



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

November, 2016

Three attend Bird Studies Merit Badge program

Awesome! Informative! Interesting! Lots of fun! These were the responses from Boy Scouts and their parents following our inaugural Bird Study Merit Badge program on October 22nd. The class size was small – just three Scouts – but they enthusiastically participated in all parts of the three-hour program. The highlight for them was finding a mixed feeding flock of birds on the Novak Sanctuary. We spent 15 minutes in one spot with everyone calling out sightings and pointing toward another bird.



Scout Jason Zumerling practices cleaning binoculars.

To learn the various parts of a bird we abandoned the usual line drawings and showed actual photographs of birds seen in NE Ohio. The Scouts were given a laser pointer and took turns attempting to identify the key field marks on sparrows, warblers, woodpeckers, owls and gulls. Pictures of local bald eagles (adult and immature), osprey, great horned owls and other raptors were also used for learning. Many birds were shown in action, like an osprey carrying a large
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SEE INSIDE THIS EDITION

**Sparrow Challenge
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Birdwatching brings peace to Marine Corp veteran

I sit at home, alone in my backyard and enjoy the constant flurry of activity. Nuthatches, woodpeckers, sparrows and American goldfinches move in and out endlessly. This still doesn't fulfill my birdwatching needs so I head to the
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Why do you volunteer?

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland is an all-volunteer organization. Unfortunately, we do not have jobs for young people who knock on our door, brandishing their shiny new college degrees.

What we have is the opportunity to do work that you care about, with people who care about the same thing.

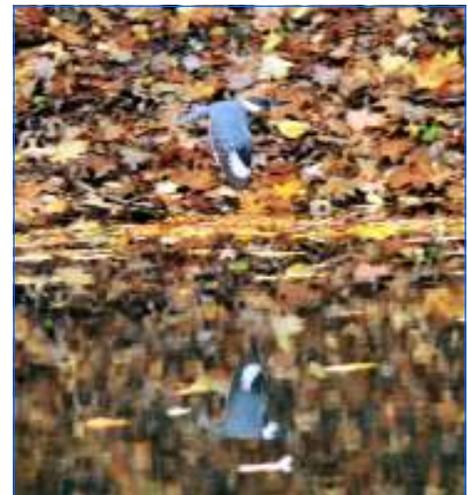
There are as many reasons people volunteer as there are volunteers. But a quick canvass of our Board of Trustees showed several commonalities.

One member started volunteering with Audubon because of her husband's

involvement. "I didn't know much about Audubon and thought this would be a great way to learn," says Carol Lillich, ASGC Secretary. She saw a need for someone to replace our resigning secretary and felt it would be a great way to make a contribution.

Others maintain ASGC's sanctuaries, educate our members and communities, handle the taxes and make decisions on the organization's future. We do these things because, for all the other demands on our time, this is what we *choose* to do.

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Belted kingfisher

Photo: M. Brown

From the Nest...

It has been an active month. Penny Orr and Mary Salomon are sprucing up the native flower beds around the Novak Education Center; Matt Valencic and his crew put together a successful Boy Scout Birding Merit Badge program; and the spectacular leaf color out over the Chagrin River Valley enchanted



participants on a field trip to Hach-Otis. Most exciting of all is that we are moving closer to an opportunity to double the size of the Hach-Otis Sanctuary.

Also, we are developing our Important Bird Area project in order to expand our monitoring of bird populations in the Chagrin River Corridor. We need volunteer help in

these and many other areas to keep our organization going. Please consider sending us an email or give us a call to offer your expertise, whether it is field work, indoor administrative assistance, accounting or educational programs. We are very grateful for your time and talents.

—Jim Tomko, President

Did you know?

Rusty blackbirds will often wade thigh deep in shallow water like shorebirds preying on small fish and snails—an ideal foraging strategy in their preferred watery habitat. Surprisingly they will also eat other birds.

This is another bird that undergoes an “erosional molt.” The new feathers

that emerge after breeding season are tipped with soft brownish edges giving them their rusty appearance in the autumn and winter offering better camouflage. As those seasons progress the brown tips wear off leaving them in glossy, black plumage, perfect for impressing the objects of their desire in the courting and breeding time.

—Jim Tomko

Critter Corner



Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*)

Bird Studies

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gizzard shad and a great blue heron with a catfish impaled on its long bill! Keeping with current technology we used a smart phone and the Sibley's Field Guide app to teach bird songs and calls. We also used this app to confirm songs during our field trip on the Novak Sanctuary.

The course also covered habitat, conservation and ASGC's initiative in the Chagrin River Corridor IBA. They learned that birds are an indicator of what's happening in the environment and that people are responsible for maintaining and improving habitat for the sake of the birds and for us!

If all this sounds interesting, please tell your local Boy Scout Troop that our next course will be in mid-April when



Scouts William Burr, Jason Zumerling and David Weygandt learn about birds they might see in the Novak Sanctuary from Merit Badge Counselor Matt Valencic.

some of the early migrants will be coming back to NE Ohio. If they would like a troop presentation to generate interest have them contact ASGC at info@clevelandaudubon.org.

—Matt Valencic

Volunteering

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Many of us see our work with Audubon as our contribution toward a better future for birds, wildlife and humans. We want to share our passion for nature, we want to teach others about birds and other wildlife, we want to “give back.”

We also enjoy working with like-minded folks, the smart, creative people who share our passion, who understand the need to preserve habitat for birds. We understand the need to hear birds singing in the woods, or see a child's face the first time he identifies a bird

through a pair of binoculars. It is about teaching, learning, and solving problems together.

The decision to volunteer may be based on many factors—passion, fellowship, or simply the need to get out of the house and do something different. Whatever your reason, the ASGC would like to welcome you to our volunteer community.

Please join us January eighth for a little party in your honor. We'll feed you, answer your questions, and describe the opportunities we have for volunteers in the coming year. See you then!

—Alison DeBroux

Finding sparrows in the Chagrin River Corridor IBA

An eBird Tutorial

Go to www.ebird.org and select **EXPLORE DATA**. Scroll down the page and select **BAR GRAPHS**. In the list of states select **OHIO**, then, to the right, select **IMPORTANT BIRD AREAS IN OHIO**. Scroll down the page and select **CONTINUE**. Select **CHAGRIN RIVER CORRIDOR** then **CONTINUE**. Scroll down the page and find Sparrows. See which ones are present during November. Click on **MAP** to find hotspots within the corridor and nearby. NOTE: [Red 'teardrops'](#) indicate where birds have been seen within the last 30 days.

—Matt Valencic

Here is a bird that we are in grave danger of losing. Since the 1960s, ninety percent of the population has vanished and there is no proven explanation. Some think it is loss of habitat, some think it is due to eradication by grain farmers, some blame red squirrels and other predators that are eating their eggs near logging activity. Many individuals are heavily infested with parasites, and some have high levels of mercury in their blood. Most likely it is a combination of factors.

These robin-sized blackbirds are only black for the breeding season. Then they molt into a mottled brown, gray and black winter covering. They always have a bright yellow eye.

Rusties nest in boreal (northern) wet woodlands containing bogs, swamps, and beaver ponds often in a spruce or fir tree two to twenty feet above the ground. They build bulky nests filled with wet, rotted vegetation which they form into a cup and when dry, line it with fine grasses and fibers. The nest is a sturdy structure lasting several seasons but they usually build a new nest each year. The female incubates three to five grayish blue-green eggs with brown blotches for 11 to 14 days and the nestlings are ready to leave the nest when 14 days old. Usually they nest individually but in certain regions colonies do occur.

They feed on insects, spiders, worms and other invertebrates in the breeding season. Seeds, acorns, pine nuts and fruit are included during migration. They are not very serious agricultural pests but are blamed for damage caused by their cousins, the European starling, red-winged blackbird and common grackle. Their fall migration through Ohio takes place October through mid-November. Now is the time to take advantage of these nice autumn days and visit a swamp or wet woods in order to catch a glimpse of this rare bird.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it!

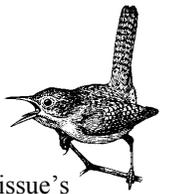
Autumn Leaf Walk
October 22, Hach-Otis Sanctuary

The spectacular palette of Mother Nature was at her finest with breathtaking views over the Chagrin River Valley especially looking toward Chapin Woods and Little Mountain. The sun played hide-and-seek behind the clouds but when it broke through the leaf color was dazzling. We were lucky

enough to hear a red-breasted nuthatch calling from a tree branch overhanging the valley. The newly re-paved parking lot was quite a success and the repairs to the boardwalk by local students looked expertly done. We had a very pleasant group of hikers, none of whom had ever been to Hach-Otis before. Every single one was impressed. It was a wonderful autumn afternoon.

—Jim Tomko

The Squawk



The picture of the Sabine's gull featured in the October issue's *Critter Corner* was taken by Matt Valencic. Our apologies for the oversight in crediting this rare photo.

The Education Committee would like to acknowledge **Wild Republic** for their generous donation of Audubon Plush Birds for our Chagrin River Bird Quest in September. We couldn't have done it without our wonderful donors!

Send your comments, questions, or complaints to
info@clevelandaudubon.org

How many native plants have you planted?

Every plant helps in the fight against climate change, the fight for birds. Your bird-friendly plants all add up—so thank you! To find local resources and tips for caring for your bird-friendly habitat, check out www.audubon.org/plantsforbirds.



Brown thrasher.
Photo: W. Stuart

Birdwatching

(Continued from page 1)

Rocky River Reservation up the road to enjoy the birds it has to offer. As I always do, I bring my camera in hopes of capturing a photo of my favorite bird, the belted kingfisher, and today I finally have success. It reinvigorates my love for nature and the creatures it provides. I am a 29-year-old Marine Corps veteran, recently separated and finding my place back in the world. I hope that my love of bird photography and watching keeps me steady in life, I know it will. Out there with the quiet of the world brings an amazing peace. My hope is that I will see more of my generation display the love of wildlife



Nuthatch

Photo: M. Brown

conservation I have, so that we may carry the torch forward for the next.

—Michael Brown

Upcoming Events

Volunteer Open House

Jan 8 Time TBD
Novak Education Center
382 Townline Road, Aurora

Love birds? Want to make a difference?

Current and potential volunteers are invited to an ASGC Open House party after the holidays.

Check out the Novak Center—worth the trip if you've never seen it!

Hear from and about ASGC's current volunteers. Learn what you can do in 2017.

More details coming soon!

Field Trips

Nov 12 9:00 am
"Wild Turkey Trek"
Novak Sanctuary

Wild Turkeys are among the largest of our local native birds. Help us search for these alert and secretive birds earning their living while hiding in our forests. Once extirpated from Ohio they are now found in every county in the state. It is hard to believe that these 16 pound, 46 inch long creatures with a 64 inch wingspan can blend in so well that we rarely see them. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road almost a mile north of State Route 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.

Dec 16 7:00 pm
"Winter Solstice Hike"
Aurora Sanctuary

The Winter Solstice is just a few days away so come and celebrate some of the longest nights of the year just a few days after December's "Cold Moon" with a night hike in the winter woods. The quiet, snow-covered forest is a special place and instills a magical feel. If we have a clear night the winter constellations along with the moon beams will light out way. If clouds are covering us then bring a flashlight. Meet at the Bretschneider parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora.

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A Wry Smile



Love your enemies.
It makes them so mad!

November sparrow challenge

Need a good challenge now that most of the warblers, vireos, flycatchers and thrushes have left our area? You might consider “chasing sparrows” during November!

Most of us don't think of sparrows and their allies (towhees, buntings and longspurs) as migrants but of the 20 or so species routinely seen in the Chagrin River Corridor IBA throughout the year some are just passing through or staying here just for the summer or winter months.

November is a great month to catch stragglers that have yet to go south (Lincoln's, LeConte's, Nelson's, Savannah, chipping and Vesper) and early-arriving winter visitors (American tree sparrow, snow bunting, Lapland longspurs). Fox, white-crowned and white-throated sparrows and an abundance of dark-eyed juncos have already arrived for the winter. Add our year-round breeding birds (song and



Swamp sparrow

Photo: M. Valencic

swamp sparrows and Eastern towhee) and the occasional rarity (clay-colored sparrow) and you have 17 species to hunt for during November.

How many can you find? Are there some sparrow hotspots in the Corridor? Let us know how you do and we will publish the results in an upcoming newsletter.

—Matt Valencic
(See eBird tutorial on page 2)

DATED MAIL

