



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

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IBA project starts with online data collection

The IBA Committee charged volunteer and avid birder, Matt Valencic, with giving us a starting point by providing some initial data. Understanding the Chagrin River Corridor IBA starts with the website for Chagrin River Watershed Partners (www.crowp.org). They identify the three main drainages that make up the watershed:

The Upper Main Branch begins above Bass Lake in Munson Township and flows through The Rookery, West Gauga Commons, Whitesburg Park, Downtown Chagrin Falls and meets the main river at South Chagrin Reservation at Miles Road.

The Aurora Branch flows from Aurora to Bentleyville (South Chagrin Reservation at Miles Road).

The East Branch starts near Bass Lake and flows mainly north through private land, the Holden Arboretum complex, some Lake Metroparks property then on for several miles to join the main river in Willoughby at Daniels Park.

Seventy one (71) miles of these streams are designated State Scenic River.

There are many public access points along and near the river including the parks mentioned above. Reviewing eBird (www.eBird.org) identifies 49 "Hotspots" which have been well birded the last several years by some excellent birders. When you dig a little deeper you can find "Personal Locations" throughout the corridor. Most have only

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**eBird Hotspots
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Wood ducks can be found in the Chagrin River Corridor IBA.

Photo: M. Valencic

Christmas Bird Count in Portage County a success

On January 3, 2016, 25 intrepid birders fanned out over a 15-mile diameter circle encompassing eight townships in northern Portage County for the 116th Christmas Bird Count. The CBC is one of the largest and longest running citizen science projects in the world.

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side

Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

This is the second year the ASGC

has sponsored the Portage Circle. Thanks to the Portage Park District, Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources, and many private land owners for allowing our group access to make the count as valid as possible. Groups and/or individual birders were assigned an area within the circle and asked to count as many species of birds and numbers of each species within their assigned area. Additionally, individuals/families could participate by "feeder watching". We had one family who has 49 feeders on their property! At the end of the day, many of the group gathered at Novak Educational building to report their totals and talk about their day's exploits. No "fish" stories allowed!

The day was a huge success with 71 species identified and 7745 birds counted. Species of interest were: Hermit Thrush (Dix Park), Wilson Snipe, Killdeer, Greater White-Fronted Goose, Northern Shrike (Herrick Fen), and several species of waterfowl.

—Joe Malmisur

From the Nest...

February is National Bird Feeding Month. I hope you have the opportunity to spread the word to your neighbors and get them involved in appreciation of nature. In addition to feeding you can participate in the "Great Backyard Bird Count". Take a hike, a drive, or just look out your window at the bird feeders and report what you see to National Audubon and Cornell Lab of Ornithology online at



www.birdcount.org. A number of years ago Ohio was the number one reporting state! Join in and see if we can do it again.

Our IBA initiative is solidly underway! We have some great minds and enthusiasm planning the next steps. But we can always use more help. If you have any connections to landowners along the Chagrin River and its tributaries let us know. We would love to get landowners on board to preserve

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Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

This is a hardy sparrow that rarely travels farther south than where snowflakes fly. They winter in Ohio in some of the harshest habitats such as the rip-rap shoreline of Lake Erie, windswept beaches, cleared farmer's fields and pastures. They are especially fond of fields that have just undergone manure spreading operations where they consort with horned larks and longspurs gleanng seeds.

But their breeding grounds are far to the north and are circumpolar including Ellesmere Island and Northern Greenland. They nest farther north than any other songbird. Males return to their tundra breeding territories in early April where temperatures can still dip to minus 22 degrees.

They conceal their nests in rock crevices and grass tussocks where the female incubates three to nine bluish-white eggs speckled with brown and lilac spots concentrating to a band on one end. The nestlings fledge after 10 to 15 days.

In addition to seeds they forage for insects, spiders, and other invertebrates.

Snow buntings are striking long-winged sparrows with a body size about like that of the white-throated sparrow. In breeding plumage the males have a snow white head and body feathers with pure black back and tail outlined in white outer tail feathers.

We usually see them in winter plumage which is creamy white with brownish crown and cheeks and a faint rufous breast band. The back is striped in brown and black.

In the next few weeks as you drive past agricultural areas or shorelines, slow down and take a look. These birds will soon be heading north and won't return until next November.

—Jim Tomko

Test your skills against the experts in these birding "hotspots"

Eastlake Seawall—Lake County, where the Chagrin River empties into Lake Erie. Power plant to the west with breakwalls used by gulls and other birds to rest.

Chagrin River Park—Lake County. Excellent juxtaposition of varied habitats that support good diversity. Chagrin River runs around the park. Forest adjacent to river. Large fields that cover old landfill. Wet woods with marshes interspersed. Walking trails throughout the park offer excellent access to all habitats.

Penitentiary Glen—Lake County. Mixed mature forest, fields, edge, gully habitat

North Chagrin Reservation—Lake County. Mostly mature forest with some fields along River Road and around picnic areas and nature center.

Orchard Hills Park—Geauga County. Reclaimed golf course. Lake, creeks, two wetlands and a wet creekbed.

Bass Lake Preserve—Geauga County. Lake, field and mature forest.

Walter C. Best Wildlife Preserve—Geauga County. Large lake, some fields around parking lot.

West Geauga Commons—Geauga County. Sports fields bordered by Chagrin River. Excellent edge and wet forest across river.

The Rookery—Geauga County. Open field around parking lot. Excellent marshlands throughout. Some forested areas.

The West Woods—Geauga County. Mostly mature forest with ravines, rock outcroppings, pipeline, Silver Creek wetland = excellent wet, shrubby area.

South Chagrin Reservation, Jackson Field—Cuyahoga County. Incredible juxtaposition of river, bottomland forest, mixed fields, oxbow marsh, cattail marsh and shale hillside that hosts Bank Swallow nests.

Frohring Meadows—Geauga County. Huge meadow with two artificial wetlands. Powerline bisects E from W portions. Mature Beech Maple forest.

Novak and Aurora Audubon Sanctuaries—Portage County.



Photo: M. Valencic

For the complete list, go to www.clevelandaudubon.org or visit www.eBird.org.

—Compiled by Matt Valencic

IBA data collection begins

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small amounts of species information and few checklists for each location.

Current eBird entries and historical accounts identify 280 species within the corridor. Some of these entries contain dates before 1990, even back to the 1930s.

Private lands adjacent to the main river and its branches are underbirded areas lacking eBird data. The big gaps include properties on the east side of the river between the North and South Chagrin Reservations in Gates Mills, Hunting Valley and Moreland Hills. There are also private lands adjacent to the Aurora Branch between Aurora and

Bentleyville, and on the Upper Main Branch between the parks mentioned above.

Committee member Sarah Mabey points out that a birding "hotspot" as identified by eBird is not necessarily a *biological* hotspot. These data trends are not scientific for final system analysis because there are too many variables in observers and the distribution of observations, but they are valuable as a starting point to inform and excite the public's awareness.

The next step will be a scientific literature review of existing bird monitoring studies.

—Matt Valencic and Alison DeBroux

In case you missed it!

January 16 9:30am
"Winter Track Walk"
Novak Sanctuary

A winter track walk and no snow! The best laid plans! There was a very heavy overcast sky dropping miniscule pellets of snow. Winter really was here at 31 degrees with a cruel wind-chill. It felt good to get into the forest and out of the wind. We encountered Mark Magree (caretaker of the Novak Education Center) on his way out of the woods and he described some otter tracks near the road that he had noticed a few days before. We found some snow accumulation in the low areas where we also discovered river otter tracks near

the steel bridge. It may have been the same otter or they could be making a great comeback taking advantage of Audubon's nature preserve. We saw cottontail tracks in several places. Squirrels (likely gray squirrel) left their tracks leading up to trees. In several places on the trail Gene and Chuck pointed out where voles or shrews had made a channel through the snow across our path. Rob found some tiny mouse tracks on the edge of the trail including their tail drag mark. Of course white-tailed deer tracks crisscrossed the trail in several areas. It is fascinating to see what critters make their homes in our sanctuaries. Every trip gives the chance for a new and different discovery.

—Jim Tomko

Did you know?

In May of 1987 a snow bunting was seen not far from the North Pole, the most northern record of any songbird.

Snow buntings undergo an "erosional molt" where the ends of the feathers are abraded off. Their black back feathers are white tipped and their white body feathers are brown tipped when new in the late summer but as fall and winter progress these tips are worn off leaving highly contrasting pure black and white feathers looking fresh and gleaming for the breeding season even though they were produced months before.

—Jim Tomko

The Squawk



Send your comments, questions
or complaints to

info@clevelandaudubon.org



Chestnut-sided warbler

Photo: M. Valencic

From the Nest

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this excellent bird habitat. We can use your expertise in monitoring, tabulating, and promoting our cause. Check out our new page on the website describing this enormous multi-year project at www.clevelandaudubon.org

As always, thank you for your support.

—Jim Tomko, President

Upcoming Events

Scout Day 2016

February 27 Two sessions:
10:00am - 12:00pm 1:00pm - 3:00pm
Novak Education Center
382 Townline Road, Aurora

A Junior Birding Patch Program for scouts K-3rd grade. Boys and girls welcome. Participants learn about birds in a variety of hands-on activities, and receive a one-year membership to the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, a Junior Birder patch and some cool things to take home. Register individual scouts or troops at education@clevelandaudubon.org. Space is limited, so sign up today!

If you don't have a scout, sign up yourself—we are looking for volunteer instructors for our program!



February 14 8:00am
"Great Backyard Bird Count"
Aurora Sanctuary

Help us contribute data to the Great Backyard Bird Count by participating in our annual winter bird survey. We will be recording every bird we see or hear along the trail in the beautiful Aurora Sanctuary. This is a great time for beginning birders as it is easy to locate

Field Trips

our quarry with no leaves to obscure and frustrate observation. Most winter birds in our area are easy to identify and there is a lower number of species so as not to overwhelm the new birder. Often an unusual species makes an appearance to add to the excitement. Meet at the Bretschneider Park parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora.

The Backyard Naturalist

Our Backyard Naturalist Speaker Series is currently on hiatus. If you have a presentation that would be of interest to our members or know someone who does, please contact education@clevelandaudubon.org for scheduling information.

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A Wry Smile



“You don't love someone because they're perfect, you love them in spite of the fact that they're not.”

— Jodi Picoult, *My Sister's Keeper*

Join the Great Backyard Bird Count!

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

The GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more



Sparrows not created equal

Unlike the ubiquitous house sparrow, the tree sparrow is here only in the winter. Look for its distinctive russet cap and the black mark, or “pearl,” on its breast.



about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 140,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 19th annual GBBC will be held February 12 through February 15, 2016. Please visit the official website at www.birdcount.org for more information or join ASGC President Jim Tomko on his annual GBBC field trip on February 14. Happy birding!

DATED MAIL

