



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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Noteworthy winter visitors

Some birds visit NE Ohio only when the conifer seed crop in Canada is poor. This was supposed to be one of those years, but we have not seen large numbers so far. There are, however, a few noteworthy sightings.

It has been five years since common redpolls visited our area. On December 31st two redpolls were found with about 30 pine siskins at LaDue Reservoir (Geauga County), feeding in the alders behind the boat house. Once the word got out on eBird and Ohio Birds Listserv, more than 20 birders showed up over the next five days, some coming from as far away as Columbus to see these pretty little birds.

About 20 minutes away another show was going on at Soltis Road, large,



Common redpoll

Photo: M. Valencic

open agricultural fields just south of Parkman. The usual flocks of hundreds of horned larks were joined by over 100
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Matt Valencic joins Board

Matt grew up hunting, fishing and ‘hanging out’ in the woods and along the rivers of NE Ohio. He attended the State University of New York, College of Environmental Science and Forestry, graduating with a degree in Forest Biology. He never used the degree professionally but shared his knowledge and passion for birds and nature with Boy Scouts and their parents for 20 years as a Scout leader and merit badge counselor. His wife, Patti, their three adult children and six grandchildren all share his love for nature and the outdoors.

Most of his professional career was in Surgical Device sales. He promoted the devices to surgeons then accompanied them into the operating room to consult during procedures. He retired in 2015 and joined the ASGC, getting involved with the IBA and Education Committees. He brought his passion for eBird to the IBA committee, encouraging the entry of ASGC
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Ken Ostermiller (Ohio eBird Hotspot Guru)

Do you ever struggle with a problem? If you were lucky, someone came along who helped you look at it ‘from a different angle’ and find the solution. Well, if you have been struggling with eBird or maybe afraid of even getting started, Ken Ostermiller just might be that person for you.

Ken is well known to Ohio birders (and beyond Ohio) as the person who manages eBird Hotspots across Ohio. When someone suggests a new Hotspot (a shared location where birders can report their sightings or go in eBird to learn about birds seen) Ken follows a well-defined protocol to give it a name

and share the new location with birders via email on the Ohio Birds Listserv. That’s probably the easiest part of his job.

Ken has also created a website (now stay with me ...) that is NOT eBird, but which TEACHES you about eBird and can TAKE YOU INTO eBird at the click of your mouse! Let’s visit it together on your computer.

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Ken Ostermiller in 2017

From the Nest...

Get ready for the 21st annual Great Backyard Bird Count sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell University Laboratory of Ornithology. This is one of the largest citizen science projects to date. All that is needed is at least 15 minutes (or for as long as you desire) of bird observation



that can be done anywhere from your kitchen window birdfeeders to a hike on the trail. Then you go to the website: birdcount.org to record your tally. There you will be able to see real time submissions from people all over the world entering their tallies. Last year 160,000 checklists were recorded. You may do this as many times as you like

starting Friday, February 15th through Monday, February 18th. This count gives scientists a “snapshot” in time of fluctuations in bird populations. It is a free, easy to use and easy to do bit of science that will help researchers monitor wild bird populations. And it is very interesting to see which parts of the world participate and to what degree they do. Give this fun bird count a try!

—Jim Tomko, President

Winter Visitors

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snow buntings, both expected species and numbers. The surprises were unusually large numbers of Lapland longspurs, some reports of 80 or more, and two or three American pipits. All these birds continue as of this writing (mid-January). The pipits are usual visitors in the fall but not in winter. More than 50 birders showed up the first two weeks of January to see and photograph these special visitors.



Lapland longspur at Soltis Road.

Photo: M. Valencic

The winter is still young (sorry)! So, brush-up on your gulls and visit Lake Erie for herring, ring-billed, greater and lesser black-backed, Iceland, Glaucous and little gulls at the mouths of the Chagrin, Grand, Cuyahoga and Black Rivers.

Once the lake edge freezes check Scranton Flats along the Cuyahoga River for diving ducks. And remember to visit Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve where northern saw-whet owls spend the winter and can often be found in the pine trees right next to the parking lot.

—Matt Valencic



American pipit

Photo: M. Valencic

eBird Guru

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Go to this internet link on your computer (<https://birding-in-ohio.com/>). You will see the site has scores of links (anything that you see underlined is a link to more information) on a HUGE number of topics. Feel free to explore every link later but first let's start with About eBird as an example. Click About eBird and it opens a new page that tells you about eBird on the left side and on the right side has a list of links to eBird that take you to *the same information* in eBird. If you click one of those links it opens a new window on your computer, so you don't lose your place back on Ken's website. You don't HAVE to go there (because Ken has already given you the information) but you can if you like.



Ken Ostermiller accepts the Award of Merit from ASGC President Jim Tomko at the 2017 Annual Dinner.

link or map. The new page has information about birding Hotspots in that county. Then click on a Hotspot name and you will be treated to a treasure trove of information about that Hotspot, compliments of Ken Ostermiller's hard work over many years.

If you like what you see please send Ken a "THANK YOU" for all his hard work on behalf of birding in Ohio. We appreciate you, Ken!

—Matt Valencic

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Common Redpoll (*flammea*)

Have you seen these energetic sprites this winter? Matt Valencic let me know where a few could be found recently at Ladue Reservoir.

These tiny birds are amazing frigid weather specialists. Redpolls can survive at minus 65 degrees Fahrenheit. They grow 31% more feathers by weight each winter season. Redpolls are circumpolar and occasionally make a winter migration into our area.

They are grayish-buff goldfinch-sized birds with a small red cap, black patch at the base of the bill, striped flanks, and a narrow-forked tail with a white rump. Males have a rosy wash to their breast.

Redpolls eat small seeds with their small, yellow finch-bill. They get their winter calories from birch, willow, and alder catkins. Often, they will hang upside down to tear apart a catkin allowing the seeds to fall to the snow where they drop down to swallow them into a throat pouch. Then they fly to a protected perch to eat them at a more leisurely pace. Redpolls can eat up to 42% of their body weight each winter day.

Their preferred habitat is scrubby, brushy fields but will readily visit bird feeders such as a nyger (thistle) feeder. Often, they will feed with pine siskins and goldfinches.

They are very social birds and will flock in the thousands during winter migration. Their usual southward migration takes them to "balmy" southern Canada! Every five years or so an irruptive winter migration occurs and we have them in our area.

Redpolls are nomadic wanderers. One banded in Michigan was recaptured in Siberia and birds banded in Alaska have been recovered from the northeastern U.S.

As you enjoy your goldfinches this winter, take a closer look. That unusual looking guy may be a redpoll!

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it!

Nobody can control (or even reliably predict) Northern Ohio weather! For those few of us who could dig out of our driveways following the onslaught of Winter Storm Harper on January 20th, ASGC's Volunteer Open House was an enjoyable and relaxing afternoon to visit, share stories and thank our many volunteers who help us during the year.

Jim Tomko discussed the variety of opportunities available to volunteers, John Lillich talked about the challenges

facing his new Friends of Hach-Otis group and their plans to build trails in the rough terrain of the recently acquired section of the Hach-Otis Sanctuary, and I listed the various programs that the Education Committee is involved in.

New volunteer Bill Smith is interested in trail-building, and Julie Albrecht will be helping at her first Scout Day on February 9th.

Many thanks to everyone who helped make the afternoon a success: Kathy and

Katie Cochran who organized the food table, Mark Magree who got the Ed Center ready for a party, and Jim DeBroux who set up the projector for the slide show (and shoveled our driveway). Thanks also to Kathryn Craig who took the leftover sandwiches and snacks to a homeless shelter in Portage County.

—Alison DeBroux

Matt Valencic

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historical birding data for the sanctuaries. He also did a 12-month avian study on the headwaters of the Chagrin River, entering all the data into eBird.



Matt Valencic

His Education Committee interests are primarily outreach and teaching. He created several programs about birds of NE Ohio from his catalog of bird photographs, and takes the programs to retirement homes, civic organizations, schools and nature and birding clubs through the "Backyard Naturalist" speakers bureau.

Matt says that ASGC was the right fit for him upon retirement, because it

allowed him to 'give back' while staying involved with science, data, teaching and birding. His other interests include being a Geauga County Master Gardener Volunteer and involvement in a couple ministries at his church, St. Joan of Arc, in Chagrin Falls.

He and Patti have a couple horses and large vegetable garden on their eight-acre 'hobby farm' in South Russell.

Editor's note: And you might have noticed that Matt is very involved in writing for this newsletter. Couldn't do it without him! Welcome to the Board, Matt (it's about time...)

Did you know?

In their cold snowy habitats, common redpolls will roost in the snow in tunnels over twelve inches long that they dig up to four inches under the surface of the snow forming an insulated chamber in which to survive the harsh winter night.

—Jim Tomko

The Squawk



Send your comments, questions, or complaints to

info@clevelandaudubon.org

Upcoming Events

Field Trips, Etc.

Feb 9 10:00am

"Scout Day"

Novak Education Center

Scout troops and individual boys and girls are invited to participate in our annual Scout Day. Why do birds have different kinds of beaks? Do all birds build nests? How do you use binoculars? What do owls eat? Answer these and many more questions during this fun-filled two hours. Go home with your own bird feeder and bird mask and other neat things. A \$5 donation per child is requested.

To register your child or troop, email info@clevelandaudubon.org.

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.

March 30 9:00am

"Waterfowl Wander"

LaDue Reservoir

Get ready to be dazzled by the amazing breeding plumage of the many species of migrating ducks as they head to their breeding grounds. Our caravan style birding tour will stop at several favorite lakes and ponds in southern Geauga and northern Portage counties. Have a full tank of gas and bring some lunch money as we will end with a stop at a restaurant to tally, compare notes and share stories. Meet at the boat ramp parking lot at the end of Washington Street off of St. Rt. 44 in Auburn Corners.

DATED MAIL

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Please recycle this newsletter

An Audubon Moment

Recently, my husband and I visited Tucson where we enjoyed the beautiful Saguaro National Park as well as hiking in Sabino Canyon. From our rental in Oro Valley, we heard large groups of coyotes every night. But like everyone who grew up on Looney Tunes, I wanted to see a roadrunner too! This was our second visit to Tucson and still no roadrunner during any of our desert hikes.

But just as we were leaving a gas station, there he was - walking cheerfully along the driveway! Looking just as I had hoped with his topknot and long tail! Meep, meep!

—Kathryn Craig



Cleveland skyline

Photo: E. Drost

Did you know that many birds migrate at night? They orient themselves by the stars. If the night is cloudy or foggy, they may get disoriented and start tracking artificial light around buildings. It is estimated that hundreds of millions of migrating songbirds like warblers, orioles and thrushes are killed each year from collisions with buildings.

By dimming the buildings' lights during the peak of spring and fall migration, we can save many birds each year.

ASGC is joining with a group of local organizations to create awareness about the effects brightly lit buildings have on nocturnally migrating birds. Through this awareness we will create change and save migrating birds' lives.

Volunteers are needed to walk the city streets from March 15th to June 1st from 5:00 am to 8:30 am to rescue and recover birds that hit Cleveland's downtown buildings. Over the last four seasons over 5000 birds have been collected and 1500 rehabilitated and released. Dead birds are processed by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and used for research purposes, including data collection about the scale of these impacts. Lake Erie Nature & Science Center coordinates this effort. Visit Ohiolightsout.org for more information or email LightsOutCLEvolunteer@gmail.com.