



# The HOUSE WREN



## Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org)

February, 2014

### On having our forests and drinking them, too

As an ornithologist, I'm an early riser. And like many bird enthusiasts, I find those pre-dawn hours easier to take with a thermos of good, strong coffee in hand. But did you know there is a strong connection between how coffee is grown and the health of bird populations?

Coffee is a tropical fruit grown mainly on plantations cleared from rainforest. Around the world, 11 million hectares (roughly the area of Ohio) are dedicated to growing coffee. More than half of that coffee is produced in South and Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean – just exactly where “our” migratory birds spend most of their lives. Back in the late 1980s, when long-term monitoring studies began to show concerning declines in our migratory bird populations, an argument erupted among ornithologists about where these birds were encountering problems. Some blamed habitat fragmentation and degradation in North America while others pointed their fingers at rampant tropical deforestation. (It turns out we can blame both.) The argument was intense enough to spur some great science.

Among this burst of research was the innovative work of the late Russ Greenberg and colleagues from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center. From their studies in Mexico and

Guatemala we learned that bird diversity can be very high in coffee plantations – as long as those plantations are “shaded”



plantations where the coffee trees grow under the canopy of mature native trees. Both migrant and resident tropical birds show a strong preference for shade coffee plantations; sun plantations have impoverished bird communities. And what's more, those birds give back to coffee farmers by reducing insect damage by 60-80%! From these scientific findings, a movement to promote shade-grown coffee was born.

Coffee has long been a significant import commodity for the United States. Last year, we imported more than 3 billion pounds of coffee. Regular coffee drinkers in this country report drinking 3-4 cups of coffee daily – about 300 million cups of coffee poured each day! The majority of this coffee is grown on sun plantations, what we could call

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### Did you know?

The largest great blue heron colony in the Great Lakes region contained over 2400 nests and was located on West Sister Island, Ohio, in Lake Erie's western basin.

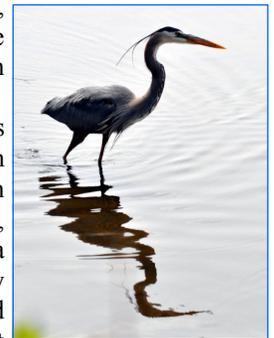


Photo: Ed Buckles

Also, across the river from the towpath in Brecksville, Ohio, there is a large heronry with a bald eagle's nest right smack dab in the middle of it! Needless to say, the heron nests closest to the eagle's nest remain vacant.

—Jim Tomko

### *From the Nest...*

Save the date! The ASGC's **Annual Meeting and Dinner** is June 7<sup>th</sup>. We are deep into the planning of this event and could use your input!

Traditionally, we hold the Annual Meeting at an environmentally significant location with a pre-dinner bird walk. Then we have snacks and a little business (the Meeting part). Dinner is a casual, catered affair, followed by a speaker. Last year our own Harvey



Webster gave a talk on Aldo Leopold and the impact of species extinction on the world we know today (for more on this subject, see our **Special Event**, page 4).

Perhaps we will do something different this year—a picnic or barbecue, with activities for kids? Shall we offer door prizes?

Please email me at [thehousewren@gmail.com](mailto:thehousewren@gmail.com) or call 216-556-5441 with your suggestions. Thanks!

—Alison DeBroux, Editor

### President's Post

Please join us for our **Special Event** at the zoo on March 9<sup>th</sup>. The ASGC has partnered with two other conservation-minded clubs in order to bring you a top-level event at a new and exciting venue. “The Lost Bird Project” and panel discussion promises to be the environmental event of the year. You won't want to miss it!

Take care and enjoy the beauty of nature.

—Mark J Demyan, President

## Birds and cold

A great example of adaptive evolution

Ever wonder how birds handle the cold? They fluff up their feathers and... what else? Our winter hold-overs have a better chance of maintaining their territory year-round than their migrating cousins, and they avoid the hazards of long travel. But in exchange they have to endure the cold.

Birds are warm blooded, which means their bodies maintain a constant temperature of around 106 degrees. To maintain this heat, they've evolved many different strategies--some similar to our own.

Sparrows, for example, seek shelter in dense foliage or cavities. They also huddle together to share warmth, and try to minimize their total surface area by tucking in their head and feet.

Bigger birds put on another layer of insulation, like we do. A goose may grow an extra set of downy feathers. Or they may put on fat. More than 10 percent of winter body weight may be fat in certain species, including chickadees and finches. As a result,



Pine warbler

Photo: National Audubon Society

some birds spend the vast majority of their daylight hours seeking fatty food sources, making feeder food even more precious for surviving a frosty night.

One of the toughest winter survivors, chickadees, can't put on too much bulk for aerodynamic reasons. Instead, they are experts in shivering. Birds shiver by activating opposing muscle groups, creating muscle contractions without all of the trembling typical when humans shiver.

Another adaptation is the ability to keep warm blood circulating near vital organs while allowing extremities to cool down. Gulls can stand on ice with feet at near-freezing temperatures while keeping their body's core nice and toasty.

Few winter challenges are more daunting than nightfall. Some birds save energy by allowing their internal thermostat to drop. Chickadees and other species reduce their body temperature as much as 22 degrees from their daytime level in a process called regulated hypothermia.

One way to help birds when the mercury drops is to hang feeders (see "Winter Bird Feeding" in the January issue of *The House Wren*). They'll appreciate the backyard buffet, and you'll have a front-row seat to these hardy winter residents.

*Edited from "How Birds Cope with Winter," Daisy Yuhas—NAS*



## Critter Corner



Photo: Ed Buckles

### Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Did a pterodactyl just fly over? Great blue herons are huge birds that fly with slow wing beats and a folded neck giving a prehistoric effect when they are seen over the marsh. Standing over four feet tall with a wingspan of up to six feet, they are impressive!

Males and females both wear gray plumage with a black cap and a white crown stripe sporting a long black plume. They use their sturdy yellow or orange bill for fishing, spearing, digging, preening, and defense. It takes four or five years to reach full adult plumage.

Herons nest in colonies called heronries (erroneously referred to as rookeries—rooks nest in rookeries!) containing as many as 300 three to four-foot diameter stick nests. Years ago the Novak Sanctuary had a 30-nest heronry which was abandoned when a nearby housing development was built.

Females lay four to seven pale blue eggs which are incubated by both parents for 28 days. The nestlings fledge

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## Notes and Notices

**February 1 7:30pm**

*"Building an Offshore Wind Power Industry"*

Eric Ritter, Lake Erie Energy Dev. Co.

Learn how this project will create hundreds of jobs locally while bringing power to thousands of homes.

Cleveland Natural Science Club

Look About Lodge

37374 Miles Road, Bentleyville

*Have an event or organization of interest to our readers? The House Wren will publish, as a courtesy, this information as space permits, but reserves the right to edit or refuse any submission and cannot guarantee its accuracy. The ASGC is not affiliated with, nor does it endorse, these events or organizations.*

*Thank you, Sue Graham, for contributing this information.*

**March 11 & 18 11am—2pm**

**Fee: \$40**

*"Life is for the Birds, or is it?"*

Chuck Jakubchak, M.A.

Learn educational facts and insights that will enlighten and entertain novice birders or just those who want to understand more about birds.

Twinsburg Senior Center

10260 Ravenna Road, Twinsburg

Register online: [www.tri-c.edu/encore](http://www.tri-c.edu/encore)

### On having our forests

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ecological deserts. Luckily, as consumers, we have a choice of what kind of coffee to drink. And thanks to Russ Greenberg, an increasing number of coffee producers are certifying their shade-grown coffee through programs like Smithsonian Bird Friendly® or Rainforest Alliance™ that help protect tropical ecosystems and bird diversity.

Does your favorite coffee shop serve shade grown coffee? You might want to ask. Next time you reach for a cup 'o joe, think about making a purchase that's for the birds.

—Sarah Mabey, Hiram College

## In Case You Missed It!

January 4—We started our wildlife track hike with a beautifully sunny, but frigid, winter day. Temperatures close to 10 degrees maintained a nice 4 to 6 inch snow cover, but it quickly warmed into the 30s. Many white-tailed deer, squirrel and mouse tracks were easily seen. We saw where a shrew had tunneled under the snow, occasionally poking its head out for a look around. A lone Eastern cottontail also left its signs. There were a great-blue heron's tracks on the ice of the Aurora Branch crisscrossing with raccoon, squirrel and mink tracks. We met two birding friends of mine, Kim Pease and Marty Sickinger, heading in the opposite direction. They reported yellow-rumped warblers and both ruby



Screech owl imprints.

Photo: Jim Tomko

and golden-crowned kinglets. Two red-tailed hawks were calling and soaring when a bald eagle joined them. The best part of this winter track walk was seeing the feather impressions in the snow where an Eastern screech owl attempted to capture its dinner! I wonder if it was successful.

—Jim Tomko

### Great Blue Heron

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in 8 weeks.

Hérons eat fish, frogs, salamanders, snakes, lizards, small birds, small mammals, large insects and even baby alligators. Adult alligators will, in turn, prey on herons!

Great blues are hardy and can withstand wintery weather if there is open water for fishing. They will

migrate but return as soon as the fish and frogs are accessible.

For a close-up view of great blue heron family life take a look at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's nest cam which runs a live streaming video of an active nest at [www.livestream.com/cornellherons](http://www.livestream.com/cornellherons). Time it right and you may be lucky enough to watch the eggs hatch!

—Jim Tomko

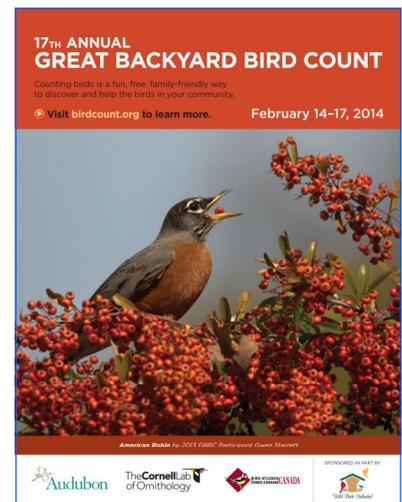
## The Squawk



"Shortly before heading out to do some shoveling, I watched a pair of juncos nibble the berries on one of our burning bushes out back. If it weren't for their movements, I doubt I would have seen them, they blend in with the mixture of dark bark and white snow so perfectly. Later I saw a gorgeous fox with about the bushiest tail I have ever seen. Very, very handsome - and looking healthy."

—Diann Rucki

Email [thehousewren@gmail.com](mailto:thehousewren@gmail.com)



## Upcoming Events

### Saturday Afternoon Backyard Naturalist Series

**February 22 3:00-5:00pm**

*"The Heronry at Bath Road"*

Andrea Irland

Volunteer, National Park Service

Imagine 120 nests, each three feet wide and 70 feet up in the trees occupied by prehistoric-looking birds with six-foot wingspans! You can see it all from your car in this drive-up heronry! Hear about the great blue herons of Bath Road, the

monitoring that has been done and what we are learning from this unique situation. Andrea Irland has been monitoring the Bath Road Heronry for 18 years as a volunteer citizen scientist for the National Park Service.

All SABN programs are free and held at our Novak Education Center, 382 Townline Road, Aurora.

### Wednesday Nights at CMNH

**February 19 7:00pm**

*"Birds and Climate Presentation"*

Gary Langham, Chief Scientist for the National Audubon Society

Audubon's Birds and Climate modeling report will present findings on expected future impacts to birds as a result of climate change.

CMNH Programs are held in the Rare Book Room. There may be a small charge.

### Field Trips

**February 15 9:30am**

*"Great Backyard Bird Count"*

Aurora Sanctuary

This international event is promoted by Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society. To participate, join us on our winter bird survey hike or just look out your own kitchen window for 15 minutes. Record what you see and then use the Internet to report to the Great Backyard Bird Count. This project runs worldwide February 14<sup>th</sup> through February 17<sup>th</sup>. While on the website you can monitor the tabulations from all over the world. Let's make Ohio the top contributor this year!

**March 29 9:00am**

*"Wheeling for Waterfowl"*

La Due Reservoir

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Please recycle this newsletter

*A Wry Smile*

All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt.

—Charles M. Schulz



I'd kiss a frog even if there was no promise of a Prince Charming popping out of it. I love frogs.

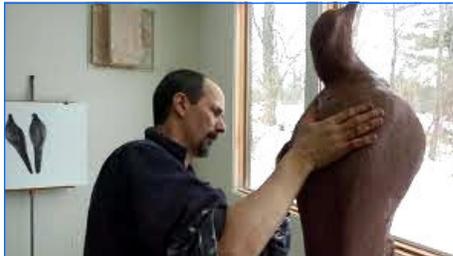
—Cameron Diaz

**Special Event!**

***"The Lost Bird Project" and Saving Species from Extinction***

**Cleveland Metroparks Zoo Auditorium**  
**2:00-4:00 p.m., Sunday, March 9, 2014**

One hundred years ago this September, the last passenger pigeon, Martha, fell dead in her cage at the Cincinnati Zoo. With her death, the most numerous bird species in the world



Todd McGrain, "The Lost Bird Project"

became extinct. The stunning loss of this and other species was a wake-up call to conservationists and helped garner support for the modern conservation movement. Yet even now we hear about an impending extinction crisis.

What can we learn from the extinction of these once common species? How can we strengthen wildlife populations today and preserve the habitats that are necessary for their survival?

We will attempt to answer these questions through a viewing of the film, "The Lost Bird Project," which highlights the effort of artist Todd

McGrain to create memorials for five extinct species close to the area where the last of their kind was seen.

Following the film, we'll convene a panel of local experts who will speak

about ways to improve the future for wild things and wild places. We envision a lively discussion between panelists and the audience about successful strategies for preserving habitats and species, including how participants can become involved.

Please join us on March 9<sup>th</sup> at the Zoo Auditorium (adjacent to the main gate in the Administration Building) for this unique and free program, and bring a friend with you!

This program is co-sponsored by the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society, and the Kirtland Bird Club.

**DATED MAIL**

P.O. Box 391037, Solon, OH 44139

