



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

March, 2014

Critter Corner

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

Hinckley "buzzards" arrive this month

It's almost "Buzzard Day" in Hinckley, Ohio (March 16th)! If you have never attended this festival, be sure to join the fun this year.

Legend has it that in 1818 there was a "Big Hunt" in Hinckley where the townsfolk tried to rid the area of dangerous predators by shooting anything that moved. After taking all they could handle, they left the excess carcasses to decompose. It's said that the "buzzards" imprinted on the feast and now return each year on that exact date and not before. Bob Hinkle, head naturalist emeritus for the Cleveland Metroparks, deems all turkey vultures seen before that date "Creagles" (a

fictitious bird!).

In Europe, where scientific nomenclature began, buzzards are the same group we call buteos (the long, broad-winged hawks) which includes our red-tailed hawks. Our "buzzards" are more properly known as turkey vultures and are not really buzzards at all. From a distance, if they are on the ground, they can be mistaken for turkeys.

They have dark brown to black plumage with a small, naked, pink head in adults. The absence of head feathers allows them to poke inside decaying carcasses without soiling hard-to-clean head plumage. These are big birds—over two feet long with almost a six-foot wingspan and weighing about four pounds.

Turkey vultures primarily eat carrion—they are one of Mother Nature's clean-up crew. They nest on cliff ledges, in caves, hollow logs, under an overhang or in a secluded, dense brush pile. Two eggs are typically laid

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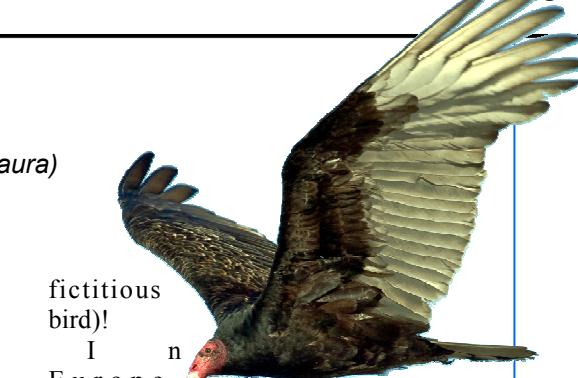
Back to the Wild's turkey vulture during 2013
IMBD at the Education Center

Photo: A. DeBroux

From the Nest...

In early February, long-time trustee and Education Committee Chair, Sandy Buckles, resigned from the ASGC Board of Trustees. During her five years as Education Chair, Sandy overhauled the ASGC's educational programming.

One of her most popular initiatives, the Saturday Afternoon Backyard Naturalist Series, has become a fixture on winter Saturdays, with speakers as varied as Jim McCarty from *The Plain*



INSIDE THIS EDITION

**Special Event at the Zoo
See below**

"The Lost Bird Project" and Saving Species from Extinction

Special event: March 9 2:00-4:00pm
Cleveland Zoo Auditorium

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 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?

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Dealer and Kim Kaufmann from Black Swamp Bird Observatory.

Sandy began the ambitious International Migratory Bird Day celebration, entertaining visitors with bird-related activities every May, in hopes of creating a birding destination close to home. The Green Earth Jamboree was a similar program in the fall, designed to encourage, and educate about, green living.

One of Sandy's most notable achievements, in my view, is Project

Que, a program coordinated with John Carroll University allowing 60 Latino middle school students a chance to experience nature at the Novak Sanctuary for a day every July.

Last spring, the ASGC offered a young birder's patch to participating Girl Scouts in our first ever Scout Day.

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Out our window

Harsh weather makes for great bird (and squirrel!) watching

As I sit here looking out our window at a totally white world, I'm hoping that by the time this reaches you a change of seasons will be well under way.

Yes, I've had enough snow. But the truth is, Carol and I have enjoyed the best bird feeding and watching season in at least ten years. I gauge this on several items. First, I'm guessing my local feed and supply is doing a brisk business, if we are any indicator. We are working on the last of 500 pounds of mixed seed, 18 pounds of raw peanuts, $\frac{1}{2}$ bushel of ear corn and 20-plus pounds of suet.

The variety of species has been pretty much what one would expect for our area, although the almost daily visits by a sharp-shinned, Cooper's and an immature red-shouldered hawk have been a real treat. I'm guessing that a few mourning doves, starlings and a junco or two might not agree.

The dark-eyed juncos have been more numerous than I can remember. We have tried to count them but usually lose count around thirty. Blue jays are here in numbers that I have not seen since the West Nile virus arrived a decade or so ago. All the woodpeckers have

been abundant, including a flicker and three pileateds at a time. We see both the red and white-breasted nuthatches regularly, although the red-breasted appears only on sunny, warmer days. The same is true for a couple of Carolina wrens. Several species of sparrow are regular visitors including white-throated, tree and white-crown. Surprisingly, the house sparrows are few and far between.

Fifteen to twenty cardinals on the snow-laden evergreens are enough to brighten even the grayest day. On most days, any time we look out, there are over 100 birds feeding their little faces, with the black-capped chickadees and tufted titmice always leading the way. They have kept us entertained as we watch them interact with each other while feeding and trying not to become a meal for our visiting hawks.

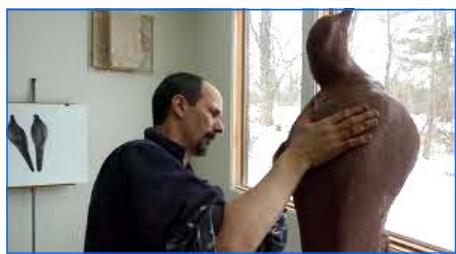
Oh, I almost overlooked our fox squirrels. These amazing comedians give us many a chuckle. We hope your winter watching has been as pleasurable as ours.

—John and Carol Lillich



"The Lost Bird Project"

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Todd McGrain, "The Lost Bird Project"

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, including Kim Kaufmann and Stan Searles, moderated by the ASGC's Harvey Webster. 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 9th 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 "Friendraiser" is co-sponsored by the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society, and the Kirtland Bird Club.

Turkey Vulture

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and incubated by both parents for about 40 days. The nest is protected by projectile vomiting of their last meal of putrefying meat. I understand it is very effective! Most young fledge by July.

These birds are masters of riding the thermals and can soar for hours without flapping a wing. They are one of the few birds to "sleep in" as they need the sun to warm the earth and create the updrafts to soar upon. One of my favorite natural history authors, Julie Zickafoose, calls them the perfect energy-efficient animal. They wait for and use solar energy to stay aloft. They recycle "wasted" animal matter that many other creatures avoid and turn it back into living bird flesh!

If you see a large, dark, soaring bird in our area, fixing its wings in a slight upturned wide-angle V-shape, it is not a hawk or an eagle. It's a turkey vulture.

—Jim Tomko

In Case You Missed It!

"Great Backyard Bird Count"

Aurora Sanctuary

February 15—The weather cooperated and gave us a pleasant winter walk. We started with overcast skies but the sun broke through several times to highlight the beautiful plumage of northern cardinals and blue jays against a backdrop of snow. Several species were singing in anticipation of establishing their spring breeding territories. Laurenda spotted an American tree sparrow foraging among some wetland scrub by the boardwalk. Kenny showed us some river otter tracks on the ice of

the creek under the Case Bridge. We only had 13 species of birds on our list, but we submitted it to the Great Backyard Bird Count compilers at Cornell University to be included with data from all over the world. As of halfway through the weekend, 36,000 checklists were submitted from the U.S. alone, totaling 591 species, including 476 snowy owls that were reported from 20 states and provinces. This is a great way to help out and participate in Cornell's "citizen science".

—Jim Tomko

From the Nest...

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Also Sandy's brainchild.

Sandy and husband Ed, ASGC's acting secretary and unofficial archivist, plan to pursue other interests and enjoy their retirement. Their hard work and commitment to the ASGC will be missed.

Board Meeting 2/13/14

Sometimes even the most dedicated volunteers must bow to greater powers.

This meeting was rescheduled from our normal January meeting because of extreme cold, and therefore coincided with our usual Executive Committee meeting.

Primary consideration was given to educational programs (ongoing) and planning for the future. As our mission is two-fold: conservation *and* education—it is imperative that we continue to offer quality and varied educational programming of interest to our members.

—Alison DeBroux, Editor

The Squawk

"This summer I am going to plant milkweed in my front yard to help provide food and a place for Monarch butterflies to lay their eggs. As I am sure you have read that the Monarch butterfly numbers are decreasing each year."

—Tiffany Ann Laufer

Send your comments, questions, or complaints to thehousewren@gmail.com or via snail mail to our regular address.



Did you know?

Very few birds have a well-developed sense of smell. But the turkey vulture does. Its sense of smell is so good that it can detect a meal obscured by the forest canopy without even seeing it. In fact, the more aggressive black vultures, with a much weaker sense of smell, have learned to watch the turkey vultures descend for an unseen meal and follow them in!

Also, turkey vultures will cool themselves off in the heat of summer by eliminating on their own legs to evaporate in the same way that sweat cools us off.

—Jim Tomko

Upcoming Events

Saturday Afternoon Backyard Naturalist Series

March 22 3:00-5:00pm

"The Triumphant Songs of Early Spring"

Dr. Lisa Rainsong

Cleveland Institute of Music

Mid-March through mid-April is an exciting time in NE Ohio with music from dawn well into the evening! Our resident birds are singing, the first of our summer visitors are returning, and early spring migrants sing as they pass through our woodlands and meadows. In addition, the amphibian chorus begins

with powerful ensembles of wood frogs and spring peepers. Dr. Lisa Rainsong will take you on a musical tour of the ensembles of early spring and offer suggestions on how to identify the individual musicians.

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

Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org for directions and more information.

***FriendRaiser*™ Event at the Zoo**

March 9 2:00-4:00pm

"The Lost Bird Project"

Film plus Expert Panel with Kim Kaufmann, Stan Searels & More

Cleveland Metroparks Zoo Auditorium

See page 1 for more details.

Field Trips

March 29 9:00am

"Wheeling for Waterfowl"

La Due Reservoir

We will caravan to several favorite lakes and ponds to witness the spectacular plumage of the drakes as well as the beautiful but demure plumage of the hens while they loaf, rest, and refuel for their continued northward migration to their nesting grounds. Some species pair up on their southern wintering range so we often see courtship displays. Meet at the La Due boat ramp parking lot at the end of Washington Road, which is a turn to the east off of St. Rt. 44 just north of the 422 interchange in Auburn.

April 5 7:30pm

"Woodcock Watch"

Novak Sanctuary

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A Wry Smile



One swallow does not make a summer,
but one skein of geese, cleaving the
murmur of March thaw, is the Spring.

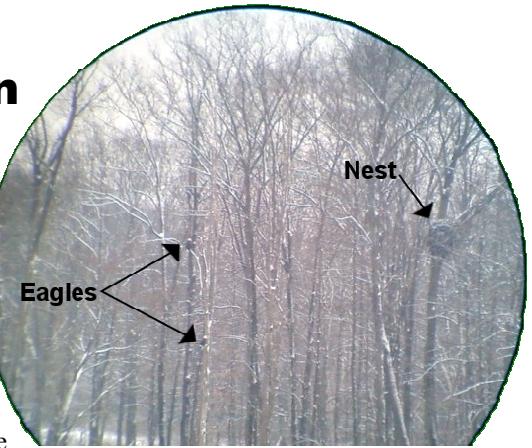
—Aldo Leopold

The eagles return

How far would you go to achieve that once-in-a-lifetime photo of a nesting bald eagle? If you are using a birdsong app on your phone to attract the birds, you are going too far.

Near the ASGC's Novak sanctuary last spring, an active bald eagle's nest was abandoned after three weeks of incubating eggs. Field trips leader Jim Tomko believes there were too many people who came too close to the nest tree, searching for eagle feathers and making noise, ultimately disturbing the birds.

James McCarty wrote that birdsong playback machines endanger birds because they distract them from what they're supposed to be doing, such as tending their nests or finding food ("Aerial View: Nature photographers can love birds to death" 6/27/13). Birdsong playback machines are banned in national parks and many preserves, and eagles' nests are heavily protected with signage and fencing, but



enforcement is difficult.

On February 2nd of this year, Jim Tomko saw no groundhogs, but reports that the eagles have returned! The accompanying photo (taken from a *safe* distance!) shows two birds in the tree on the left, and the nest in the tree on the right. It is the same nest that was abandoned last year. With the property owner's permission, Jim hopes to protect it by posting some signs.

We can all hope that the eagles have a quieter, more private home life this year.

**Bring a friend!
"The Lost Bird Project"**
March 9, 2:00-4:00pm, Cleveland Zoo Auditorium

DATE MAIL

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