



# The HOUSE WREN

## Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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October, 2021

### Chagrin River Bird Quest 2021

Mother Nature provided perfect weather for this year's Chagrin River Bird Quest (CRBQ). More than 130 birders on 35 teams prowled the woodlands, fields, lakes and wetlands of the Chagrin River Valley to find 133 species of birds, including 22 species of warblers. Jim Tomko's "Owl Prowl" at the Audubon Aurora Sanctuary turned up a great horned owl and three barred owls and Saturday walks at The Rookery and Chagrin River Park had checklists of around 30 species each.

About 65 people returned to the West Woods Nature Center to celebrate and enjoy some tasty food while we recapped the day's birding. Harvey Webster emceed celebration. As usual, he added thoughtful and sometimes

whimsical comments with each award and prize.

This year's first place for Total Number of Species Found went to team Hangry Birders with 79 species. Second place went to team GPD N at Catchers with 77 species, followed by team Where's The Darn Connecticut Warbler with 73 species. The Most Warblers Seen award went to team GPD



Team "Flowers and Feathers" looking and...

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### The most common question, revisited...

Throughout most of this summer we have been asked "can we start feeding the birds again?"

According to ODNR scientists, the answer is now **YES!** There is ongoing study because the reason for all the bird deaths is still not explained. But there are much fewer deaths and sick birds.

The recommendation is that you may begin feeding the birds, but once a week, take your feeders down and wash them with a 10% bleach solution. Allow it to completely dry and then refill with birdseed.

If you notice dead or ill birds or unusual behavior report it to ODNR, stop feeding and once again, clean the feeder with the bleach solution. After 7-10 days resume feeding. I hope you delight in bringing our feathered friends right into your backyard.

—Jim Tomko

### Invasive species control in the Aurora Sanctuary

ONAPA, ODNR and ASGC volunteers clear buckthorn, multi-flora rose and other invasives along trail

Invasive plant species are unwelcome everywhere but especially in our Audubon sanctuaries. When species like buckthorn, barberry and autumn olive get established in fields and along edges they shade out native species, disrupting the natural balance of native plants, pollinators, and ultimately other wildlife.

Eight members of the Ohio Natural Area and Preserves Association (ONAPA) and a local contingent of six members of the Ohio Division of

Natural Resources (ODNR) joined six Trail Crew volunteers from ASGC to clear invasive plant species from the Aurora Sanctuary. Focusing on Japanese barberry, multiflora rose and common buckthorn, the ONAPA and ODNR volunteers and staff showed the ASGC volunteers how to identify, remove and destroy the plants.

For five hours on each of two days, the crews cut the invasives close to the ground using loppers and piled the plant material off-trail to be used as wildlife

cover. After cutting, ODNR and ONAPA workers followed up by treating the cut stumps with herbicide containing blue dye. This was a 'surgical approach' in that the herbicide was only applied to the cut stump of each invasive plant using a 'dauber' to prevent accidental treatment of nearby desirable species. The dye identifies stumps that have been treated. The herbicide is absorbed by the stump and kills just that plant.

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### From the Nest...



WOW! What an amazing Bird Quest we had this year. We all need to give Matt Valencic a huge thank you for his planning, leadership, and enthusiasm to have such a success. We also owe his Education Committee and many other volunteers some extreme gratitude because he could not have accomplished it without their help.

Thank you to Mark Demyan, Ban Twaddell and Keith Kohnke for their recruitment and organizing of a volunteer crew to join ODNR in the battle against invasive species in our Aurora Sanctuary. They got a huge start in regaining a diverse native woodland which is healthier for all.

We count on volunteer help to meet our mission. Please let us know how and where you can help. We need you out there!

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

## October birding

More than 250 species of birds can be expected in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake and Portage Counties during October. We will have everything from ducks and grebes to a few hardy warblers, both kinglets and a few new sparrows.

Keep visiting your ‘migrant traps’ for Nashville, blackpoll, palm, orange-crowned and yellow-rumped warblers. In fall and winter these birds supplement their insect diet with berries, so look at every poison ivy vine you see crawling up trees. Ruby-crowned and golden-crowned kinglets also will start showing up in the thickets and woods. While you are in the woods watch for gray-cheeked, Swainson’s and hermit thrushes.

Dunlin will join the remaining shorebirds in wetlands, on mudflats and shorelines of inland lakes. Watch for rusty blackbirds in wet areas – they like to flip leaves to look for ‘creepy crawlies’ underneath! They will also join large flocks of other blackbirds so look over every flock. And while you are at the lake, start watching for ducks, coots and grebes. Their numbers will increase next month but many start arriving in October. They are much easier to ID for new birders than a fall warbler!



Palm warbler in fall plumage.  
Photo: M. Valencic

In fields, edges and at feeders start watching for Lincoln’s, white-crowned and white-throated sparrows. They often hang out under feeders where there is a diverse menu of seeds and suet.

Now you have more reasons to enjoy the lovely weather of October. And remember to add your sightings to eBird! If you are not familiar with eBird contact us at [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org) for a free pdf.

—Matt Valencic



White-throated sparrow.  
Photo: M. Valencic

## Invasive species

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Though stormy weather forced an early retreat, the group managed to clear a significant area of trail margins near the kiosk at the southern entrance to the Aurora Sanctuary. We are grateful to everyone who participated in these workdays, and we are looking for YOUR HELP as we continue the ongoing battle with invasives in our sanctuaries.



Rick Deininger clearing invasives along the Aurora Sanctuary trail.  
Photo: B. Twaddell

If you would like to be part of a future work crew, please contact us by email at [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org). We will pass your name along to the crew chief and let you know when future workdays are scheduled.

THANK YOU ODNr, ONAPA and the ASGC volunteers for ‘being part of the solution’!

—Matt Valencic and  
Ban Twaddell

## Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



### Blue-winged Teal (*Spatula discors*)

This is one of our migratory “dabbling” ducks, as opposed to the divers. Most dabblers feed by doing tip-ups—putting their head straight down under the surface with their tails almost straight up.

But not the blue-wings. Usually, these ducks just skim seeds and invertebrates off the surface. Occasionally they tip-up to stir up the mud in the shallows and then retrieve the resulting delicacies.

Weighing in at 13 ounces with a length of 15.5 inches this is one of our smallest ducks. Blue-winged teal are often missed because they often stay in the shallows, camouflaged in the emergent vegetation. If you do spot a drake, it is unmistakable and very memorable. He has a bluish, almost purple-gray head with a large, bright white crescent behind the bill and in front of the eye. The back and breast are speckled with browns and grays. There is a large chalky blue shoulder patch and a green speculum, both of which are only visible when the wing is extended. Drakes often have a white spot on their sides just before the tail.

Females are cryptically speckled in browns and grays until she extends her wing, when she exposes that beautiful blue shoulder patch.

She builds a nest by making a shallow scrape near a small pond and lines it with soft grass and down. She incubates the eggs by herself for about 24 days. The eggs hatch within hours of each other and the hatchlings quickly follow their mother into the pond. Rarely do blue-winged teal nest in our area as they prefer more northern nesting grounds.

Blue-winged teal are closely related to the cinnamon teal of the west and northern shovelers. They are not close relatives of the green-winged teal. Blue-winged teal are among the last species to migrate through our area in the spring and among the first back through in the

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## In case you missed it

“Owl Prowl” September 10th

We were blessed with a perfect late summer evening for our annual Bird Quest Owl Prowl in the Aurora Sanctuary. Thirteen hardy hikers joined me to stumble down the trail under the forest’s full leaf canopy in the dark.

Owling is like fishing. Sometimes you get an owl’s response and sometimes you come up empty. Well! As soon as it became dark and before we had even attempted to lure an owl in, we heard a great horned owl hooting away in its signature “Who’s Awake? Me Too!” pattern. Then as we rounded the beaver dam on Hamman Pond the owl swooped out in a semicircle over the pond and back into the pines.

When we reached our favorite barred owl calling spot we called and played all sorts of barred owl calls in vain. There was no response. Kim Pease did catch a glimpse of an owl behind us in the branches above the trail. As we approached Fulton Pond, we heard a

beaver loudly slapping its tail on the water’s surface signaling to all that we, the intruders, were present in the woods. Then from the complete opposite side of the pond two or three barred owls began their “Who Cooks For You” calls just taunting us with their invisible presence.

To add insult to injury, a pack of happy, yappy coyotes began to trail us as if to give us a good push out of the woods with their howls, yaps and whines. I consider it a success to note even one owl but that night we had great horned and barred owls, a beaver and coyotes all announcing their claim to the night time woods. It was a fantastic hike!

—Jim Tomko



Questers at the Rookery in Geauga County on September 11th.

## Critter Corner

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autumn.

They are here right now on their way to our southern states and some go as far south as Venezuela and other South American countries. If you miss them now, you will have to wait until April as they migrate north to nesting grounds north of us.

—Jim Tomko

## Did You Know?

Blue-winged teal are the second most numerous duck species in North America. Only mallards are more numerous.

## Bird Quest

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Nat Catchers with 12 species. Best Bird was a whip poor will found by team Warblers, Robins and Wrens, OH MY!

More than \$450 worth of prizes were donated by generous individuals and businesses for this year’s event – THANK YOU to all who donated something! Items included bird feeders, a nest box, 25# of sunflower seed, books, field guides, tick gaiters, jewelry and 24 gift cards to local businesses.

A separate raffle was held for two special donations from John & Carol Lillich – a hand-carved ruddy duck decoy (won by Harvey Webster), and a matted and framed picture of common loons (won by Jim Tomko).

In the spirit of minimizing the spread of COVID 19, boxed meals from Honey Baked Ham were provided along with vegetarian and gluten-free salads. Everyone enjoyed the simplicity of ‘grab -and-go’ to their tables.

CRBQ would not be possible

without the hard-working and dedicated members of Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland and our partners at Blackbrook Audubon Society and the Geauga Park District. More than 20 individuals helped make this year’s event a success and we say THANK YOU to each of them.

SAVE THE DATE: Sept. 9-10 for Chagrin River Bird Quest 2022!

—Matt Valencic

# Upcoming Events

## Third Thursday

**Oct 21 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.

**Register at**

[www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events)

**Oct 24 2:00pm**

“Autumn Leaf Color”

Hach-Otis has the right mix of tree species and the right micro-climate to dazzle you with the full palette of autumn colors. Views over the Chagrin River Valley are spectacular! John Lillich will guide us on a wonderful tour of this special place. Since John grew up in and around this woodland, he can give interesting history and a wealth of natural history information. Meet at the Hach-Otis parking lot at the end of Skyline Drive off of River Road in Willoughby Hills.

Registration is not required.

Hach-Otis Sanctuary and Chagrin River.

Photo: J. Lillich

## Field Trip




**DATED MAIL**

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***A Wry Smile***



Q: Why wouldn't they let the butterfly into the dance?

A: Because it was a mothball.

***An Audubon Moment***

Friends had been seeing two stilt sandpipers on the mudflats at Headwaters Park (East Branch Reservoir in Geauga County) for the past three days, but I kept missing them. I determined to bring my scope and ‘park myself’ in the area by 4pm on Saturday in the hope they would come to feed.

I never carry a chair while birding, but I was tired from working that morning, so I grabbed one and put it in the car. When I arrived at my destination I sat in the chair and adjusted my tripod so I could look through the scope while sitting – lazy birding at its best!

Within a few minutes I saw shorebirds flying toward the mudflats, but a few veered and came toward me. They landed and started feeding, walking right toward me in my chair!

For the next 10 minutes I enjoyed four solitary sandpipers foraging, sometimes within 10 feet of me. You just never get that close to shorebirds. I took a few pictures



but mostly just watched them feeding. What a peaceful, special experience. About an hour later the stilt sandpipers arrived – icing on the cake!

Maybe I should take my chair birding more often!

—Matt Valencic

Solitary sandpiper.  
 Photo: M. Valencic