



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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Blow-fly larva control for cavity nesting birds

This will be the second year for our blue bird trail at Hach-Otis's John & Carol Lillich Meadows. We have eleven blue bird boxes out this year. Monitoring will be done by myself and two other volunteers. I am looking for others, if you think you would like to join in this effort.

Last year taught me that I have a lot to learn about monitoring blue bird nesting boxes. Our only loss last year was a chickadee adult and four hatchlings to ants. I now use Tangle Foot as a preventive measure on all nest box posts.

A major concern is losses to blow fly larva. Small infestations will weaken nestlings and large infestations will kill them. I did a bit of research online into blow fly control and I want to share what I've learned with you.



Dusting a nest with diatomaceous earth.

Photo: C. Lillich

Each female blow fly will produce thousands of eggs over her two-to-eight-week life span. Each egg mass can contain 1500 to 2,000 eggs. Hatching

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In appreciation of plants

This spring, as you enjoy the beauty of warblers, vireos, flycatchers and other migrants, look around at the plants. Where birds stop their journey north depends on plants. For many, the stop is temporary – just long enough to rest and refuel. For others, the journey ends in NE Ohio where they seek that unique combination of plants, water and topography we call habitat.

Of course, it's not just plants. Plants attract the insects that so many birds eat. So, while you are enjoying the birds, look around at the insects. Some are flying from flower to flower, gathering pollen or nectar and 'giving thanks' by pollinating which will result in seeds and fruits that birds and other wildlife eat, dispersing seeds that guarantee the next generation of plants. Some birds eat

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Ohio crane survey

Sandhill Crane populations in the United States were at their lowest levels in the early 20th century, due in large part to market hunting. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 played a critical role in stopping the hunting and other pressures on the cranes, allowing them to start rebounding. And rebound they did in the Midwest.

Today you can see hundreds of thousands of cranes on the Platte River during spring migration, the result of

focused efforts in crane research and habitat preservation and expansion.

But crane populations did not rebound as well in other parts of the country due to habitat loss, urban growth and illegal hunting. In Ohio, Sandhill Cranes are listed as *threatened*, a step above their recent *endangered* status. Little is known about their populations outside of eBird data but that is about to change.

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Photo: M. Valencic

From the Nest...

I hope that you have your hummingbird feeders cleaned, filled, and out for hungry sippers to refuel. They are back! A number of other species will relish the nectar too. Migration is in full swing and it is a time to renew your acquaintance with our springtime visitors and our summer residents with their spectacular plumages and beautiful songs.



We are happy to see that in the past year folks have begun new habits of walking the trails and appreciating our natural world first hand. We are hoping to begin field trips and in-person gatherings this summer as more people receive the COVID vaccination and it is again safe to gather.

We thank all those who contacted us regarding a desire to volunteer as workers in the sanctuaries. As weather

permits several big projects and several perpetual trail maintenance jobs are planned to take place. This is our last newsletter before our summer hiatus therefore please pay attention to our website, Facebook page, and your email to participate in our events.

Thank you for your patience and for your continued interest.

—Jim Tomko, President

Plants

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these flying insects, but many birds prefer their offspring – caterpillars!



Bobolink carrying a caterpillar for her young.
Photo: M. Valencic

Insects lay eggs on plants and the caterpillars that hatch eat the leaves, especially those of trees and shrubs. Caterpillars are the main food for many baby birds, even seed eating and nectar eating birds.

Plants also provide shelter for birds, shelter to hide a nest or avoid predators and severe weather. This includes trees, shrubs and even herbaceous plants (think of ground nesting birds). But plants can only provide these ‘services’ if they are healthy and strong, and that brings us to appreciation of soils and the myriad of organisms in soil communities. Some soils are wet, as in swamps and marshes, and others dry, like uplands. The plants that grow there are uniquely adapted and so are the insects and birds that



Natives like marsh marigold (above) and squirrel corn (left) create pollinating opportunities for insects in the Aurora Sanctuary.
Photos: J. Tomko

Blow-fly larva control

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occurs within 24 hours. The larva feed at night and move down into nesting material during the day. Blow flies develop from egg to adult flies in 10 to 25 days. They will complete four to eight generations each year.

I was searching for a product or system to control blow flies that did not include pesticides and was simple and the least intrusive. I was not hopeful for total success.

I am happy to say that I found just such a product that has been around for quite some time: food grade diatomaceous earth. You can be confident that diatomaceous earth is safe and effective. It is produced from finely

make up those communities.

It’s getting complicated, isn’t it? That’s really the point of this piece. Habitats are complicated and when they disappear more is lost than most of us can imagine. We cannot replace what nature has taken thousands of years to create. But we can be good stewards by protecting habitats and enhancing them. National Wildlife Refuges were created for that purpose. We can do our part by enhancing our own yards with native plants for birds and insects. But it starts with awareness, moves to appreciation and ends with gratitude for all that nature provides us and the birds we love.

—Matt Valencic

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Hooded Warbler (*Setophaga citrina*)

Here is a warbler that will not give you “warbler’s neck”! This ailment happens the last week in April and the first two weeks in May when we warbler fanatics walk around in the woods, binoculars to our eyes, heads thrown back as we crane our necks to see the colorful gems in the canopy.

The hooded warbler prefers the forest floor and understory. They have the largest eyes of our warblers which allows them to see well in the dark lower levels of the forest.

They have a clear, bright yellow face without a mask or eye-ring. They wear a black hood that wraps around their throat, extending up to their lower bill. The back is olive-green. The undercarriage is bright yellow with a dark upper tail and white under tail which they suddenly fan open, flashing white outer tail feathers.

When I hear that distinctive “taweeet taweeet tweet teeo,” I know that spring is in full swing and the hooded warblers have returned from Central America and are nesting. Many warblers continue their migration north but this one nests here in mature woodlands with a dense shrubby deciduous understory.

They weave their nest of fine grass, bark, leaves, spider silk, animal hair and plant down which they place in a low tree or shrub one to four feet above the ground. Leaves on the outside of the nest help disguise it as a leaf ball.

They incubate two to five brown spotted, creamy white eggs for 12 days. The nestlings remain in the nest for eight to ten days after hatching.

They feed on the ground, climb up trunks, explore low branches, and hawk insects flycatcher-style. They consume all types of invertebrates from worms and insects to spiders, ticks and mites. This spring, try giving your neck a rest by listening for the song and then spotting this spectacular warbler in the forest understory.

—Jim Tomko

ground fossils of prehistoric fresh water diatoms. Diatomaceous earth (DE) kills many household pests. It kills by mechanical action rather than poison. When soft-bodied insects come in contact with DE, it causes massive loss of body fluids and death.

DE can be purchased at garden centers. I ordered a two pound bag with duster from Chewy. A bag this size will last many years. Humans should not breathe in this dust or let it contact their eyes.

DE is applied with a duster lightly into the middle of the nest (not on top).

Results from this experiment will be included in the season’s end report.

—John Lillich

Crane survey

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On April 17th, the International Crane Foundation (www.savingcranes.org) included five Ohio counties in their annual Midwest Crane Count - Geauga, Trumbull, Summit, Holmes and Wayne. Teams and individuals surveyed known or likely sandhill habitat from 6:30 – 8:30am, noting how many, where and when they saw or heard sandhill cranes. Everyone followed the same protocol including using eBird for documentation and sharing checklists with the International Crane Foundation.

In Geauga County I worked with Dan Best, recently retired naturalist with Geauga Park District, to identify likely sandhill locations and assign our 13 volunteers to those locations. Everyone was 'on station' by 6:30am and by 8:30am, 20+ cranes were counted

(preliminary data). We will report the official results from all counties in our fall newsletter.

If you want to see and hear sandhill cranes, two public locations are Lucia S. Nash Preserve on Snow Road in Geauga County and Tinker's Creek State Nature Preserve at the eagle observation platform on Old Mill Road in Portage County near Aurora. Please stay on paths and observe good birding etiquette.

—Matt Valencic

The Squawk



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



Photo: M. Valencic

Native plant chart

If you are wondering what native plants might benefit birds and insects in your yard, visit our website (www.clevelandaudubon.org) and click on Docs/Info. Look for the free pdf file titled *Native Plants for Birds and Pollinators*.



New England aster from the Native Plants file.

When is a bird a “birb”?

There are certain terms that embed themselves into your consciousness like a woodpecker's beak in particle board. “Birb” is one of them. For those not terminally online, birb is affectionate internet-speak for birds. What *is* a birb, really?

Rule 1: Birbs are often (though not conclusively) small. Adult ostriches are thus disqualified, as is any bird larger than a turkey; warblers, sparrows, flycatchers, and other songbirds are the most likely demographic.

Rule 2: Birbs are often (though not always) round. People tend to regard round animals as cuter, and round objects in general to be more pleasant. Given this, the rounder or fluffier a bird is, the more birblike it is likely to be. If the pileated woodpecker didn't lose its birb status under Rule 1, it does now.

Rule 3: Birbs appear cute. This gets into slightly dicier territory: Isn't cuteness subjective? Up to a point, but Rule 2 helps here. Humans tend to like looking at round and fluffy things.

Now that we've laid out some basic guidelines, let's test them out. The following can be unquestionably judged as birbs, hitting the natural sweet spot of round, fluffy, and small: the vast majority of songbirds. Burrowing owls, elf owls, both screech-owls, American kestrels, and other small raptors also qualify. So do prairie chickens, quail, shorebirds like sandpipers, and smaller seabirds like puffins and penguins. Parrots of all sizes are in, despite some of them being quite formidable, because culturally they scan as cute. Little waders like the green heron are in, but the great blue heron? Sorry, not a birb.

Now, one might reasonably ask why it matters which birds qualify as birbs. Strictly speaking, of course, it doesn't. These sorts of debates are fun partially because they reveal real fault-lines in our operational definitions. It's a chance to take stock, not just of what we think about birds, but *how* we think about them. Defining “birb” also means interrogating our impressions. It's not only about rating them: it's about reminding us that—regardless of birb-status—all birds are good.

—Asher Elbein

Excerpted from *Audubon Magazine*

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday Series

May 20 7:00pm

“Summer Birds of NE Ohio”

Via Zoom®

Did you know that more than 50 species of birds travel hundreds, even thousands, of miles each spring just to raise a family in NE Ohio? This presentation showcases 50 species of summer visitors through 180 photographs of adult birds, babies, nests and habitats. Hear songs and calls, some sweet and musical like the yellow warbler and others harsh like the green heron, and learn many interesting anecdotes about individual species.

Presented by Matt Valencic

Visit www.clevelandaudubon.org to register for this program.

DATED MAIL

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Please recycle this newsletter

Website photo contest

You're invited to submit your photos 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.

An Audubon Moment

Tough Love

I had been enjoying an early morning hike at the Aurora Wetlands park under a clear blue sky with comfortable early summer temperatures. I occasionally saw a river otter patrolling for its morning meal in the reservoir.

To the north of the water, I noticed some agitated songbirds carrying on with their whining and complaining chips, squeaks, peeps, cheeps and tweets emanating from an area of several taller trees and a bit of understory brush. Often when this occurs, I begin looking for a predator such as a snake, fox, cat, or even an Eastern screech owl in the brush below the commotion. I searched for the cause but came up empty.

Then I saw it! I had been so focused on the understory that I missed the red-tailed hawk soaring just above the tree top level. Still, I could not understand all the commotion considering that the hawk was already carrying a small lifeless rodent. Why wasn't it headed off to the nest with its bounty? Suddenly the hawk dropped its prey and let it fall to the ground—then it swooped in to snatch it and get airborne again. This was repeated several times and each time the hawk let out some calls that did not sound familiar to me.

After a few more drops, I heard some other loud unfamiliar, raspy, scraping shrieks from the brush below. A juvenile red-tailed hawk materialized and took flight from the cover. The parent (presumably) swooped in and once again dropped the prey so that the free-loading youth could catch it in mid-air.

I wondered if Dad was saying, "Son, its time you learned how to catch your own breakfast" and "If you want to eat, you have to work!" Does this sound familiar to anyone in your own home?

—Jim Tomko

