



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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Owl pellet program a huge success at CFPC

Want to calm down a high-energy group of elementary school kids? Put an owl pellet in front of them and watch how focused they get as they pick it apart and begin the process of discovery.

Recently ASGC traveled to Chagrin Falls Park Community Center in Bainbridge, where they have a robust after-school program for about 26 students. Monday through Thursday, the students can have a snack while they get their homework done or receive tutoring from staff and community volunteers as needed.

But Fridays are FUN FRIDAY! It may be a trip to Valley Art Center or a nearby park for a program, or a special in-house treat like our Owl Pellet Program.

We started with a short presentation about raptors including several pictures of hawks and owls regurgitating pellets – just what kids love to see!

“Gross!” “Disgusting!” “Cool!” You name it, there was a reaction, including “NO WAY am I touching that thing!”.

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CFPC students explore their owl pellet—with gloves.

Photo: M. Valencic

Documentum update

ASGC's newest committee, Documentum, has finally gotten down to work! The committee met numerous times during August, September and October, logging about 30 hours.

An initial issue was the sheer scope of the task of cleaning, organizing, and filtering the materials they had unearthed in the “attic” of the Novak Education Center. With the assistance of Jim Tolan and a crew of Hiram College interns, boxes of documents, file cabinets and other assorted stuff was brought down-stairs.

Members of Documentum then cleaned and sanitized the file cabinets, upright cabinets and a desk. The file cabinets were returned upstairs to be filled with materials deemed suitable for archiving.

Next the committee determined that materials would be separated into the following categories: Legal, Financial,



A member of the Hiram work crew, in protective gear against the dust of the Ed Center's attic, brings a load of materials outside for examination.

Photo: J. DeBroux

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From the Dustbin...

(Tidbits from ASGC's history)

Have you ever wondered about the Novak Sanctuary? Why do we have it? Just who was Blanche Katherine Novak? The following is a love story. A love story between a man and his wife and a couple's love of the environment.

The first time they met on a Mantua farm, they fell madly in love. They didn't part until death.

William and Blanche Novak wanted others to enjoy a portion of their Garden of Eden — their land.

“She loved nature, he loved nature and they loved each other,” said Art

Moebius, an old friend of the Novaks. “They wanted others to love their property like they loved each other. They really didn't want development there.” According to Moebius, they both wanted the wide-open space preserved.

After his wife died in 1989, Novak named the property after her. And two years later, at the age of 81, he donated the 150 acres on the Aurora—Mantua border to the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland.

When the Novaks bought the land in

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From the Nest...

Thank you to all our volunteers for their work in helping us to meet our objectives. Our unsung heroes are too many to list. Our board of trustees does an amazing amount of work all without pay or many times without thanks or even a pat on the back.

Our newest endeavors include the completion of our observation deck at



the Novak Sanctuary, invasive species management at the Aurora Sanctuary, and maintenance of the new trail at the Lillich Meadows in the Hach-Otis Sanctuary.

Do you have a passion for our chapter that we are not addressing at this time? Let us know about your idea and how you can become involved. We can use all the volunteer help that we can

get.

On another line of thought, waterfowl migration is upon us! The excitement of seeing the ducks, geese, grebes and loons passing through on their southward journey is a great excuse to stop at any local wetland areas. Please let me know what interesting things you turn up.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

The females of the species



Canvasback: This diving duck eats plant tubers at the bottom of lakes and wetlands. She builds her nest on floating mats of vegetation and will sometimes put her eggs in the nest of another duck.

Bufflehead: Buffleheads eat a variety of aquatic invertebrates (insect larvae), crustaceans and mollusks. She builds her nest in an old flicker hole in the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska.



Ring-necked Duck: Ring-necked ducks dive underwater to eat a variety of plant and animal materials. They breed in freshwater marshes and bogs across the boreal forest of North America. Young are independent at two days old.

Photos and text by Matt Valencic.

Once there were...

500,000 sea otters; 1,000,000 whooping cranes; 2,000,000 great auks; 3,000,000 Carolina parakeets; 5,000,000 Eskimo curlews; 15,000,000 heath hens; 60,000,000 American bison; 2,000,000,000 passenger pigeons; 35,000,000 square miles of forests in Ohio.

Shall we sit by with folded arms while our remaining wildlife vanish?

Ask yourself ... what have I done to further conservation?

This could have been written today, but it was in the December, 1943, issue of *BIRD LIFE*, a quarterly magazine of the Cleveland Bird Club, predecessor of today's Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland. Our mission is the same today as in 1943: "To promote conservation and appreciation of birds and other wildlife through habitat preservation and educational activities, focusing on the Greater Cleveland community." Contact us at info@clevelandaudubon.org if you would like to help.

—Matt Valencic

Novak history

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1941 for \$10,000, they had some cows and chickens.

Now called The Blanche Katherine Novak Audubon Sanctuary, the property was designated a State

Nature Preserve in 1999. There is a very fine Category 3 wetland with the highest species diversity of five natural wetlands in northern Ohio studied by the Ohio EPA. The sanctuary is a rich habitat for nesting birds and other wildlife and has been part of the spring bird walks of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland since 1993. 186 species have been



documented there throughout the years.

William Novak always wanted to be featured in *The Plain Dealer* holding his wife's portrait next to a sign with her name.

But the lawyers of his estate said he couldn't

hold the sign because of tax issues. A week after he died, we could finally put up the sign.

—Jim DeBroux (with reporting originally from *The Plain Dealer*)
(Editor's note: *From the Dustbin is a new, semi-regular column from the members of the Documentum Committee.*)

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Common Loon (*Gavia immer*)

Which came first: the name "loon" for the common loon or the name "loon" to describe a mentally unstable person? There is an Old English word "*lumme*" meaning lummox and a Scandinavian word "*lum*" meaning clumsy. From these words came the name loon.

Loons have their legs attached so far back on their body that they cannot walk on land. They can only push themselves along on their belly. Therefore, they are quite awkward on land. But with legs in that position, they are superb underwater swimmers able to make 180-degree flip turns in a split second in their pursuit of their fish prey.

If you have been lucky enough to hear their amazing yodeling, tremolo call, it will haunt you forever. But that call has been compared to the maniacal laughter of a mentally unstable person and thus the name "loony" to label them.

Common loons nest north of us on unpolluted, clear water lakes. They are visual fishers and must have clear water to see their prey. Mostly they consume fish but will also eat leaches, frogs, large insect larva and crayfish.

Their mud and matted vegetation nest is built on or near water deep enough that the parents can approach from underwater undetected. Newly hatched loons will ride on the parents back for protection from predators.

Breeding adults have a spectacular black-and-white checkered back, iridescent greenish-violet black head, blood red eye, and a heavy dagger-like black bill. During fall migration they are a palette of dull grays and off-white.

Loons have heavy solid bones instead of the sponge-like hollow bones of other birds. This makes them better able to submerge and float low in the water compared to most other waterfowl.

November is the peak month for loons in our area. I hope you are able to get out and see some of these spectacular visitors.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

"Autumn Leaf Hike" October 23rd

John and Carol Lillich and I all wore our raincoats to prevent the rain from starting. It almost worked this time.

Even though we had a bit of drizzle off and on, John gave us an interesting and educational walk through the section of the Hach-Otis Sanctuary named the John and Carol Lillich Meadows.

Since we had such a warm September and October, the leaf color change is delayed but there was some very nice color. The yellow/orange of the sassafras, and the dark red of the Virginia creeper and poison ivy were spectacular. There was an abundance of winter wildlife food in the form of grass, sedge, and rush seeds, fruit on the apple and crab apple trees, and rose hips on

the multiflora rose shrubs. Some chicory and hawkbit were still in bloom.

Bluebirds were fluttering among all the snags and shrubby clumps. Many of them likely were offspring from John and Carol's bluebird trail. We saw or heard 17 bird species overall.

Thank you to John and Carol for a wonderful tour of our new trail through the meadow.

—Jim Tomko



The John and Carol Lillich Meadows on October 23rd.

Photo: J. Tomko

Documentum

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Sanctuary, Meeting Records and General History.

A "first level filtering" resulted in a large pile of material sorted into recyclables and trash. Roughly two dozen boxes of donated books were examined, resulting in thirteen boxes of books being donated elsewhere or disposed of.

A "second level filtering" has begun and consists of finding redundancies and other material that is not needed for ASGC purposes. The committee is now beginning to find interesting artifacts and documents that require closer examination.

The next step will be to start on the actual archiving and sorting of these items, which will include scanning and digital storage for the use of future generations.

—Alison DeBroux (from the committee report, 10/26/2021)

Owl pellet program

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Well, after we handed out gloves even the most vocal critics were eagerly tearing their pellet apart and putting the



A piece of tape keeps bones organized and safe for the trip home.

Photo: M. Valencic

bones they found on a piece of tape.

And they started asking questions about the bones they were finding, indicating that learning was taking place. Some took their 'bone card' home and others wanted to leave it as an example for other students. Everyone enjoyed the activity.

We left some ODNR *Owls of Ohio* guidebooks for those who wanted them. Who knows ... there may be a budding ornithologist among them.

Special thanks to Barb Philbrick and Dave English for helping me make this event happen for the kids.

—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday

Field Trip

Nov 18 7:00pm
"Terminal Velocity"

Via Zoom®

The Peregrine Falcon is the fastest bird in the world, reaching speeds of 200+ mph! This illustrated program will explore the thousand-year-old relationship between Peregrines and people and chronicle their transformation from birds of wild places to urban dwellers. The program will focus on the story of the falcons that came to dwell at the Terminal Tower in downtown Cleveland. Presented by Harvey Webster.

Dec 16 7:00pm
"Why Field Guides Change"

Via Zoom®

Why does my field guide keep changing?

Dr. Andy Jones from the Cleveland Museum of Natural History will explain changes in taxonomy and why bird names change.



Nov 13 9:30am
"Turkey Trek"

Novak Sanctuary

Maybe this year we will be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of our local wild turkey flock. As all wild turkey hunters know, they are an exceedingly alert and elusive species even though they are quite common. In addition, they may know how close Thanksgiving is!

I can guarantee a visit to our new and amazing observation deck overlooking the Beaver Pond.

Meet at the parking lot about one mile north of State Route 82, on the east side of Townline Road on the Aurora/Mantua border.

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

DATED MAIL

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To contact an individual trustee, send an email to info@clevelandaudubon.org

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Please recycle this newsletter

A Wry Smile

If all is not lost,
where is it?



An Audubon Moment

Synchronized swimming ducks

Many years ago, when I was a more novice birder, I learned new avian behaviors on almost every single birding adventure! I became enamored with the resplendent plumage and courtship displays of the drake waterfowl. I soon became an avid waterfowl birder. I read everything that I could. I braved the icy winds off the lakes. I put up with rain spatters on my binoculars. I had to strain to see the birds I quested far out on the water.

When I received my first paycheck from my first job after college, I purchased a spotting scope to study the birds farther out than my binoculars could manage.

One blustery November day I went out to Alum Creek State Park, a reservoir just north of Columbus, to see what birds were resting and recouping during their southward migration.

I quietly crept out to the shrubby shoreline trying to stay concealed from the amazing wariness of the ducks. I saw mallards, scaup, ring-necked, and bufflehead. Then as I looked down the shoreline, I saw a raft of ducks with indistinct markings. There were about 25 of them and they were all swimming and riding the waves facing in the same direction like trained synchronized swimmers.

I was excited to add this new species and unusual behavior to my field notes. I carefully aimed and focused my new spotting scope on these distant birds to confirm the identification. As the image became clear, I realized that I was studying a “flock” of hunting decoys! It was, after all, duck hunting season.

I hoped that no one was watching me!

—Jim Tomko

Did you know?

Common Loons are such heavy birds that they need a clear “runway” across the water at least 30 yards in length. Occasionally a shiny, wet parking lot will fool a migrating loon into landing for a rest thinking that it is a pond or lake. Once down it is stranded because it cannot take off without flapping and running across water. Loons cannot run on dry land.