



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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Birding Cuba

This January, I visited Cuba for 10 days of birding around the eastern half of the island. Travel to Cuba is now easy with direct flights on commercial airlines from a number of US cities.

The trip was led by Arturo Kirkconnell, Curator of Ornithology at the Havana Museum of Natural History, and co-author of the leading field guide for Cuban birds. Besides working hard to make the trip truly enjoyable by all six participants, Arturo had amazing knowledge of the songs, characteristics, and locations of the birds. I saw around 150 species of birds, including 40 endemics or near-endemics found only in Cuba or Cuba and very limited nearby countries (often the Bahamas). One highlight was the Cuban Trogon, the



The Cuban Trogon
Photo: M. Salomon

national bird of Cuba, with its beautifully scalloped tail. The second highlight was the Bee Hummingbird, at two inches the smallest bird in the world. It is easily mistaken for a bumblebee!

The weather on the trip was a welcome respite from our Cleveland winter: sunny everyday with high temperatures in the 80s. It is very interesting to view this country, which has been mainly closed to the US for over 50 years, but in the news frequently.

Although there are poor people, Cuba lacks the type of grinding poverty found in many third world countries. There is universal literacy and health care, as well as subsidized food.

A mixture of bicycles, motorcycles, marvelous vintage and newer cars, and horses with carts all compete for the

Bee hummingbird
Photo: M. Salomon



roads in the countryside. The infamous Bay of Pigs area actually is the top birding spot in the country, with very diverse habitats, including extensive marshes and dry and wet forests that harbor many rare bird species.

A final plus for the trip was a day spent in Old Havana which dates back to the 1500s and was also the haunt of Ernest Hemingway. Many of the historical buildings have been beautifully restored and the area is a virtual museum of history.

I heartily recommend visiting Cuba!
—Mary Salomon

Backyard Naturalist returns!

The program (Birds of NE Ohio) on January 31st at South Franklin Circle went very well. About 70 people attended (average age was probably 75-80!) and they really enjoyed the pictures and content. One lady told the Activities Director “there sure was a lot of content!”. Several people came up afterward and had comments or questions. One lady in the front row was

taking notes – I didn’t think what I said was noteworthy!

I covered 102 species of birds in about an hour. The last 10 minutes were less comments and more pictures. I put the gulls and shorebirds at the end figuring that if I had to stop those would be the least interesting to non-birders.

One thing they enjoyed were the calls of the American bittern, pectoral

sandpiper and Wilson’s snipe off my Sibley app (it has more calls than Cornell’s website). If you are not familiar with them they are really strange. I solved a mystery while preparing the talk – I never listened to the call of a pectoral sandpiper but realized it was one of those “weird sounds” I have heard in the marsh after

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From the Nest...

Thanks to all of you who submitted birding checklists to the Great Backyard Bird Count. There were record numbers submitted and an amazing number of species were listed from all over the world. The tabulation is continuing and I will report the final tallies as soon as they are available.



Our Backyard Naturalist Series is up and running. These programs will be available for your group at your meeting location. There are eight presentations currently available with more to come. Please check our website for descriptions. Go to www.clevelandaudubon.org and click on “Events.” Scroll down to “Speakers for your events.” There you will see the

offerings. [Alternatively, click on “Education” and scroll to “Backyard Naturalist” or the “Backyard Naturalist” button on the right-hand side of the screen.]

The northward migration is underway. Keep alert for rarities and then share the news with others!

—Jim Tomko, President

eBird Tutorial

When winter days are 60 degrees Birders get confused! They think it's April and start looking for migrants. Let eBird remind you when they *really* show up in your county.

From the home page click [EXPLORE DATA](#) then [BAR CHARTS](#).

Select [OHIO](#) on the left and [COUNTIES](#) on the right. Scroll down and click [CONTINUE](#).

Find your county on the list and click it.

If the green bar is thin, few birds are expected that month. The green bar widens as the migration gets into full swing.

Good Birding! —Matt Valencic

A fun day for Scouts *and* volunteers!

The 5th Annual ASGC Scout Day was held on February 11th at the Novak Education Center and deemed to be yet another successful educational program! Between our morning and afternoon sessions, 20 Scouts aged Kindergarten to 3rd grade participated, coming from as far away as North Ridgeville and Lakewood.

We were very excited to welcome four new volunteers for this year's event! The program ran like clockwork and you couldn't tell the new volunteers from the seasoned ones.

Starting out at the registration table with Alison DeBroux, scouts grabbed a "bag and a tag"—the bag to decorate for take-home items and the tag to divide them into "flocks." Sue Graham got them started by reading "The Best Nest" by PD Eastman. The "flocks" then began to rotate through the stations.

Matt Valencic adeptly ran our binocular station again this year. We never know if an actual bird will appear, so we have pictures of them tacked on trees for the girls to find with binoculars. They took home a copy of our very own ASGC Mini Field Guide.

Madison Proctor and Jim Tomko facilitated the feathers, bones and wings station this year. Here the scouts colored a 'feather' bookmark to take home.

Kathryn Craig and Betsy Siman demonstrated how many species of birds eat at our beaks station. A very cool bird sticker book was added to the scouts' bags from this station.

Nicole Ryman and Sarah Cochran facilitated our new and improved feet station. Scouts tried on swim flippers to

see if they could walk like a duck and matched silicon feet stamps to pictures of the birds who owned them.

Sue Graham showed the scouts her vast collection of nests and eggs. She gave each scout an envelope containing plastic canvas and yarn, showing them



Matt Valencic supervises the Binoculars station.

how to thread the yarn through the canvas so they could hang it outside in the spring. Hopefully, many birds will use the yarn in building their nests.

Heidi Harris, Michael Phillips, Stephen Quick and Olivia Hendershott worked at the Sight and Sound station. Here the participants listened to bird songs and tried to identify them, using our Audubon plush songbirds previously donated by Wild Republic. The scouts

received an ODNR Wildlife Journal to take home from this station.

Betsy Siman and Laurenda Messer worked at the owl pellet dissection table. The children are always amazed to see what owls eat. It's like finding hidden treasure!

Olivia Hendershott and Cholet Barone facilitated our craft for the program helping the scouts decorate a bird mask with crayons and multi-colored feathers.

The program ended with the children receiving an Audubon songbird to hold. On cue, everyone pushed the button to make the birds "sing." It truly brought the outside in! As the scouts placed the birds back into their "nest," they received their ASGC Junior Birder patch. We're looking forward to planning Scout Day 2018!

—Kathy Cochran

Critter Corner



Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)

Many years ago my wife, Joanie, and I were doing some birding when a grayish bird with white wing patches zipped by. I quickly identified it as a mockingbird which at that time was quite unusual in Ohio. My observant partner said "Are you sure? It did not look quite right for a mockingbird!" Well, we tracked it down to a perch and sure enough it was not a mockingbird. It was a shrike!

At 10 inches with a 14 ½ inch wingspan northern shrikes have similar dimensions and gray color as mockingbirds including a white wing patch, but shrikes are a bit chunkier with a larger head and a much heavier, hook-tipped bill. They are a striking gray color with a black mask, black wings and tail with white outer tail feathers and finely barred white underside.

Shrikes are songbirds with a vicious, predatory nature making expert use of that hook-tipped bill. They prey on large insects, shrews, mice, snakes, frogs and small birds but there are records of them taking birds up to the size of blue jays and rock pigeons. They dispatch their victims with a bite through the spinal cord.

Northern shrikes nest in the far north building a sturdy, deep-cupped, bulky nest of grass and plant fibers lined with hair and fine grass 5 to 40 feet above the ground in a tree or shrub. The cup is so deep that the incubating female is out of sight except for her tail. The young hatch from four to nine brown-spotted, greenish-white eggs, and fledge after 20 days. The oldest known northern shrike was eight years old.

These are rare winter visitors to Ohio usually seen between late October and early April. This year one or two were detected in our area. One was at Herrick Fen in Streetsboro, and one was at Liberty Park in Twinsburg. It possibly was the same one. Keep a keen eye out for a mockingbird that just doesn't look quite right.

—Jim Tomko

The Squawk



We have lived in Cleveland Heights for about 35 years and have had a bird feeder outside our kitchen breakfast nook window for most of those years. Each year we seem to have less and less variety in the population that comes to the feeder. This year it seems that house wrens are the only visitors. They are noisy and aggressive and I'm guessing have crowded other birds out. ... I put black oil sunflower seed in the feeders. ... There is a large Oak tree just outside for birds to sit while waiting their turn. Is there anything I can do to discourage the House Wrens and encourage other species?

Thanks for your advice, I enjoy reading your bulletin when it comes & hope to participate in some of your scheduled activities this spring.

—Joan A.

Dear Joan,

I am assuming you are referring to an over abundance of either House Sparrows or House Finches as House Wrens have migrated south and do not return to our area until mid to late April at the earliest. House Wrens are not flocking birds. Some Carolina Wrens do spend the winter with us but House Wrens are obligate insect eaters and cannot survive our winters. Regardless of that, it does sound like you have lost diversity in species. You seem to be doing all the right things to invite them to your yard and your micro-habitat

seems just great. It is not likely that the abundant House Sparrows are pushing the others out because you are offering plenty of the right kind of food. It is very likely that the habitat around you where the birds roost or drink or seek shelter has changed. Have your neighbors changed their landscaping? Have some water sources dried up? But this winter has been particularly mild and the usual feeder birds have not been as dependant on feeders as much as usual. Those birds are doing fine finding naturally produced food in the wild. If we do get an extended stint of real winter I will bet they all will be flocking to your feeder. It is all so very fascinating and I am impressed that you noticed the change. Please keep me in the loop!

—Jim Tomko

Backyard Naturalist returns!

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dark.

Many of the participants followed up with the Director of Member Services and requested a trip to The West Woods (Geauga Park District) to view birds at the feeders. I am helping them coordinate with the resident Naturalist, Linda Gilbert.

I will be offering this talk to the other two "Senior Facilities" our church

serves in the Chagrin area. I know at least one of them will want to see it.

—Matt Valencic

Editor's Note: To schedule a presentation of "Birds of NE Ohio," or another of our new Speakers' Bureau programs, contact the ASGC at info@clevelandaudubon.org. For a list of all available programs, visit www.clevelandaudubon.org.



American bittern.

Photo: M. Valencic

Upcoming Events

Backyard Naturalist

Apr 9 2:00 pm

"Warbler Warm-up"

The West Woods Nature Center,
9465 Kinsman Road, Novelty, OH

A 1-hour program for beginners & novices. Learn (or recall!) how to identify spring Warblers by sight, habitat, behavior and song. Over 125 photographs. Handouts.

Light refreshments served.

Matt Valencic and Kelly Kozlowski, Presenters.

This Backyard Naturalist program is free and open to the public.

Mar 25 9:30 am

"Waterfowl"

Ladue Reservoir

Fill up your gas tank for this "caravan" style field trip where we travel to some favorite watery spots in southern Geauga County and Northern Portage County. We will be amazed at the fantastic breeding plumage of migrating waterfowl. The drakes can be breathtaking in their spiffy new duds. Bring some lunch money as we will end the trip at a local restaurant to tally our results and share our stories. Meet at the Boat ramp of Ladue Reservoir at the end of East Washington Street just north of 422 in Auburn Corners.

Field Trips

Apr 15 7:30 pm

"Woodcock"

Novak Sanctuary

The male woodcocks will be doing their courtship dance and flight display. If you have not witnessed this twilight ritual then here is your chance! As darkness falls we will hear the male begin his calling and then suddenly he will rocket upward in his flight display over the field. He will return to earth landing on his own little patch of dancing ground. The fields are wet this time of year so be prepared footwear wise! Meet at the Novak Sanctuary Parking lot on the east side of Townline Rd. a little less than a mile north of State Route 82 on the Mantua/Aurora line.

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A Wry Smile

I think we consider too much
the good luck of the early bird
and not enough the bad luck
of the early worm.

—Franklin D. Roosevelt



Call for entries!
Photo contest opens 3/15/17
www.clevelandaudubon.org

Notes from a Newbie

My Mother used to call me “The Bird Whisperer.” When I lived in Florida, a friend once referred to me as “The Bird Woman of West Palm Beach.” Growing up here in Northeast Ohio, I can remember begging my great aunt to “feed the chicken-birds!” (the Black Capped Chickadees that would feed from her open palm).

You could say that I definitely have had a great love for all things avian. But, until March of 2016, I had never allowed myself the distinction of being called a “birder.”

The term “birder” always seemed so official, to me. I figured I had to be skilled in identifying birds by genus before I could call myself anything as lofty as a birder! I’ve had some exciting bird encounters, like seeing a belted kingfisher perched on a “No Fishing” sign near a lake or hearing wood thrushes call out to each other on a warm summer day. Once, I opened my front door only to be nearly knocked over by a hawk who was zooming in on an unsuspecting snack! But I never considered these events to be part of the life of a birder.

That’s one of the best things about being a birder – all you really need is a love for birds and a desire to learn more about them. From nature walks to the Great Backyard Bird Count, opportunities for birders are too numerous to count! I’ve enjoyed learning about everything from habitats to binoculars in my first year with the National Audubon Society...and I have *much more* to learn.

So, for the next few issues, I’ll be recounting some of my “newbie” experiences with you and I’ll share answers to some questions I’ve had in my early days of birding. I’ll also include helpful tips I’ve received for being a better birder.

As humans, we learn from sharing our stories. Do you have a birding experience or story you’d like to share? If so, we’d love to hear it! Send your story [and/or photos], along with permission to print/share your words in our newsletter, to info@clevelandaudubon.org

Until next time, keep looking up!

—Heidi Harris

DATED MAIL

