



# 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)

October, 2017

### Bird Quest at West Woods = FUN!

Our 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Chagrin River Bird Quest was fun for the youngest birders and the old hands alike. Twenty-four teams registered to participate in this year's Bird Quest and Birding Workshop and seventeen turned in checklists for judging. Approximately 60 people stayed for refreshments, awards and door prizes at Geauga Park District's West Woods Nature Center at the Quest Celebration! on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, the conclusion of the event.

The big winner of the day was Blackbrook Audubon's "Blackbrook Bombers" team, with 71 total species seen. The Rarest Bird award went to the "Bird Brains," who managed to check off a gray-cheeked thrush on their list.

On a lighter note, the "Blue-footed Braunies" won the Youngest Team

award, with an average age of 11.2! This young team also won for Longest Distance Traveled, having journeyed

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Sisters Megan and Amber Strassler, shown with emcee Jim Tomko, won the Most Creative Team Name award with "The Siblings Guide to Birds."

### Expansion of annual breeding bird survey

The ASGC held our thirteenth annual nesting bird surveys of the Aurora and Novak sanctuaries at 6am on various dates in the first half of June. The early hour is needed in order to be able to hear bird songs, since most identification this time of year is by ear. In addition, we expanded to a new area – the former Aurora golf course.

The most exciting find this year was a cerulean warbler, heard in West Novak, the first time this unique species has ever been detected in a breeding bird survey in ANY of our sanctuaries. Besides the warbler, the surveyors found blue-gray gnatcatchers for the first time. A typical number of species (48) was observed, along with the largest total number of individual birds (331) in the thirteen years of West Novak surveys. Other unusual highlights included a yellow throated vireo (seen only once before) and historical high counts for blue jays (13), white-breasted nuthatches (7), rose-breasted grosbeaks (10), and red-winged blackbirds (34)

The East Novak survey found a typical number of species (44), but activity was low with only 137 birds detected. The survey also observed one new bird, a Cooper's hawk, and the highest historical count for red-eyed vireo (15).

Finally, the Aurora sanctuary survey *(Continued on page 2)*

### October birding (or, where to bird after Bird Quest?)

With 9 days left in September eBird showed 140+ species reported in Lake and Geauga Counties, the two counties that encompass much of the Chagrin River Corridor IBA (important bird area). Many migrants are feeding and resting here as they work their way south. After they leave what do we have to look forward to? PLENTY!

As numbers of shorebirds, warblers, vireos and flycatchers dwindle, look for increases in waterfowl, gulls, thrushes, sparrows and other birds passing

through or staying in NE Ohio for the winter.

On Lake Erie and larger inland lakes look for increasing numbers of ducks, grebes, coots and gulls. Last October three Sabine's gulls were seen – two on Lake Erie and one at LaDue Reservoir. American pipits and early snow buntings can be found on beaches.

In field habitats look for white-crowned, white-throated and Lincoln's sparrows as well as palm warblers and *(Continued on page 3)*

### *From the Nest...*

Did you hear about this year's Bird Quest? It was a resounding success with almost 80 participants ranging in age from toddlers to "ole coots" (which is where I fit in!) coming from near and as far away as Cincinnati! Great fun, food and the facility were appreciated and enjoyed by all.

It began a week before with an excellent beginning birding workshop



put together by our own Matt Valencic. On Friday night of Bird Quest I led an Owl Prowl in Aurora with at least three (but maybe more) barred owls serenading us. Matt Valencic led a Saturday morning bird walk at the Rookery.

I give many thanks to numerous helpers that made this such a success. But we really must pass on the greatest gratitude to Alison DeBroux who came

up with the idea three years ago and has continued to take the lead and cause it to grow and become more and more organized and enjoyable. Next time you see her give her a pat on the back! Thank you Alison.

—Jim Tomko, President

## Native plant garden blooms at Novak Ed Center

Native plants provide important food for birds. National Audubon has recently emphasized the important role natives play in attracting birds and, of course, providing seasonal beauty. For more details, see [www.audubon.org/native-plants](http://www.audubon.org/native-plants).

ASGC trustees Penny Orr and Mary Salomon have spent the last year weeding, enriching and drastically expanding the former plantings located around the shed adjacent to the ASGC Education Center.

A total of 110 different species of perennials were planted in fall 2016, and 45 additional species were planted during 2017. The plants all came from Penny's store, Perennials Preferred, on Mayfield road. Penny generously donated a significant number of them to ASGC.

As the garden becomes more and more established, the plants are expanding in size as well as spreading through germination of their seeds.

Please take a look at the garden next time you visit the Education center, enjoy its beauty, and learn about native plants..

Future plans include establishing a native shrub garden in an area behind the education center. Penny has already provided 12 shrubs for this planned garden.

—Mary Salomon



Photos: M. Salomon



## Critter Corner



*This little fellow (about 8") was guarding the door to the Ed Center and about got himself stepped on. We are thinking Eastern milksnake but wondered if you concur or have a better idea!*

—Alison DeBroux

Wow! You found my very favorite snake. I kept one as a pet one summer when I was a kid and released it before it needed to find a hibernacula. The "Y" splotch on its head is diagnostic. But they are unmistakable.

Sadly, occasionally, the uninformed take it for a copperhead and kill it. But copperheads have bands and this species has splotches outlined in black. We do not have copperheads in this part of the state anyway.

Milkshakes are a member of the kingsnake clan. Note the round body in cross section. Most snakes are "loaf" shaped.

They are true constrictors and subdue their prey by suffocation. They are egg layers. Adults are usually less than 36 inches but there are records of specimens in excess of 50 inches!

By the way, they do not steal milk from cows!

—Jim Tomko

## In case you missed it!

Summer in the autumn! It sure felt odd to see autumn leaves fall with temperatures in the 90s! I imagine it is similar to experiencing the Christmas season in a tropical climate. The fringed gentians were spectacular and numerous though not as tall as usual. It is very interesting to see how they move about the area they grow in from year to year. Since they are biennials, they go unnoticed the first year and then send up that unmistakable bloom the second year. Also noted were bottle gentian, ladies tresses, calico aster, New England

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## Bird Quest

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from Cincinnati to visit family and decided to participate in Bird Quest while they were at it.

The Most Creative Team Name went to the "Siblings Guide to the Birds," a team of sisters, Amber and Megan

Strassler. The "Common Loons" and "Blackbrook Listless Listers" both won Bird Quest Ambassador awards for sponsoring new teams.

The teams all reported unseasonably hot and dry weather for the third weekend in September. But that didn't stop a lot of good birding!

## Breeding Bird Survey

*(Continued from page 1)*

found typical numbers of species (50) and individual birds (241). No new species or historical high counts were noted.

With the former Aurora golf course becoming park land, we decided to do a scouting breeding bird survey of half of this large, previously unbirded area to see if there is potential for further study. The results were promising: 51 species

detected as well as 322 individual birds, providing a valuable baseline for future work. Before this becomes a regular annual survey, decisions need to be made on a specific survey trail and whether two different surveys are required to cover the extensive area.

Thanks to all who participated and continue to express enthusiasm for monitoring these important areas. See you next June!

—Mary Salomon

## October Birding

(Continued from page 1)

American pipits.

In the woods, watch for gray-cheeked, Swainson's and hermit thrush and both kinglets.

Listen for the 'gurgling' sounds of rusty blackbirds in open, wet woods and along edges. They may be in mixed flocks with other blackbirds, starlings and cowbirds.

Orange-crowned warblers arrive in October and favor edge habitat.

Here are some parks with diverse habitats for October birding. In Lake County: Chagrin River Park,

Penitentiary Glen and Holden Arboretum. In Cuyahoga County: North and South Chagrin Reservations. In Geauga County: Bass Lake Preserve, The Rookery, The West Woods and West Geauga Commons.

Within the IBA, eBird data shows almost 140 species for the month of October. Couple that with our lovely fall weather and you have reason enough to go birding! See you in the field!

—Matt Valencic



Closed bottle gentian

## In case...

(Continued from page 2)

aster, other asters, and various goldenrod species. Several fantastically colored fungi species were adorning the fallen timber along the trails. This is an amazing time to take a hike where ever you are. Now is the time to enjoy nature's picturesque palette!

—Jim Tomko

## What is it?



At first I thought this was the female towhee I'd been seeing all summer, but then thought it looked more like a sparrow. I snapped a couple shots

(through the kitchen window), and sent them off to ASGC's "resident" bird identification experts, Jim Tomko and Matt Valencic.

Matt agreed it could be a towhee, but, "Babies are tough," he said, "just like humans—She has your smile!...No! I see your family's nose on her!..." He consulted the Sibley app, and determined the shape of the beak is like a towhee. Feather color was not a help EXCEPT for the white patch at the base of the primary feathers on the wing that is just visible in the picture. And the long tail is like a towhee.

Jim Tomko consulted with Andy Jones, Curator of Birds at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and a former trustee of the ASGC. Dr. Jones agreed it was an Eastern towhee, but not a commonly seen plumage. As Matt also noticed, the diagnostic field mark is the white base of the primaries (where the long flight feathers meet the "shoulder").

I haven't seen this youngster since, but have the satisfaction of knowing my backyard played host to a cool "unusually plumaged" towhee!

—Alison DeBroux

# Upcoming Events

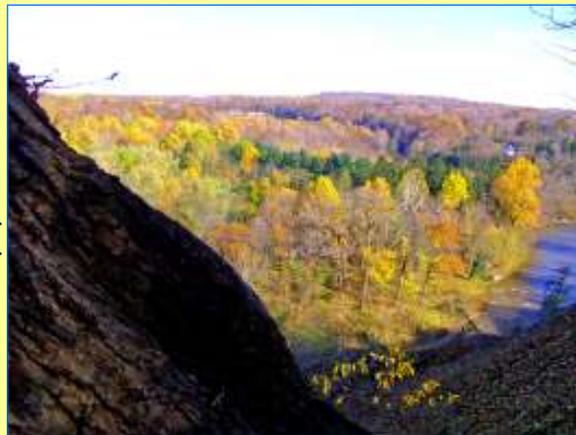
## Field Trips

**October 21 2:30 pm**

*"Autumn Color"*

Hach-Otis Sanctuary

Our autumn leaf color is among the best in the world. Of course the local weather leading up to the leaf change influences the intensity but we have the correct mix of species to really show off nature's amazing palette. And if you have not viewed the Chagrin River gorge from the bluffs above it where our Hach/Otis Sanctuary is located then you have missed a spectacular view. Meet at the Hach/Otis parking lot at the very end of Skyline Drive off of River Road in Willoughby Hills.



Chagrin Valley from Hach-Otis Sanctuary.  
Photo: J. Lillich

**November 12 2:00 pm**

*"Leaf Cruncher"*

Novak Sanctuary

Have you walked the "other side" of the Novak Sanctuary? We frequently explore the west side (Aurora side) of the Novak Sanctuary but rarely go into the east side (Mantua side). There is a flock of Wild Turkey that make this section their home and much of it is a mature forest. There are several large fields to provide grassland habitat encouraging open country wildlife. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary Parking lot on the east side of Townline Road a little less than a mile North of St. Rt. 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.

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*A Wry Smile*



Despite the high cost of  
living, it still continues to be  
very popular.

## My first Bird Quest

When I signed up for the third annual Chagrin River Bird Quest, I knew that my husband and I would be in for a day of fun – exploring new venues for birding, getting a bit more exercise, and maybe even seeing some birds we might not have in our own backyard.

Turns out I was right. We achieved all of those things and had a great time doing it!

We also learned that birders are SERIOUS competitors. The teams assembled at the West Woods Nature Center for the conclusion of the 24-hour quest put up some pretty awesome numbers in spotting (or hearing) uncommon or migratory birds, numbers of species sighted, and sponsoring new birders.

Just as exciting as hearing the tallies for the day was seeing the age range of the assembled birders! As I watched the youngest birders rush to claim their favorite Audubon plush toy, I smiled knowing that at least a few of them would continue to care for - and about - the health and future of wildlife for many years to come.

Of all the things I took away from

my first Bird Quest, that was the best.

—Heidi Harris  
(Team Hunka Hunka Birding Love)



The final Quest event: a mad scramble to choose the BEST bird for each young birder's collection!

**DATED MAIL**

