



# The HOUSE WREN

## Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

P.O. Box 391037, Solon, Ohio 44139-8037 Ph: 216 556 5441

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October, 2019

### "One of our favorite weekends of the year!"



Alex Burke searches the treetops during Bird Quest.

Photo: M. Burke

Molly and Alex Burke's "The Left-Wing Little Grebes" is not the only team participating in the Chagrin River Bird Quest year after year. And Molly's email—the above headline—after the September 13-14 event may describe the feelings of many of them!

We were pleased to welcome not just returning teams, but many new ones. After registering just nine teams our first year, in 2015, we had 30 this year. By any measurement, it has been a successful five years!

Birders were welcomed by volunteers at Check-in on Friday, September 13, with t-shirts and 5-year commemorative pens. Then they picked up maps and checklists, had a snack "for the road," and headed out to start birding. Many began right at The West Woods Nature Center, our Bird Quest center of operations.

The Chagrin River Bird Quest is a celebration  
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### COAC Fall Meeting a success

Our chapter has much to be thankful for – talented and dedicated leadership (officers and Board members); four beautiful sanctuaries that cover more than 500 acres; annual and monthly programs that draw hundreds of members and guests; and outreach programs that educate hundreds of people each year in NE Ohio (Backyard Naturalist Speakers Bureau). Not all Audubon Chapters are so fortunate. To that end, your leadership participates in an organization, COAC, whose sole purpose is to help Audubon chapters grow and prosper.

The Council of Ohio Audubon Chapters (COAC) mission is "to aid chapter development in strength, growth, and leadership through dialog and networking between chapters". In other words, we share what is working for us while



we listen for new ideas that can make our chapter even better.

On September 15<sup>th</sup>, Mark Demyan (VP of ASGC) and Matt Valencic (Education Committee) participated in the Fall meeting of COAC at Fernald Preserve near Cincinnati. Mark is also Program Chairman for COAC and he, along with the Board members, put together a great agenda for the day. It

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### Hach-Otis storage shed

Fall brings with it the winding down of an active construction period at Hach-Otis. We are now awaiting final inspections at our new pole building at 2685 Dodd road, in Willoughby Hills. Many thanks to two anonymous donors who helped make this building possible. Their gift provided more than half the cost of construction. The building will be used to store tools and mowing equipment.

Two and one half years ago ASGC acquired this former orchard and farm field with the intension of maintaining the grassland habitat. To maintain this

habitat will require a mowing schedule to keep out woody plant species. We were excited to find that thirty nine bird species were seen by Trustee Matt Valencic during a single one hour excursion. Thanks to two other anonymous donors, ASGC will shortly take delivery of a model L2501 Kubota diesel tractor with a front end loader and a 60 inch brush hog for mowing.

I served as construction manager for ASGC. I am happy to report that construction has been completed without any cost overruns. However, the  
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### From the Nest...

WOW! This was the best Bird Quest yet! We had a number of new participants and many returning teams. Two of the returning teams have competed all 5 years. And we have Alison and her crew to thank for such a successful event. It is a great way to rub shoulders with others of like mind and



interest in a spirit of friendly camaraderie. Alison scheduled the exact type of weather the event called for! We had some excellent refreshments to top off the day of field work. You will learn more details of all the special things that happened in this issue of the "House Wren".

Also, the equipment storage garage at Hach-Otis is complete. Take a peek

when you drive by. It blends well with the surroundings and looks great in its own right. Thanks to John Lillich for overseeing the project with input from Vice President Mark Demyan and sanctuary committee member Rob Swaney.

I hope that you are setting some time aside to get out and enjoy our beautiful autumn. This is when straggler and out  
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## Bird Quest

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of fall migration in and around the Chagrin River watershed, and is designed to support the Chagrin River Corridor IBA (Important Bird Area). Together with Geauga Parks and Blackbrook Audubon, the ASGC studies bird populations and works to preserve the Chagrin River Valley. Our recent purchase of 80 acres along the Chagrin River, contiguous to our existing Hach-Otis Sanctuary, created new preserved land. Encouraging teams to bird within the IBA boundaries is another way to help birds and educate people about the wonders of nature.

At 4pm Saturday, September 14, Bird Quest teams returned to The West Woods Nature Center for our Celebration. The award for Most Species Overall went to Andy Avram, Erin Avram, and Ophelia Allen of the "Crazy Cardinals" team, with 78 species found. The Rarest Bird Seen, for a Western Kingbird, went to the "GPD Nat-Catchers," and the Most Creative Team Name award went to the "East Clark Bird Nerds." Many thanks to our judges, Mary Salomon and Matt Valencic.

But the fun wasn't finished yet! We received two special donations to give away in celebration of our five years of Bird Quest. The first, "The Fisher King," was a life-size carving of a belted kingfisher, created and donated by

award-winning wood carver John Lillich. The second was a photo of a wood duck, photographed and framed by Matt Valencic. To receive these special awards, we selected two special teams. Both of them have competed in Bird Quest all five years. How better to celebrate five years than by celebrating those who have helped make it possible! Molly and Alex Burke of the "Left-Wing Little Grebes" won the wood duck photo, and the Ianiro family, for five years known as "The Common Loons," took home the kingfisher. Congratulations to both of them, and to all our wonderful teams! Thank you so much for making Bird Quest a big success!



The Ianiro family (with Alison DeBroux) aka "The Common Loons" won The Fisher King.

Photo: J. Tomko

I cannot sign off without giving a shout-out to all our hard-working, behind-the-scenes volunteers (the Worker Bees Team!) without whom this event truly would not happen: Kathy Cochran, Kathryn Craig, Steve Zabor, Laurenda Messer, Betsy Siman, Joe Kollar, Andrea Story, Matt Valencic and Mary Ann Wagner of Blackbrook Audubon. Many thanks goes to emcee Jim Tomko and all who stayed after the Celebration to help clean up. And of course to Linda Gilbert and the Geauga Park District, who allowed us to take over The West Woods Nature Center and made sure it was set up and welcoming.

Let's see what the next five years brings!

—Alison DeBroux

## COAC

(Continued from page 1)

started with a 1-hour hike around the property with its many and varied habitats (more than 250 species of birds recorded there). This was followed by a presentation about the Preserve, a former cold war uranium facility that has been remediated. These two activities showcased potential field trips for chapters in the area. Then came lunch, a time for networking with people you did not know and for sharing information about our chapters.

RAPTOR, Inc. started the afternoon. This raptor rehabilitation organization shared how they successfully operate and grow this non-profit, conservation enterprise. Many points they made could be applied to Audubon Chapters.

Then Matt Valencic presented the results of a survey titled "What's working in your Chapter and what are your challenges". Some of the programs and events chapters shared (like our own Bird Quest) were inspiring to chapters who needed some new ideas. This was followed by a session by Bill Heck, our regional rep from National Audubon, about the many resources and activities available to chapters, including grants for habitat improvement. Jackie Augustine, COAC President, closed the day with a short business meeting.

All participants agreed the meeting was well worth their time and we look forward to the next gathering in Columbus on April 4, 2020.

—Matt Valencic

## Critter Corner

### Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*)

This elegant little gull would not be caught consorting with the bigger gulls in trash dumps or fast food parking lots. Their diet



Photo: M. Valencic

is primarily small minnow-type fish and crustaceans such as krill and shrimp which they capture in a tern-like dive and dip instead of the clumsier, typical gull technique. Bonaparte's will also search for worms, crabs, and other invertebrates on mudflats. They consume a large number of insects during nesting season, chasing them down flycatcher-style.

At 13.5 inches in length and seven ounces in weight it is the smallest gull we commonly see in our area. There are smaller gulls but they are rare finds in Ohio. During fall migration they often congregate by the thousands at the mouths of rivers, power plant discharges, and waste water treatment plants. They are hardy souls as many winter at sea where converging ocean currents cause an upwelling of food items.

Bonaparte's Gulls in breeding plumage have a black head, dainty black bill, red legs, and white primary feathers giving their open wings a white wedge shape against the grayish remainder of the wing. We usually see them in winter plumage which shows a dark ear spot rather than a black head.

Another unusual trait is this is one of the only gull species that usually nests in trees. They build a cup-shaped nest of twigs, rootlets, bark shreds and vines lined with moss and lichens 6-40 feet above the ground near the trunk of a conifer near water in the boreal forests of Canada and southern Alaska. Most gulls nest on the ground and these occasionally will too.

A Bonaparte's could show up on our shorelines any month of the year but autumn is the best time. As you search through that enormous flock of Bonaparte's be alert for some rarities like Little Gull, Black-headed Gull and Sabine's Gull. They're out there!

—Jim Tomko



Photo: M. Valencic

**Did you know?**

Bonaparte’s Gulls have an entrancing feeding strategy called “conveyor belt foraging” where they start upstream en masse and follow the current, diving and skimming the surface until they get to the end of the feeding patch then they lift up over the flock and drop back to the beginning to start the sweep again and again. It is mesmerizing to watch at the mouth of a river where the flock is feeding.

Also, the name Bonaparte’s comes from the 1820’s ornithologist Charles Lucien Bonaparte who was a cousin to Napoleon!

—Jim Tomko

**From the Nest**

*(Continued from page 1)*

of place migrants show up. Even on your usual walk about you could run into an unusual species that is not normally encountered here in Northeastern Ohio. Let me know what you are seeing. Good birding to you.

—Jim Tomko, President

**5 things YOU can do to help birds**

**1. Make your yard an oasis for birds.**

All birds need clean water, food, and cover. Hang a feeder, build a brush pile, install a birdbath, or fill your garden with native plants.

**2. Become a scientist.**

When you participate in programs like the Christmas Bird Count, the data you supply helps to inform and shape Audubon’s bird-saving work.

**3. Create communities.**

Inspire new bird lovers by sharing your passion for birds with family and friends, and joining or starting conservation programs where you live.

**4. Be the voice for birds.**

You care about birds — so speak up for them! They can’t sign petitions, contact their reps, or vote, but you can.

**5. Keep cats inside.**

When your gentle kitty goes outside, she becomes a menace to the birds in your backyard. Millions of birds are killed by America’s domestic cats every year. Keep your cat indoors.

*Excerpted from www.audubon.org*

**Storage Shed**

*(Continued from page 1)*



New storage shed at Hach-Otis Sanctuary.

Photo: M. Valencic

construction schedule had its interruptions. This was mainly due to the Lake County Building Department not accepting new applications for several weeks due to computer problems.

I am looking forward to implementing this mowing schedule soon, and am looking for a person or persons to share the seat on the Kubota.

—John Lillich

**Upcoming Events**

***Field Trips, Etc.***

**October 18 7:00pm**

*“The Hach-Otis Preserve”*

Burrough’s Nature Club  
Methodist Church, Willoughby Hills

John Lillich will be making an indoor presentation on the Hach-Otis Preserve, to the Burrough’s Nature Club at the Methodist church in Willoughby Hills. All are welcome.

**October 19 10:00am**

*“Fall Leaf Colors”*

Hach-Otis Sanctuary

Mid-October in Northeastern Ohio is a spectacular time to soak up the beauty of nature. John Lillich’s stories and style

will keep you entertained with the natural and human history in this gem of a wildlife preserve. John hiked and worked these ridges and ravines ever since he was a child and intimately knows the moods and denizens of this woods. Join us and the Burrough’s Nature Club for a walk at peak color change (if mother nature agrees with our timing). Meet at the Hach-Otis parking lot at the end of Skyline Drive heading east off of River Road in Willoughby Hills.

**November 16 2:30pm**

*“Leaf Crunching”*

Molnar Sanctuary

The leaves of brown are on the ground! If we have a dry day we can crunch and kick through the many leaves blanketing the trail and forest floor! I love a November walk because without the leaves on the trees we are better able to see the wildlife and the lay of the land. Often on these walks we remark, “I didn’t know that was there!” referring to a tree or boulder or wetland that had been obscured by summer leaf cover. Help us see what is new or newly discovered in this sanctuary with its varied habitats. Meet at the Aurora Dog Park parking lot on the east side of Page Road a few hundred yards north of Mennonite Road in Aurora.

**DATED MAIL**

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*A Wry Smile*



According to one estimate, a real-life Death Star (from the Star Wars movies) would cost \$15.6 septillion to build—roughly a trillion times the amount of money in the world.

**Congressman Joyce goes birding**

On August 15, Audubon Great Lakes and leaders from Blackbrook Audubon Society, Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, and Lake Metroparks took Congressman Dave Joyce (OH-14) on a bird walk through Veteran’s Memorial Park in Mentor, OH. Congressman Joyce has introduced the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) Act of 2019, an important piece of legislation that would increase funding for the GLRI from \$300 million to \$475 million over the next five years.



Congressman Joyce (center) holds forth with members of Audubon and Lake Metroparks including ASGC Trustee Matt Valencic (far left).

*Photo: M. Urso*

“It is undeniable that the Great Lakes are a national treasure and an economic powerhouse, which is why I have championed efforts to reauthorize and fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to protect the Great Lakes for current and future generations,” said Congressman Joyce.

“The GLRI enhances water quality and habitat protection for birds like the Least Bittern which is even more at risk

in a changing climate,” said Marnie Urso, Policy Director for Audubon Great Lakes. “The GLRI Act will ensure that additional investments in our Great Lakes benefit the 30 million people and the 350 plus species of birds that call the Great Lakes home.”

Veteran’s Memorial Park, located near the Lake Erie shoreline, is a remnant of original Ohio swamp forest and a birding hotspot.

—Marnie Urso