



# 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)

January, 2019

## ASGC VISITS WILLOUGHBY-EASTLAKE SCHOOL of INNOVATION

On the last day of November, Matt Valencic and I teamed up to make a presentation on Ohio birds to 75 third grade students at Willoughby-Eastlake School system's School of Innovation. Their School of Innovation is a STEM school. Ms. Sheila Rosciszewski's 3rd graders are currently studying Ohio birds. Matt and I each made about a thirty minute presentation, intending to take questions as the program progressed. Each presentation generated such a mass of questions that questions had to be deferred to the end.

My presentation focused on migration and nesting birds with an emphasis on wood warblers. The students learned that over three hundred



ASGC Trustee John Lillich presents an Ohio birds program to 3rd graders in Willoughby-Eastlake Schools.

*Photo: S. Rosciszewski*

different species of birds could be seen in Ohio in a one year cycle. That did not seem to impress them until they saw ASGC's bird checklist. I pointed out Ohio's north shore hot spots.

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## It's a party!

Enjoy birds and birding? Have some knowledge to share? Just want to get out and do something with like-minded people? Then you could be a volunteer!

Even if you're not (currently) an ASGC volunteer, you're invited to our Volunteer Open House on January 20th at 1:00pm at the Novak Education Center.

Share a light lunch (sandwiches and beverages provided—bring a dessert or side dish to share if you wish), meet some trustees, other volunteers, and friends of the ASGC. Find out what we've been doing recently. Come early (12 noon) for a hike in the Novak Sanctuary.

Hope to see you there!



Open House 2017: A cold winter walk (right) but there were plenty of goodies to warm up with afterwards!



**Volunteer Open House**  
January 20, 1:00pm  
Novak Education Center  
382 Townline Road, Aurora  
RSVP  
[info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org)

## From the Nest...

I invite you to join me in a New Year's resolution to be in touch with how our actions, habits, and purchases affect our natural world. I am going to be more mindful and astute about my daily activities in order to make changes that will improve our planet's health. Things as simple as refillable water



bottles and reusable grocery bags can have a huge impact.

Planning those errands to include several stops instead of repeated outings can reduce carbon emissions. Establish a brush pile instead of sending yard-waste to a landfill. Reduce or eliminate the use of lawn and garden fertilizers and pesticides to protect our streams, which eventually become the

water we drink. These little things and many others will add up to a great success if we all are moving in the same direction.

I hope you have an amazing year in your observation and study of the wildlife we desire to protect. I hope you add several new birds to your life list!

I wish you a healthy and happy New Year!

—Jim Tomko, President

## ID Challenge: Sharp-shinned vs. Cooper's Hawk

These two accipiters have confused birders for a long time. Adults of both species have rufous (red/orange) barring on the breast, fading to white near the legs and undertail coverts. Both have dark 'caps' with Cooper's being darker than its blue-gray back and wings. Both have long, narrow tails with alternating gray and black bands, terminating in a white tip. Juvenile birds have brown streaks on the breast, tails similar to their adults, and basically brown wings and backs with some white spots.

So how do we tell them apart? I checked "The Photographic Guide to North American Raptors" by Wheeler and Clark and Cornell's "All About Birds" website for some insights. First is overall size, with Cooper's being substantially larger than the sharpie (about 16" vs 11"). Females are larger than males which can have us asking "is this a large, female sharp-shinned or a small, male Cooper's?" Without some known reference point they often appear the same.



If you find a perched bird look at its legs – sharpies' legs (right) are thinner, more 'stick-like', than the robust legs of Cooper's (left).



Photos: M. Valencic



Birds in flight offer even more clues. Sharpies (left) have small, round heads that, in flight, often do not extend past the 'wrists' of the wings. They appear 'short-necked'. Cooper's heads (right) appear to extend beyond the forward edge of the wings. When flying across an open area, sharpies have a distinctive 'flap-and-glide' style with rapid wing flapping. Cooper's tend to flap slower with a 'flap-flap-glide' pattern. An experienced birder once told me "if you cannot count the wing flaps (too fast) it probably is a sharpie."

Finally, the calls of each species are different. Go to [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org) and listen to the recordings they have for each.

As with many ID challenges, we need as many clues as possible for a positive identification. When we are not sure it's best to list the bird on your eBird checklist as "Sharp-shinned/Cooper's Hawk". You will get better with practice, which is the best justification to say "I need to go birding today"!

—Matt Valencic

## Critter Corner

Cooper's Hawk  
Photo: J. DeBroux



### Cooper's Hawk (*Accipiter cooperi*)

It's a Chicken Hawk! That was, at one time, an appropriate name for the Cooper's hawk as they are bird hunting specialists. Many people raised free-range chickens and the Cooper's hawk took advantage of the easy prey. Those chickens are mostly a thing of the past, much to the dismay of the Cooper's hawks!

These are crow-sized raptors with short, rounded wings and an exceptionally long tail enabling "fighter pilot" precision, power and speed in the pursuit of their avian quarry through woodland habitats. The tail gives maneuverability and the short wings allow powerful passage through narrow openings between tree trunks.

Cooper's hawks are fierce-looking with red eyes, black-capped flat head, and grayish-blue back and wings. Their white breast is heavily barred in a beautiful rufous orange.

The male must be careful to judge the female's receptiveness when he approaches her as he is in the size-range of much of her prey. The male does most of the nest building and brings her food as she incubates the eggs for about a month. They both help raise the nestlings for another month. When they are ready to be on their own all smaller birds must be on high alert so as not to become the next meal.

Many of you have had Cooper's hawks raid your bird feeders for a meal of one of your feeder birds. Among their favorite prey are mourning doves, northern flickers, cardinals, and starlings. To discourage Cooper's hawks from taking your feeder birds the feeders must be removed for 5-10 days so that the hawk will move on.

Cooper's hawks have habituated to human habitat disturbance and are becoming fairly common even in the tree-covered cities and suburbs. Use caution in identifying them as they have a look-alike smaller cousin known as the sharp-shinned hawk.

—Jim Tomko

## In case you missed it!

Oh what hardy souls I had join me on our celebration of the winter solstice (the shortest day of the year) under a full moon made invisible due to the heavy overcast. We had chilly—near 30-degree—temperatures, a mild to moderate wind, and almost every kind of precipitation you can imagine from mist to rain to sleet to snow but none of it was ever a heavy down-pour. The trail was a bit muddy and there were some slippery slopes.

We did not hear a single owl, coyote, or beaver. We concluded that the animals all had more sense than we did because they were all denned up in a snug, warm, dry hollow out of the weather. Wendy announced that her husband coaxed her away from the fireplace where she had a cat napping on her lap.

Then, out of the dark we heard a number of Canada geese calling! What a find! I pointed out a tree where

previously some wild turkey had roosted. Keith responded with “all the turkeys are right behind you!”

Back at the parking lot we all enjoyed some hot chocolate and cookies. I suspect that most of the participants were there just to earn the treats at the end of the trail and to brag about what they did on Friday night of the winter solstice under the invisible full moon!

—Jim Tomko

## Presentation

(Continued from page 1)

Matt’s portion covered Ohio waterfowl and birds of prey. Matt shared a number of his outstanding photographs that really held their attention. One of his images was a collection of photographs showing different bird beak configurations. Ms. Rosciszewski requested some bird beak photos. The students were studying beaks and had drawn their own ideas. They planned to 3D-print their designs the following week. We left the class enough ASGC Bird Checklists so each student would have one of their own.

I was a little surprised to discover that these students entertained me, and I found that I thoroughly enjoyed presenting to them.

—John Lillich

## New Year’s Resolution: Start using eBird!

If you follow this monthly newsletter you have probably figured out that I am a little obsessed with eBird! But there is a good reason – actually, there are lots of good reasons and here are a just a few:

- It helps you find more birds
- It keeps track of your bird lists, photos, and sounds
- You can explore the latest sightings from around your neighborhood or around the world
- You become part of the world’s largest birding community
- Your birding contributes to science and conservation

A good friend attended an eBird training session last spring but didn’t get overly excited about it. Fast forward six

months and he finds himself walking three miles every day for exercise. He started thinking about that training session and the “Getting Started” handout he took home. Since he was getting a little bored with just walking, he decided to start using the eBird app on his phone to log the birds he was seeing while walking. He liked watching the lists build and has set a goal to walk in every Geauga Park District Park and eBird everything he sees. With 17 parks and 46 miles of trails to eBird, he doesn’t have time to be bored!

If you would like a copy of the eBird handout, email [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org) and consider giving eBird a try in 2019!

—Matt Valencic

## Upcoming Events

### Field Trips, Etc.

**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. All volunteers, past, present or future, are welcome. Sandwiches and drinks provided. Bring a dessert or salad to share if you wish.

RSVP: [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org).

The Education Center is a 2-story brick building located at 382 Townline Rd, Aurora, about 1.5 miles north of Rt 82.

**Jan 26 9:30am**

“Winter Hike”  
Molnar Sanctuary

The winter woods divulges secrets that are not noticed in the summer. Without leaves on the trees, the forest floor and topography can be appreciated in finer detail. Snow cover will allow us to see signs of the creatures that use our trails as we do. Often a complete story can be put together from the tracks in the snow. We will gather at the Dog Park parking lot on the east side of Page Road a few hundred yards north of Mennonite Road in Aurora.

**Feb 24 9:30am**

“Late Winter Bird Count”  
Aurora Sanctuary

Help us do our annual winter bird survey at the Aurora Sanctuary where there is an excellent diversity of habitats. If you are new to birding or have had thoughts about beginning, winter is an excellent time to get started because there are no obscuring leaves and the number of species are limited to our winter residents. Biting insects are dormant and the poison ivy has died back. Meet at the Bretschneider Park parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora.

**DATED MAIL**

**AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)**  
**Board of Trustees 2018-2019**  
**Jim Tomko, President**

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Please recycle this newsletter

**Do you have an Audubon Moment to share? Submit your short (200-300 words) nature story to [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org). Pictures are appreciated but not required.**

—Editor

***An Audubon Moment***

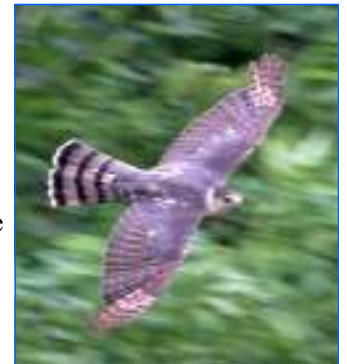
It was a brisk windy day at Sheldon Marsh with an amazing array of beige and brown colored emergent vegetation across the wetlands. The sun played hide and seek behind the clouds but the stunning blue autumn sky kept showing through. What a perfect morning to be out and feeling to the core the joy of our natural world.

I was thoroughly enjoying the usual year-round residents such as chickadees, titmouse, nuthatch, downy woodpecker, and a few straggling migrants like palm warblers and yellow-rumped warblers. A red-headed woodpecker and some ruby-crowned kinglets even made a cameo appearance.

All of a sudden, a cacophony a blackbird-like shrieks and calls erupted while a wave of little black specks undulated up over the far tree line then spiraled down into the cattails and up again into the air. As they got closer, I was delighted to see it was a large flock of easily over 100 rusty blackbirds. I had never seen so many at one time before and I had never witnessed that kind of flock activity. They kept weaving and dodging this way and that in a panic-stricken way. My eyes kept darting back and forth, up and down, round and round almost to a dizzying degree. What was the cause of this pandemonium?

Then a large dark shape popped over the tree line and dove to the level of the tops of the cattails. As it approached it had the unmistakable shape and flight pattern of an accipiter hawk in hot pursuit. From its size and the shape of its head and neck and the structure of its tail I could see that it was a Cooper's hawk trying with all its prowess to capture its breakfast.

—Jim Tomko



Cooper's hawk giving chase.  
 Photo: M. Valencic

**You're invited!**

**Volunteer Open House**

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