



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

March, 2019

Scout Day equals a fun and busy morning



Nicole Ryman helps a Scout walk like a "duck".
Photo: K. Cochran

Our annual Scout Day for K-3rd graders dawned bright, clear and cold. Not cold enough to scare away eleven eager Scouts, thirteen volunteers and

several troop leaders and parents who filled the Novak Education Center with chatter, laughter...and learning!

The Scouts learned that feathers are what makes birds unique in the animal kingdom. Matt Valencic, in charge of the feathers station, demonstrated the idea of "lift" and participants tried on a pair of bird wings to see if they could fly (they couldn't).

Madison Proctor and Jim Tomko showed how bird beaks are adapted to a wide variety of food at the Beaks station. The girls practiced cracking seeds like a cardinal and sipping nectar like a hummingbird (with pliers and eye droppers, respectively).

Then it was on to the Feet station, where Nicole Ryman pointed out the different kinds of feet that birds have.

A Scout makes a bird feeder to take home.
Photo: K. Cochran



The participants tried on flippers to see what it felt like to "walk like a duck."

At the Nests and Eggs station, Joe Kollar and Kathryn Craig showed off the
(Continued on page 2)

Winter Surprises!

While not totally unexpected, it still excites me to see certain birds in the winter. During February I had three such sightings.

On the Cuyahoga River at Scranton Flats (an eBird Hotspot), a birder pointed out a glaucous gull sitting on the ice, relatively close to us – close enough for some good pictures on that sunny morning. This large gull breeds on coastlines and islands in the high arctic. It's built to handle cold weather. In winter it moves to the east and west coasts of Canada and the U.S., down the St. Lawrence River, and into the Great



Glaucous gull on left, ring-billed gull on right.
Photo: M. Valencic

Lakes. Very cold habitats for sure, but at least there is some open water. We see a few each winter but not many. The thing

I find special is that juveniles and adults lack any black on their wings or tails, so they really stand out against the thousands of ring-billed and herring gulls along the lake.

Also along Lake Erie, at Wendy Park, we found two white-winged scoters on February 19th. They mainly winter along the east and west coasts, but we get some each winter, often at Sims Park in Euclid (an eBird Hotspot). They are divers that like mollusks (think zebra mussels) and can be hard to identify when diving or resting because they don't always display the white 'slash' along the body. These birds were
(Continued on page 2)

From the Nest...

The annual Great Backyard Bird Count was a resounding success! Over 182,064 checklists were submitted from 174 countries from around the world with 113,777 of those checklists from the United States. 6,356 bird species world-wide were listed. Colombia won the most species with 1,062! The United



States ranked 7th with 663 species. These are not the final tallies so numbers will go up but this was a very active year. Each year this international event brings bird lovers together via the internet for some fun competition and allows researchers to get a "pulse" on world bird populations. I hope you will participate again next year to help with this enormous citizen science project.

Closer to home be prepared for spring migration. As soon as the ice goes the waterfowl will be hurdling north to breeding grounds. Early nesters such as bald eagles and great horned owls are already incubating. Woodcock will be starting their breeding dance. This is an exciting time of year and it gets more so as each week goes by, peaking in late April and Early May.

—Jim Tomko, President

Winter Surprises

(Continued from page 1)

males and had the white 'comma' around their eye, making ID pretty easy.

My third surprise was a Wilson's snipe, first found by Mark Shave (a Geauga County birder) on January 24th in Geauga County. It was a surprise because of WHERE it was – in a small drainage ditch along a dirt road – and WHEN it was found – first birds usually show up in later February. Wilson's snipe use



Can YOU find the Wilson's snipe in this picture? Great eyes, Matt!

Photo: M. Valencic

their long bill to probe the mud for invertebrates, and that ditch was the only open "mud" in the area – everything else was frozen or snow covered. It was last reported on February 14th, looking quite healthy considering the below-zero temps we had early in the month. It appears that it will be just fine since the weather is improving every week.

I hope you will keep that feeling of 'wonder and awe' at all that mother nature serves up!

—Matt Valencic

Scout Day

(Continued from page 1)

ASGC's large collection of birds' nests, and the Scouts made grass and horse-hair "nests" to hang outside at home.

At the Sight & Sound station, Mark Hancock and Katie Cochran demonstrated bird sounds and each group played a Bird ID matching game. Julie Albrecht supervised the Owl Pellets table where the girls found out what owls ate for lunch. Sarah Cochran helped everyone make a bird mask to

take home, and Barb Philbrick gave a lesson on how to use binoculars.

There was plenty to fill the two hours and plenty of goodies to take home as memories from an awesome day!

Our thanks to our amazing volunteers, and a special welcome to our first timers: Julie Albrecht, Joe Kollar and Mark Hancock. We hope to see everyone back again next year!

—Alison DeBroux

National Audubon issues position statement on proposed border wall

Construction is imminently set to begin on a section of a border wall at the National Butterfly Sanctuary in Mission, Texas, and threatens to close Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Texas, part of the World Birding Center, which hosts over 500 bird species. National Audubon Society has a position statement on this issue:

"As the voice of birds and as a community-builder for 114 years, Audubon opposes the construction of structures along the border that would:

1. destroy or fragment important bird habitat like Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park, iconic National Wildlife Refuges like Santa Ana NWR in Texas, National Parks, National Forests, other public lands, or protected wetlands;
2. block migration corridors for 111 endangered species, and 108 species of migratory birds;
3. damage habitat for over 500 species of birds;
4. create or worsen environmental risks like flooding that would threaten birds and people;
5. result in waiving or weakening bedrock environmental protections, including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, or the National Environmental Policy Act;
6. diminish outdoor recreation or ecotourism opportunities;
7. sever connections between communities and natural resources; or
8. harm the communities, landowners, tribes, or organizations with whom we partner and among whom we serve."

Read the full statement on Audubon.org.

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Mink (*Mustela vison*)

Many of us are surprised to learn that we have mink living in our area. Because of their secretive, nocturnal habits, they are rarely seen. Winter is a great time to see them or signs of them.

Like otters they are amazing swimmers and can dive up to 16 feet under water searching for their prey of frogs, crayfish, fish, and mussels. Mink have partially webbed feet to aid in the pursuit of their quarry. It is said that among their favorite prey is muskrats but they also take rabbits, mice, squirrels, snakes and worms. They are fierce predators and will kill more than they can eat at one time, sometimes storing the excess in their dens.

Their required habitat is a wooded or brushy river, stream, pond, marsh or swamp.

Mink have luxurious, chocolate-brown, waterproof fur with a white chin patch. These semi-aquatic, weasel-like mammals can be up to 27 inches long (nine of that length is tail) and weigh between one and a half and three pounds.

Mink are very territorial with a male's territory overlapping several females' territories. Fierce battles, sometimes to the death, occur in establishing property rights.

Breeding takes place in late winter with a litter of "kits" or "cubs" born in April. The female constructs a cozy grass, feather, and fur-lined nest in a burrow in the bank, under exposed roots of a tree, in a log, in an abandoned muskrat nest or in an abandoned beaver lodge. She alone cares for and raises the young until autumn when they are encouraged to find their own territory.

Mink populations were decimated by unregulated trapping for their pelts. Today their main threat is the destruction and draining of their habitat. Natural predators are coyote, fox, great horned owls, bobcat and dogs.

Recently on a winter walk we spotted a pair of mink tracks on the ice

(Continued on page 3)

In case you missed it!

Winter Track Walk, January 26th

It was a cold but wondrous day in the woods at our Molnar Sanctuary where we were treated to a barred owl playing leap frog with us through the tree tops. It is always a heart-felt joy to get a glimpse of these mysterious, nocturnal predators in the day time.

We also saw several of our winter avian residents flitting about foraging for food and fluffing their downy insulation against the winter wind. There was evidence of beaver activity in the sight of gnawed trees and slides into the lake but the lake was completely frozen with no openings. We imagined them cozy in their lodge protected from the cold; feeding on twigs and branches that they stored below the surface before the lake froze.

Many highways of white-tailed deer and gray squirrel zig-zagged through the

woods. Cottontail rabbit tracks were noted in the field. Shrew, vole, or mouse paths were noted in various places. It appeared that a weasel

crossed the path but the prints did not register well enough to be sure.

We even celebrated the largest American elm that we know of on our properties.

What a great way to enjoy a winter day. Thank you to Matt Valencic for helping us to identify what we were looking at and for the photograph.

—Jim Tomko



Lynn Richner, Deborah Ondrejka and Jim Tomko visit an American elm.

Photo: M. Valencic

Critter Corner

(Continued from page 2)

on the Aurora Branch which led to an opening in the ice at the edge near some roots. They will toboggan along in the snow “otter style” making a smaller trough than the otters.

I hope you get a chance to hike along a wooded wetland this winter to look for signs of mink.

—Jim Tomko



Photo: J. Tomko

Save the Date

ASGC Annual Meeting & Dinner
Saturday, June 1

A gentle reminder...

If you contributed to our end-of-year Annual Appeal, our heartfelt thanks.

If you did not, and you are *not* a member of National Audubon, please note that chapter memberships need to be renewed every year. Your \$10 in dues will help us very much.

Online renewal coming soon!

Help!

Help college students continue their college experience in the Conservation and Environmental fields of study through our revamped scholarship program. Interested volunteers please email info@clevelandaudubon.org, attention Mark Demyan.

Did you know?

When mink are calm, comfortable and content, they emit a purring sound cat-style!

When agitated to a “fight or flight” degree they emit a musk reminiscent of a diluted skunk aroma although they do not aim or spray it skunk-style!

—Jim Tomko

Upcoming Events

Field Trips, Etc.

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.

April 2 7:30pm
“Warbler Warm-up”
Rocky River Nature Center

Spring migration is one of the best times to be in NE Ohio for warblers. Many species pass through the area on their way north, but some remain in Ohio to nest. This presentation uses photographs to help group warblers by appearance, preferred habitat, and behaviors, such as tail wagging, which helps with identification. In addition, songs and ways to remember songs will be provided. This should get us prepared for migration!
24000 Valley Pkwy, N. Olmsted, OH

April 12 7:30pm
“Woodcock Waltz”
Novak Sanctuary

The springtime courtship dance and flight of the woodcock is an annual must see. Join us for a twilight performance of the local Timberdoodles competing for the limelight trying to win their heart’s desire. If the weather and mother nature is on our side, we should have a grand display with multiple performers. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Rd about a mile north of State Rt. 82 on the Mantua/Aurora border.

DATED MAIL

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An Audubon Moment

Sometimes, an Audubon moment is truly just a moment. I experienced one such moment recently – and it was magnificent.

Our back yard is essentially a 30-foot-deep ravine populated by old growth forest. Many of these very old trees have grown up from near the bottom of the ravine, which gives our home a tree top view, especially from our second story windows. From many of our vantage points we often view birds at our eye level, and typically don't need binoculars when the trees are not in leaf.

I was sitting at one of those vantage points not long ago, typing away on my keyboard when something out of the corner of my eye caught my attention.

It was rapid movement – from something large and quick – and I found myself suddenly chanting, “big bird, big bird, big bird...” loud enough, apparently, that my spouse on the floor below could hear me. As I locked my eyes onto this moving target, my mind was racing through the possibilities (first thinking “hawk;” but then, “naw, too big;” then thinking “owl;” “yes, that is more like it, but which?”). I was fortunate to focus my eyes quickly enough to identify the moving target, and was surprised to realize I was following the swift movement of a bald eagle as it soared through the center of the ravine. Magnificent! And gone as quickly as it came.

Our backyard ravine feeds into the Aurora branch of the Chagrin River, which we can glimpse during leafless months. This eagle was heading in the direction of the Aurora-based Audubon sanctuaries – and it could well be that it was heading home following a fishing expedition in the river.

Wherever it came from, and wherever it was headed, I was thrilled to catch a glimpse of it, especially so close, if only for a moment: a magnificent Audubon moment.

—Diann Rucki

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

A Wry Smile



I miss being able to slam my phone down when I hang up on somebody. Violently pressing “End Call” just doesn't do it for me!

—www.yesemails.com