



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

September, 2021

7th Annual Chagrin River Bird Quest 2021

September is Bird Quest month! Get your team together and support the Chagrin River IBA (Important Bird Area) by participating in our seventh annual team birding challenge, **September 10-11**. Explore the Chagrin River Valley from Lake Erie south to Audubon's bird sanctuaries in Aurora in search of year-round residents and fall migrants. Start in your own backyard, bird on your own, or join one of our expert birders for a guided bird walk.

Teams can be two or more, young or old, experienced birders or never birded before! Win a prize for the most creative team name! Find the most warblers, visit the most habitats, or check off the most species overall. Our photo montage of teams birding throughout the day was so

popular last year, we're doing it again. Send in photos of your team or the birds you find, then join in the Quest Celebration! to see what everyone did all day! Great food, awards and prizes for all!

Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org for more information or to register.



Dave English scoping Mentor Marsh during Bird Quest 2020.

The most common question...

Throughout the summer we have been asked, "can we start feeding the birds again?"

According to ODNR scientists, the answer is still **NO**.

There is ongoing study to sort out what has been killing scores of birds in Washington D.C., Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Ohio, and Southern Indiana. It appears to be a neurological condition causing blindness and the inability to fly. It has not been common in our area of Ohio but ODNR still recommends not feeding or providing bird baths for the time being.

Before we begin feeding again, it is important to disinfect feeders and baths with a 1:10 bleach solution. Also

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Bluebird Trail roundup — Hach-Otis Sanctuary

Our sixteen weeks of monitoring 11 bluebird nesting boxes has come to the end for this season. How quickly it has passed. We started on April 11 and finished with a thorough cleaning of each house on August 15. Carol and I shared the box monitoring with Stephanie Berhannan and her husband Tristen.

I believe we had a successful season. We had 11 nest boxes in the field. Only one was unused for the entire season and one was only used the last eight weeks.

This nest was our only failure. Tree

swallows laid three eggs, but they never hatched. I believe the nest was abandoned.

All nests were treated with food grade diatomaceous earth. We had no indication of blow fly larva being present. In addition, all nest box posts had Tanglefoot applied in two inch bands to prevent ants in the nests, and sky lights in their roofs to discourage house sparrow occupation. This season we fledged 21 bluebirds, 12 tree swallows and 3 house sparrows.

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Stephanie Berhannan and John Lillich monitoring a nest box in Hach-Otis.

Photo: C. Lillich

From the Nest...

This summer has zipped by. Migration is underway and with that brings the excitement of discovering new and unusual species moving through our area. I hope you are enjoying some fantastic adventures in the forest and field.

Ohio birders are celebrating the success of Nellie and Nish, a pair of piping plovers who nested in Ohio this



year. What is so special is that piping plovers have not nested here in over 80 years! This pair selected Maumee Bay State Park.

As soon as it was noted that they found their place, wildlife people both professional and volunteer cordoned off the area to protect them from us and our pets. This pair successfully fledged some young.

Often when there is nesting success,

a pair of birds will return to the same area the following nesting season to try again. Everyone will be keeping a sharp lookout next year to see if they return.

Also, we are looking forward to resuming our monthly field trips this month. Please join us if you are able to.

—Jim Tomko, President

Meadows

Habitat is what makes birds possible! Habitat provides food, water and cover birds need at different times of the year. One habitat that is stunning this time of year is the meadow, especially the native plant meadows that have been thoughtfully created by our park systems across NE Ohio. In summer they attract breeding birds seeking nesting cover and insects to feed their young. In winter, the plants provide cover from the elements and lots of food for seed eating visitors.

Meadows look beautiful at a distance, but I would like to invite you in for a closer look. Be sure to bring your new SEEK app (see below) and camera because there's lots to see and photograph.

As you walk the trails through your meadow, notice there are plants of all heights living together. Purple prairie clover and mountain mint will be one to two feet off the ground while rattlesnake master, American boneset, common milkweed and the different goldenrods are three to four feet tall. Occasionally you will find clusters of blue Asters (five feet) or Joe Pye weed (six feet) or the giant tall ironweed that can be eight feet tall.

Not sure what you're looking at? Point your SEEK app at the flowers and find out!

Seek (the app)

Most of my birding friends are also nature nerds. We love everything about the habitats where we chase birds, even though we don't always know what it is ... until now!

Seek is the FREE smartphone app from iNaturalist that helps you identify plants and animals, then tell you about what you have just discovered. It does this using a camera you point at the living thing, then picture recognition software uses the iNaturalist database to attempt an ID. If the app is having difficulty, it prompts you to look at a different angle or take another picture. You can ID birds, trees, plants, fish, fungi, reptiles, amphibians and



Eastern tiger swallowtail on ironweed
Photo: M. Valencic

Some flowers attract specific insects while others seem to be a magnet for many. Those tall Joe Pye weeds and various coneflowers attract swallowtail butterflies. The boneset will attract small bees and wasps as well as small butterflies. In my experience, rattlesnake master and goldenrod are attractive to many different pollinators including bees, wasps, butterflies and bugs.

Several species of true bugs (plant sucking insects) and many beetles can be found on the green parts of the plants. Not sure what insect you are seeing? Take a picture with your camera, enlarge the image of the insect, point the SEEK app at the image and BINGO! You have an ID!

Like birding, this will be a learning project for years to come. There always seems to be a new plant or insect showing up. Just be sure you have your SEEK app and your curiosity when you leave the house, then be ready to learn every day. If you have a free iNaturalist account, your sightings will be saved for you to enjoy again and again.

—Matt Valencic



Goldenrod soldier beetle on mountain mint.
Photo: M. Valencic

invertebrates.

Recently I was birding Frohring Meadows in Geauga County. The birding was slow, so I started photographing flowers and pollinators in the meadow. I could get my phone close to flowers but not insects. So, I

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Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*)

Yes, migration has started! Last month I came across a small flock of shorebirds we affectionately group among the several species known as “peeps” on a beach in Huron, Ohio.

Sanderlings are the birds that scamper in synchrony with the waves as they madly and energetically dash at the wave-line, plucking delectable morsels out of the wet sand. They specialize in the aquatic macro-invertebrates such as small crabs, amphipods, mollusks, insects and horseshoe crab eggs.

Sanderlings are robin-sized birds at about eight inches long with close to a 14-inch wingspan, and weigh in at about two ounces. In breeding plumage, they have a rich, rusty-rufous mottled head, back and breast with clean white underparts. We usually see them in non-breeding plumage. They are still mottled but in grays and black. In all plumages they have a sturdy all-black bill and black legs. When in flight the leading edge of the wing is black which creates a small black spot in front of the wing when folded at rest.

They usually are monogamous and after pair bonding, they seem to go everywhere together. They nest in the high arctic on the ground where predatory birds, arctic foxes, and wolves may detect their nest. Both parents take turns incubating and remain motionless on the nest when discovered until the last minute when they feign the good ole “broken wing display” to lead the predator away.

Some only migrate as far south as southern Alaska beaches but many go as far south as South America. These are the shorebirds that you “migratory birders” see running ahead of the waves when you visit Florida beaches in the winter.

I hope you have a chance to see them here *and* there!

—Jim Tomko

Seek app

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photographed them, enlarged the picture on my camera screen and pointed the SEEK camera at the image. BINGO! Seek identified most of the pollinators as well as the flowers they were on. It can even identify plant responses to insects like the goldenrod gall fly, goldenrod bunch gall midge and oak apple gall wasp. Very cool!

Seek is available for iPhone and Android from your app store. You can download the Seek User Guide by typing "Seek by iNaturalist" into your browser.

The Guide will walk you through all the features and address privacy and security questions.

Start using Seek today and add a new dimension to your outings for you, your family and friends.

—Matt Valencic



Trail Crew update

The observation deck in the Novak sanctuary is nearly finished and several of the sign kiosks have been repainted.

Audubon's Trail Crew has been working on these and other projects this summer and looks forward to continued work in all three of the sanctuaries in Aurora this fall.

Work sessions are being planned and we would greatly appreciate some more help. Let us know if you would like to be contacted.

One of the most valuable contributions you can make, however, is to let us know what needs to be improved on our trails. Changes such as overgrowth, fallen trees, damaged boardwalks, eroded or muddy spots on our paths can occur quickly. Please let us know if you see something that needs attention.

Email us at trailcrew@clevelandaudubon.org.

—Ban Twaddell



Wendy & Keith Kohnke repaint a sign kiosk in the Aurora Sanctuary.

Photo: B. Twaddell

Question

(Continued from page 1)

remember to report any dead birds that you find to ODNR.

And remember, we feed the birds for our benefit, not theirs. We love to see them up close and personal in addition to that "feel good" feeling that we get when we are sharing with our feathered friends. In reality, they have existed for thousands of years without the assistance of our bird feeders.

—Jim Tomko

Bluebird boxes

(Continued from page 1)

When it comes to nest building and housekeeping, bluebirds and tree swallows are two very different classes of bird.

Bluebird nests are made of grasses and are very neat and compact. Tree swallows' nests are lined with goose down, quite pretty and inviting.

Housekeeping is another story. Our bluebirds appear to be meticulous housekeepers while tree swallows do not have the word in their vocabulary. Their empty nests are filled with bird waste and unconsumed food, including dead grasshoppers.

It is my intention to add two more boxes and to relocate two boxes for next season. If you would like to participate next season for some volunteer work, email me at info@clevelandaudubon.org.

—John Lillich

Upcoming Events

Bird Quest

Sept 10-11 4:00pm
24 hour birding challenge

Check-in: 4pm to 6pm, Sept 10
Pick up checklists, information, and t-shirts

Go Birding: 4pm to 4pm, Sept 10-11
Bird with your team throughout the Chagrin River Valley; send in photos

Quest Celebration! 4pm to 6:30pm
Sept 11
Turn in your checklists. Then food, awards and fun!

Register at www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events

Third Thursday

Sept 16 7:00pm
"A live tour of eBird"
Via Zoom®

Matt Valencic will take you online into eBird, introducing you to many interesting and useful features, available at your fingertips for FREE! Whether going far from home or just chasing fall migrants around your county, eBird can show you where to go birding and what is being seen. Want to keep track of the birds you see in your yard or during your travels? Sign up for a free account and My eBird takes the data from your checklists and keeps track of it for you!

Field Trip

Sept 25 3:30pm
"Fringed Gentian Hike"

Join us to see this exquisite native wildflower. These rare flowers are losing ground due to housing developments, loss of wet soils, excess mowing and the use of herbicides. Fringed gentians are biennials which flower in the second year. In addition to the fringed gentian, we also will see closed or bottle gentian in bloom. Stop and absorb some of the last flowers to bloom for the season. Meet at the Brettschneider Park/Audubon Parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora. (Registration not required.)

DATED MAIL

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An Audubon Moment

I'm a helper and I always planned that when I spotted a tagged bird, I would report it to the researcher if I could. I rarely see a tagged bird and if I do the tag is too far away or so difficult to see that I cannot get any information from it.

Well, in June I attended a wedding celebration near the tasty little town of Hershey, Pennsylvania. Of course, when I get the chance to travel, I always try to squeeze in some birding. I discovered a riverfront park with an abundant array of tree swallows, barn swallows, cliff swallows, a few northern rough-winged swallows and several purple martins thrown in. As I was admiring their amazing aeronautical prowess, I spotted a huge dark bird landing in a tree across the river. It was a black vulture! This was interesting to me because I rarely see them in NE Ohio.

This bird had bright green wing tags on both wings with clearly visible white letters. I was excited to have my first chance to report a tagged bird to a study. As soon as I got back to the hotel, I reported it to the USGS Bird Banding Lab. They acknowledged receipt of the information, thanked me and told me it could be a good number of weeks before they would know which study it was in. I felt very good knowing that I would help some researcher add data to the study. And, I would learn where that bird had been, how old it was, where it was hatched and what the study involved.

Well, three days later I got the report. The bird was estimated to be a year old and had been tagged the very day before I reported it near, you guessed it—Hershey, Pennsylvania! Still, it was fun while the excitement lasted and maybe the researcher got a chuckle about the report on the bird that was tagged just the day before!

—Jim Tomko



Black vulture from Audubon archives.

A Wry Smile



We could learn a lot from crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty and some are dull. Some have weird names and all are different colors, but they all have to live in the same box.