



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

November, 2018

Canton Audubon Society visits Hach-Otis Sanctuary

Carol and I were pleased to lead a walk for a group from Canton Audubon Society. The weather prediction for Saturday, October 6th was a fifty percent



Members of Canton Audubon Society along with John Lillich check out a giant tulip poplar, estimated to be 130 years old. Photo: C. Lillich

chance of rain—we had one light shower, with a high temperature in the sixties. Everyone arrived a little before 10am. One of them drove in from Marblehead.

We toured the original section of Hach-Otis as well as the meadows. Everyone enjoyed the history of the property and all were very impressed with the old growth trees along the south trail. A lot of photos were taken of the Chagrin River valley from a number of overlooks. We saw several hawks circling above the valley floor and we heard a number of unidentifiable bird calls.

Returning to the parking lot, Linda Chen opened the back of her car to reveal an assortment of snacks; we snacked and discussed what we saw on the
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Audubon Moment

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Send **your Audubon Moment** to info@clevelandaudubon.org

November = Waterfowl Feast

November in NE Ohio is all about waterfowl - ducks, geese, swans, grebes, coots and loons. I like waterfowl because they are easy to find, they are NOT hiding in the leaves at the top of an 80-foot tree and in foul weather you can watch them from your car!

Ducks are the most abundant with more than 20 species of divers and dabblers on the waters of Lake Erie and larger inland lakes (LaDue Reservoir, East Branch, Mosquito Creek Reservoir, Berlin Lake, Lake Medina).

DIVING DUCKS (scaup, bufflehead, ruddy ducks, redhead, ring-necked ducks, canvasback and all three mergansers) are often in deeper water where they catch fish, a variety of aquatic insects, mollusks and even eat some vegetation.

DABBLING DUCKS (mallards, gadwall, wigeon, pintails and American black ducks) feed in shallow water on vegetation, aquatic insects and mollusks (snails). You can watch dabblers
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How are your bird ID skills?

Try this challenge: Greater vs. Lesser Scaup

Scaup are challenging even for experienced observers. Richard Crossley (author of *The Crossley ID Guide*) notes that identifying greater from lesser is “sometimes obvious and at other times ... a real head-scratcher”! According to David Sibley (author of *Sibley Guides*), the head and bill shape when birds are relaxed provide the most apparent differences. Just watch a single active bird
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Scaup: greater in foreground; lesser in background. Photo: M. Valencic

From the Nest...

We are having an irruption of red-breasted nuthatches! An irruption is when there is a sudden upsurge in numbers of a species in an area for various reasons. This irruption is because the northern conifer seed crop is sparse this year and that is the red-breasted nuthatches' primary winter



food source. This year's failure of the conifer seed crop means that we may also host redpolls, crossbills, pine siskins, and evening grosbeaks in larger numbers as the season progresses.

Therefore, when you are enjoying the birds at your feeding station take a closer look. That nuthatch may not be the usual white-breasted. It may be the red-breasted! And those small sparrow-

like birds at your finch feeder may not be a goldfinch it may be a pine siskin or a redpoll!

Also, remember that November is one of the best duck watching months as these intriguing birds make their way south in search of unfrozen water. Please let me know what unusual visitors you have at your feeders and on your outings.

—Jim Tomko, President

Hach-Otis

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walk.

Everyone accepted my offer to lead a caravan tour of Hach-Otis's new perimeter. Completing the tour, we arrived at the meadows, where the group was amazed at the number of bluebirds surrounding us near the old orchard. It is not uncommon to view twelve to sixteen bluebirds at any one time. I like to refer to it as bluebird paradise.

Carol and I thoroughly enjoyed this group of enthusiastic birders and nature lovers and they all thought Hach-Otis was well worth their trip.



Canton Audubon members: Chris Lamb, Connie Rubin, Joe Sudomie, Linda Chen, Denise Lesko, and Scott Watkins.

Photo: C. Lillich

—John Lillich

November waterfowl

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“tipping” as their heads go under water and their tail points to the sky! An exception is the northern shoveler that uses its long, spatula-like bill to strain small crustaceans and invertebrates from the surface of the water.

Most ducks leave when our lakes freeze but Lake Erie and the Cuyahoga River offer viewing opportunities throughout the winter. The most popular locations are Wendy Park, Whiskey Island (mouth of the Cuyahoga River), Edgewater Park, Scranton Flats on the west bank of the Cuyahoga, Lorain Harbor (mouth of the Black River), Huntington Beach in Bay Village and Fairport Harbor (mouth of the Chagrin River).

The southeast movement of tundra swans in early November is spectacular. After raising their young on the Arctic

tundra, they start moving south in September. By early November they are moving in great numbers over NE Ohio, often stopping on our lakes to rest and feed before continuing to the Chesapeake Bay area. On November 8, 2017, I counted 954 swans flying over LaDue Reservoir in three hours, with about 100 landing to rest. When you are outside, you can hear them calling well before they come into view, flying very high in the sky.

Rounding out the November waterfowl feast are horned, pied-billed and red-necked grebes, common loons, American coots and lots of Canada geese. Keep careful watch for the occasional bonus birds – eared grebe, red-throated loon and snow goose – mixed in with everyone else!

Bundle up, grab some friends and enjoy November's waterfowl feast!

—Matt Valencic

HELP!

We are saddened to report that our long-time Education Committee member and regular “Nests & Eggs” volunteer, Sue Graham, has retired from our committee. She has amassed a wonderful collection of nests and assorted information about how and where birds raise their families, but now we need a new Nests & Eggs “expert” to share the collection with our youngest bird enthusiasts during Scout Day and Bird Buddy Day.

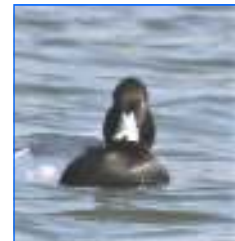
If you enjoy young children and have a few days to give every year, we'd love to welcome you to our program! Contact us at info@clevelandaudubon.org.

—Alison DeBroux



Critter Corner

Lesser Scaup
Photo: M. Valencic



Lesser Scaup (*Aythya affinis*)

I am a procrastinator! Nothing motivates like a deadline. This duck is a procrastinator in the form of a straggler. It nests north of us in the prairie potholes of the upper Midwest and the Canadian provinces north into the tundra. Its deadline is the freeze-up of ponds and lakes. Lesser scaups often are among the last to show up in the autumn migration and the last to reappear in the spring.

This is an elegant diving duck colored grayish white with a black “bow and stern” who feasts on mussels, clams, snails, other aquatic invertebrates and sometimes submerged aquatic plants to round out the diet. Females are a grayish-brown to chocolate brown with a white patch at the base of their bill. If you get close enough they will look at you through a wonderful golden-yellow eye over a chalky grayish-blue bill earning them the name of “Bluebill” by duck hunters.

In migration they prefer shallower (less than 20 feet deep) fresh water as opposed to salt water. Greater scaup prefer deeper salt and brackish waters; therefore we are more likely to see lesser scaup but both species overwinter in unfrozen parts of Lake Erie. (Look for identification tips from contributor Matt Valencic elsewhere in this newsletter.)

Lesser scaup migrate to the gulf coast and into the Caribbean and South America— farther south than most other divers.

After the young hatch and fledge the nest from a well concealed grassy area on the ground many females leave the young to fend for themselves in a *crèche*—a large flock of unattended fledglings of differing ages, freeing the mom up to recuperate from nesting. They learn from each other and a few adults how to survive the rigors of being a duck.

Look for them over the winter on ponds, lakes, and large slow-moving streams.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it!

"Fall Leaf Color Walk"

We had wonderful weather for our annual autumn leaf walk but the leaf color had only just started. There was a beautiful purplish-red sweet gum, a wonderful bright red black gum, and a delicate pastel, pinkish-orange hop hornbeam. All the other trees were just beginning to change but were mostly green.

With decreasing daylight and cool temperatures chlorophyll production ceases and the underlying pigments

begin to show in the leaves. Due to our uncharacteristically warm and dry fall, the fall color is slightly later than usual. By the time you read this you will have enjoyed our autumn leaves and are now hard at work raking them into piles. The leaf fall, you will note, is later than usual also.

I am looking forward to some winter birding without the leaves obscuring our view of the songsters in the canopy.

—Jim Tomko

A Wry Smile

Q: Why did the little bird get in trouble at school?

A: Because he was caught tweeting on a test!



Did you know?

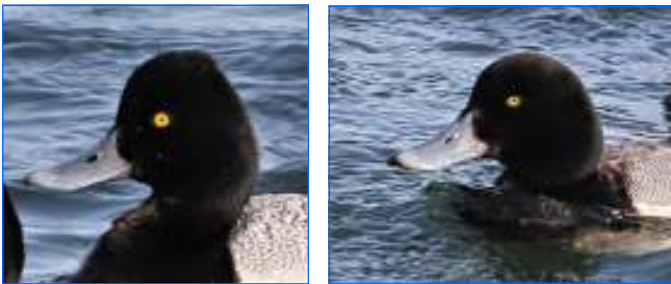
If the light is right the lesser scaup has an iridescent purplish cast to their head while the greater scaup has an iridescent greenish cast to the head. But this is not reliable because the lighting is rarely right!

—Jim Tomko

ID Challenge

(Continued from page 1)

and notice how head and bill shapes vary as they move about.



Considering a side profile, the head of lesser scaup (left) is "taller and narrower" with an apparent peak (long crown feathers) at the crown. Continuing back from the crown, the head shape appears to be 'flat' as it goes down the neck. The greater scaup (right) has a "broad head and evenly domed rear crown and thick neck".



Photos: M. Valencic

Considering a front view, the lesser (left) has a 'thinner face' with a bill that is parallel-sided. Black color is confined to the nail at the tip of the bill. The greater (right) has 'chipmunk cheeks' and the bill flares somewhat at the tip, with black extending laterally from the nail.

If you have ever tried to identify these two species, you understand why eBird has the option "Greater/Lesser Scaup"! Good Birding!

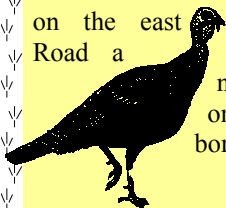
—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Field Trips, Etc.

Nov 3 9:30am
"Turkey Trek"
Novak Sanctuary

Each year we go on a quest to spot wild turkeys before Thanksgiving. They know how to play the game of Hide and Seek extremely well. These large but wily birds are experts in blending in. Help me find the flock as they roam the sanctuary in search of food. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road a little less than a mile north of State Route 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.



Dec 21 7:30pm
"Winter Solstice"
Novak Sanctuary

Help us celebrate the longest night of the year under the almost (one day early) full moon known as the Cold Moon. If we are lucky enough to have clear skies, we will not even need a flashlight. A night hike this time of year reveals secrets of the forest and field because the leaves are down increasing our viewing while the crisp air allows sounds to travel farther. Hiking after dark seems to heighten the acuity of our senses. Join us to see what the nighttime forest unveils. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of

Townline Rd a little less than a mile north of St. Rt. 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.

Jan 20 1:00pm
"Volunteer Open House"
Novak Education Center

Chase away the winter blues with a light lunch and good conversation at the beautiful Novak Education Center! View a slide show of our activities over the last year and hear how our volunteers are helping out. Come early for a hike in the Novak Sanctuary. Sandwiches and drinks provided. Bring a dessert or salad to share if you wish.

Sponsored by the Education Committee

DATED MAIL

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Please recycle this newsletter

An Audubon Moment (One baby left in the nest...)

(Continued from October...) Then more hours went by when the parents didn't show up at all. It was getting dark out. The parents stopped by once (with no food) and chirped something and left.

I went to bed myself and the next morning, the baby was gone. The parents stopped at the nest to check it out and then flew off.

Barn swallows often re-use their nests, and even their babies come back to the same spot, so I decided to destroy the nest. The mess below was pretty bad and didn't easily wash away at all. In fact I had to use a putty knife to scrape the stuff off the deck.

Sometime later I looked out the window and there were all seven members of the family on the ledge where the nest had been. I went out on the porch and shoed them away though they didn't even seem particularly afraid of me. Later the five babies were back, chirping away and probably saying, "OMG what has happened? This is where we grew up, and it's gone!"

Fast forward two days - in the evening, a whole squadron of barn swallows flew through the deck area, several lighting on the ledge, others just doing fly-bys. They scattered when I

went out on the porch. I didn't know what to do if they show up again to nest, so I Googled "how to get rid of barn swallows". Among the suggestions: hang up a fake owl. I had a vinyl owl from my gardening days, so I blew it up and hung it on a hook a few feet from the nest location. It's been two months now, and occasionally I see the birds swoop around the area but none come near their old home. Ollie the Owl will remain blowing in the wind just as long as I need him there. As interesting as it was to observe the whole [nesting] process, I prefer not to do it again - at least not on MY porch!

Wishing you Audubon Moments—Joan Greig



Barn swallow
Photo: M. Valencic

SAVE THE DATE!
Volunteer Open House

January 20, 2019 — 1 to 3pm — Novak Education Center