress being made to reduce crashes, and how each of us can become part of the solution. In the second half of his talk, he updates us on how technology is helping identify new songbird hybrids being discovered right here in northern Ohio.

Presented by Dr. Andy Jones

DATED MAIL

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An Audubon Moment

Valentine's Day Surprise

I always enjoy the February weekend of the Great Backyard Bird Count organized jointly by National Audubon, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, and Bird Canada. Several of my checklists are from birds right out my kitchen window. I also do a bird walk for variety and additional species.

This year's hike was quiet with very little birdsong or movement in the woods which allowed some time for day dreaming. I was headed to a blind with a view of a bald eagle's nest because I've found in our area bald eagles are renovating and sprucing up last year's nest right around Valentine's Day.

A barred owl materialized, flew across the trail and disappeared into the leafless winter woods. I took this to be a good omen.

When I arrived at the blind, I gazed across the marsh and there was an eagle already incubating on the nest! A few minutes later the mate appeared and they did their "changing of the guard" ritual. The original incubator took off and began to soar above the marsh while the replacement settled into its duty of incubation.

Kind of a nice coincidence to observe some bald eagle "romance" on Valentine's Day!

—Jim Tomko

A Wry Smile



Did you know?

A salamander can launch its tongue with a force 450 times that of a Corvette going from 0-60 mph.

Website photo contest

You're invited to submit your photos representing the best of the **spring** 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. Spring pictures accepted until **May 15th**.

Check www.clevelandaudubon.org for full contest information. So get out those cameras and click away!