



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Education Committee assists Science Olympiad students

In March, ASGC was privileged to help two groups of students prepare for the Ornithology section of the Science Olympiad competition. Coaches from Solon High School and Medina Elementary Schools told us what was expected of their students and several ASGC members eagerly agreed to help.

On March 5th four ASGC members met with several students at Solon High School for an 'Ornithology open forum'. They asked lots of great questions about nests, eggs, songs vs. calls, feathers, habitat, behaviors, and techniques for quickly identifying species and learning their songs. Some of their questions were academic (like number of eggs in a nest or describing the growth of feathers) while others were familiar to bird watchers (field marks for quick ID or learning bird



Hiram College students, Keegan Rankin and Carah Katzendorn answer questions about Nests and Eggs. Photo: M. Valencic

songs and calls). We shared in answering their questions then introduced them to several resources, from various field guides to Cornell's wonderful website www.allaboutbirds.org. At the end, we encouraged them to get out and watch birds! All

(Continued on page 2)

16 Scouts complete Bird Study Merit Badge

Troop 269 held the last session of its Merit Badge Challenge on Saturday, March 7, 2020, where over 200 Scouts gathered to earn BSA merit badges. ASGC members Kim Pease and Barb Philbrick led two classes that helped Scouts earn the Bird Study Merit Badge.

To complete the merit badge, the Scouts needed to attend a bird walk and identify 20 birds by sight and five by ear. During this session, Kim and Barb led the Scouts through the grounds of

the Aurora City Schools campus, which includes fields, a pond, and woodland. The highlight for the first class was a red-tailed hawk catching a mouse in the soccer field and then eating it on a nearby telephone pole. Another great moment was a bald eagle flyover. For the second class, the highlight was two red-tailed hawks mating at the top of a telephone pole. One Scout mentioned that that's not what he expected to learn

(Continued on page 2)

From the Nest...

It is with great regret that I must inform you that due to the COVID 19 pandemic, we must cancel all our programs, field trips, and events until further notice. This includes our greatly anticipated Annual Meeting. Many of the attendees to the annual meeting are over the age of 60 which puts them at



greater risk of serious complications should they become infected.

I do encourage you to continue to get out in the forests and fields to discover the amazing treasures Mother Nature will reveal. Spring is such an exciting time with the migration in full swing, the birds singing their hearts out and the frogs calling to fill the air.

Your jaunts outdoors will actually

ASGC 2020 Annual Meeting

Saturday June 6th
Has been canceled.

Thank you for your patience and support.

New birders, take note...

COVID19 caused us to cancel the New Birders Workshops but we are still committed to helping new birders get started. All registered attendees received 'handouts' via email and I would like to make those same materials available to anyone interested in getting started. Email your request to info@clevelandaudubon.org.

Here are some valuable pointers for new birders:

Use a Field Guide that shows all the information about each species on one or two pages (side-by-side pages). Sibley and Peterson guides are two examples.

Spend time reviewing the information in the front of your field guide, especially learning the parts of a bird (so you know what 'field marks' mean) and Range Maps (show where the bird is found at different times of the year).

When looking at a bird (through binoculars or directly), describe it OUT LOUD, finding as many field marks as possible before it flies away. Only then do you consult the field guide.

Start by learning the birds at your feeder, using your field guide and

(Continued on page 3)

help you feel better both physically and mentally as we get our blood circulating and the endorphins flowing. Please get out there to enjoy and absorb the good aura of our natural world.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President



Hermit Thrush

Don't miss these April arrivals...

Photos by Matt Valencic

Look for the hermit thrush in leaf litter under trees and shrubs



Pine Warbler

Look: high branches of pine trees



Louisiana Waterthrush

Look: close to forested streams and creeks



Sora

Look: among cattails and rushes

Bird Study

(Continued from page 1)

about during Bird Study! Several Scouts were very engaged in the walks. One asked if they could continue to look for birds after we found the ones we needed for the requirements. (Of course, we said yes!)



Bird Study Merit Badge participants outside Aurora High School. Photo: B. Philbrick

Kim and Barb also reviewed their work for a requirement in which they needed to build a birdhouse or birdfeeder. The Scouts did some nice work building and placing their houses and feeders. Kim asked them to remove perches from the birdhouses. She told them that most native cavity-nesting

birds can cling to the outside of the box and get in without the perch. Perches actually help other non-native birds or predators who may harass the nesters.

If Scouts attended all three sessions and completed building a birdhouse or birdfeeder outside class, they earned their blue card for the Bird Study Merit Badge. Out of 30 Scouts who started the classes, 16 completed their merit badges. Others left with partially completed merit badges that they can complete later.

—Barb Philbrick

Look: shorelines and waterways



Osprey

Science Olympiad

(Continued from page 1)

their academic knowledge would come together once they observed birds in their natural environment.

To prepare for the elementary students we updated our Lesson Plans for the Junior Birders Day stations. This program is usually directed to K-3rd graders. Our tri-fold presentation boards already have more information than K-3rd graders can take in, so we just 'raised the bar' of information we would present to older students.

The result was awesome! On March 8th we took eight third and fourth graders through six of the stations – Feathers & Flight, Feet, Beaks, Sight & Sound, Nests and Energetics (aka, Owl Pellets). The students were fully engaged as we shared and discussed information at each station for 15-20



Volunteer David Factor describes how bird feet are adapted to living in various habitats.

Photo: M. Valencic

minutes. They asked lots of questions and had hands-on experience at most stations. The students and their coach said they learned a lot of new information while having a great time. We look forward to helping them again next year.

Thanks to the following ASGC members for their help making all this possible: Alison DeBroux (her leadership created the original Junior Birders program), Kathy Cochran, Kathryn Craig, David Factor, Cathy Green, Kelly Kozlowski, Sarah Mabey, Betsy Siman and Jim Tomko. Special thanks to Hiram College students Carah Katzendorn and Keegan Rankin for their help on March 8th.

—Matt Valencic

New Birders

(Continued from page 1)

binoculars.

Learn what birds are found in specific habitats (details found in the ‘handouts’). You will learn why some birding locations have so many species – they have a variety of habitats!

Review various groups of birds in your field guide and notice shared characteristics as well as unique characteristics (e.g., woodpeckers – similar overall shape, similar beaks, perch on side of trees. Pileated has large red crest, others do not.).

Go birding with a friend or family member. You will see more birds and have more fun!

Good Birding!

—Matt Valencic



Pileated woodpecker and young.

Photo: M. Valencic

More about cats...

Article in March *House Wren* prompts response

As a member of the Audubon Society and a protector of two small cat colonies I read with interest Betsy Siman’s article in the most recent issue of *The House Wren* about the book *Cat Wars*. I was pleased to read her concluding sentence which ended with the clause “...and benefit both our aviary and feline friends.” Until that point I was fearful that a false alarm had been sounded.

To be sure Oahu, Hawaii, has an extreme situation, but it is precisely that – extreme, and it does call for more drastic albeit humane answers to a very complex issue. But the statement that “Toxoplasma alone has been found to cause schizophrenia, terminate pregnancies, and is fatal to a variety of

wildlife” is a bit misleading as it implies cause and effect.

The exact causes of schizophrenia are unknown, but research supports a combination of genetic, environmental, and psychological conditions that increase probability. Many people who have contracted toxoplasmosis are symptom free. While it certainly is necessary to wash your hands, or even wear gloves while cleaning the cat box, it does not mean that failure to do so will cause schizophrenia.

Clearly, there are too many cats and the TNR (*Trap-Neuter-Release*) program appears to be a step in the right



direction. There is compelling evidence that feral cats reduce the rodent population, which is more likely to cause disease if left to multiply than cats are. There is no denying that hungry cats will catch birds just as hungry lions will kill a gazelle, but on a global scale people kill more birds than cats do because of pollution, pesticides, environmental encroachment, and global warming.

Admittedly, I have not read *Cat Wars* but perhaps the book we should anticipate is *People Wars*. I hope this letter will serve to alleviate some fears about cats who deserve compassionate intervention as much as any other animal on the planet. As Betsy Siman concludes this is a complex matter and the ideal solution needs to benefit both our aviary and feline friends.

—Dr. Dixie Benshoff

Upcoming Events

Field Trips, Etc.

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland encourages you to get out and enjoy nature on your own.

All Audubon-sponsored field trips and bird walks are canceled until further notice. For other scheduled walks, please check directly with the sponsoring organization.



Purple Martin: look for purple martin “houses”

More April arrivals...

Photos by Matt Valencic

Vesper Sparrow: look in grasslands and fields



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A Wry Smile



Doing nothing is hard. You never know when you're done.

Family spring activity

With schools closed my daughter is home with her children, ages 9 and 11. Part of their new daily routine includes PE Class – a 30-minute walk around their neighborhood. You already know the physical and emotional benefits of a good walk but consider an added benefit: seeing plants and animals that you usually just drive past! Now that spring is here and migration has begun, your neighborhood will be changing daily. If you don't live in a neighborhood with sidewalks, consider a nearby park where you could still practice 'personal distancing' while enjoying nature.

Make your walks a nature learning game. You and the kids search for as many wildflowers and animals as possible on each walk. Take turns keeping the daily list and take pictures of new arrivals with your phone or camera. Binoculars will help identify the birds you see. If you are unsure of a bird, describe it out loud while looking at it and take notes of a few 'field marks'.

When you get home get out the field

guides and start identifying what you discovered. ODNR has free Wildlife ID Guides available as downloads – type *ODNR Educational Materials* into your browser. If you want to incorporate technology, you can create an account at iNaturalist (www.iNaturalist.org) or Bug Guide (www.BugGuide.net) and upload your unknown pictures for identification. For birds, consider the Facebook page [whatsthisbird](https://www.facebook.com/whatsthisbird).

I guarantee the kids will love hearing you say, "I don't know what this is – let's look it up!"

—Matt Valencic



Look for fox sparrows in leaf litter and mulch beds. Check out other April Arrivals on pg 2.

Photo: M. Valencic