



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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“Big” Quest 2020—AWESOME!

“Exceeded my expectations” was the way one person put it. This year changed so much – but it worked! For the first time we asked you to take pictures of your team in action throughout the 24-hour challenge. We put them together, by teams, in a slide show that was so well received we created a gallery of your pictures on our website. Go to www.cleveland-audubon.org and click on Bird Quest to enjoy the day all over again.

We removed the boundaries of the Chagrin River IBA and said “Bird where you are” – our way of ‘social distancing’. The result: teams found a record number of bird species, 140 in all compared to 116 last year.

And since you could not enjoy our hospitality at the end of the day, we shared Subway Gift Cards with everyone so you could ‘have lunch on us’! Another big hit!

Other records were broken during this 6th Annual Chagrin River Bird
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Dave English scopes out Mentor Marsh in search of the CONW.

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A Caribbean visitor

There are rarities and then there are MEGA RARITIES! We enjoyed the later in late August when a juvenile Brown Booby, a bird common in the Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico, landed at Nimisila Reservoir in Summit County. First seen and documented in eBird on August 25 by Henry Trimpe, this bird attracted literally thousands of birders from several states to see a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ bird. This is the first ever reported sighting in Ohio and was covered by newspapers, radio stations and TV news. It was also reported on more than 500 eBird checklists (yes, I counted them)!

The bird is assumed to have arrived on the remnants of a recent hurricane, a weather event that often takes birds far from their normal range. That same weather system might also be responsible for the Brown Pelican that is still being reported off the Cleveland lakefront.

One of the unusual characteristics of
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First Year Bluebird Trail at Hach-Otis Sanctuary

Early this past spring, I established two birding/walking trails at Hach-Otis’s Lillich meadows.

I had been thinking about establishing a bluebird trail there since bluebirds were already present in the adjacent old orchard. I have built many bird houses over the years, from purple martin houses to wren houses and most everything else in between, so during the winter I built a half dozen bluebird houses. After some research, I chose a



“Peterson” bluebird house with skylight. Photo: J. Lillich

design known as a Peterson house. I modified the design based on my own experiences.

In late April, Carol and I put out the first five houses and had immediate occupants. We noted bluebirds, tree swallows, chickadees, and unfortunately house sparrows. House sparrows will drive out bluebirds. I installed a skylight in that house and as if by magic the sparrows were gone and
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From the Nest...

We are all adapting and evolving during this unusual time. We are all learning new ways of doing the things that we need to do and the things that we like to do.

I give a huge thank you to Matt Valencic for his leadership in launching our endeavors into cyberspace! And I



am also very grateful to his talented and enthusiastic team on the Education Committee.

Matt very successfully put our increasingly popular Bird Quest event online via the Zoom platform.

Matt has also moved our Backyard Naturalist Speaker Series online. Dr. Sarah Mabey was our inaugural speaker, presenting an extremely interesting session on the latest in bird migration in

September. These presentations will continue monthly on the 3rd Thursday of each month at 7:00. Everyone is welcome to attend.

Hopefully we will be able to resume normal activities next year. If you have any ideas on how we can maintain contact with our membership and continue to satisfy our mission please let us know.

—Jim Tomko, President

Bird Quest revisited...



Team "Bird Brains" didn't lack for enthusiasm!

Hello,

We were first time birders participating in Bird Quest this year. It was a ton of fun for our family and we will definitely be back next year!

Sincerely,

Team Fly'n See Quest



Team "South Franklin Francolins" kept safety in mind.

*Editor's note:
Please visit our
website and click
on Bird Quest for
more photos!*

This was our first Bird Quest. We had six boys ages 4-12 and three adults hiking along Punderson Lake and it was fun to see them passing around the binoculars, telling each other to be quiet and see them pulling out bird books, cards to try to identify what they were seeing. We are definitely in for next year!
Deborah Downey

"Big" Quest

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Quest: more teams (40) and participants (167) than ever before. The most warbler species seen by one team (18 – Buster's Bird Nerds). The most overall species seen by one team (108 – Hangry Birders). Even the #3 team in overall species found 80 species, surpassing last year's winning total of 76! Three teams found a merlin (all at different locations) and one team spotted a Northern bobwhite (quail). And, ironically, team "Where's the darn CONW?" found a Connecticut warbler (CONW) and had a picture to prove it!

Mother Nature provided stellar weather for friends and families to enjoy the outdoors across NE Ohio. Let's hope for the same weather next year (Sept. 10-11, 2021) and pray that we can have the pandemic behind us.

—The Bird Quest Team

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Virginia Opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*)

A friend of mine was removing the tarp from his wood pile and came face to face with a face that only a mother (or another of its kind) could love.

Actually, when you get used to them, the opossum is not so homely. It has thin, hairless black ears, a white face and a naked, scaled tail with a gray body the size of a large house cat. In the south there are darker forms with some almost black and some more cinnamon.

Being North America's most primitive mammal and our only marsupial, it has some very unique characteristics. Opossums have more teeth (50 total) than any other North American mammal. They have a prehensile tail and can hang by their tail for short periods. They have a clawless, opposable thumb on their hind foot which helps in climbing. They have one of the shortest gestation periods of any of our mammals at 8-14 days. When the tiny, bumblebee-sized embryos are born, they must climb through the mother's fur and make their way into her fur-lined abdominal pouch where they spend the next two months growing and developing. By two months of age they can sometimes be seen riding on their mother's back learning the ways of their world.

They have adapted well to human habitation taking advantage of our food waste, but primarily eat a variety of small mammal pests such as mice and voles. They also consume fruit, vegetables, insects, grubs, worms, ticks and carrion.

We are approaching the northern limits of their range and often, after a harsh winter, they will be missing part of their tail or ears due to frostbite. Next time you see an opossum, take a second thought about the good they do as part of nature's clean-up crew and controlling pests for us.

—Jim Tomko

Bluebird Trail at Hach-Otis

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bluebirds moved in. Over the early summer I built five more houses, which Carol and I installed in mid-summer.

You can see in the photo (page 1) that I added an extension to the entrance hole. This was done to make it more difficult for predators to reach around inside the house. I also added "Tangle Foot" to each mounting post.

We discovered the chickadee nest was invaded by ants. One adult chickadee perished on the nest covered with ants. Two volunteers monitored the houses and noted no further casualties.

Meanwhile a pair of barn swallows built a nest on the motion detector light under the eave on the front of the barn. Carol and I watched daily. We thought this location was not the most secure, but there they were. The pair had four eggs in the nest. Three had hatched when a severe storm blew through.

We found the nest about fifteen feet away with one surviving chick on the ground. Carol held the



Barn swallow nesting on motion detector light and checking out the "new" nest in berry basket.
Photo: J. Lillich

survivor in her hands while I went for supplies. Returning, I fastened a one-quart berry basket to the light, fashioned a nest from dry grasses and placed the chick in the new nest.

As we watched from a distance, the parents made numerous approaches, coming closer each time. After almost three hours they finally landed and resumed feeding their lone chick. Four days later we were present when the chick fledged.

With hopes for next year, I built and placed six nesting platforms under the eaves of the barn. We will let you know how that works out.

—John Lillich

Did you know?

Opossums can be the scourge of a horse owner. They are known to carry a protozoan parasite that causes Equine Protozoal Myeloencephalitis. Many horses in our country show antibodies to this parasite and are protected but some infected horses will have severe and permanent damage to their central nervous system.

—Jim Tomko

The House Wren online

Would you like to receive this newsletter in color? Would you like to receive it sooner? You can do both by sharing your email address with us! Go to www.clevelandaudubon.org and select Docs/Info and then Newsletters to sign up. See the people, birds and other wildlife in vivid color and know that you are conserving paper and postage. We think you will get hooked!

—Editor

Booby

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this bird was its tolerance for human activity. It had a favorite shoreline perch near a parking lot, making it easy for people to walk to the lake and view it. People took to kayaks and canoes for closer looks and some even



Birders looking for the brown booby sighted at Nimisila Reservoir.

Photo: G. Traveny

waded into the lake for pictures (including yours truly). For all this activity the bird did not seem upset as it preened, looked around and rested on its perch. Some were concerned for its health, but local bird rehabbers saw the bird and said it looked healthy and was doing well. Some folks were fortunate to see it make spectacular dives into the lake for fish.

Unfortunately, after 10 days of excitement, evidence was found that a predator had taken the bird. A sad, though natural ending to the story. Many wonderful memories were created for birders who first studied (probably on www.allaboutbirds.org) then drove long distances to see a bird they probably never could have seen otherwise. And the birding community gathered safely in great numbers, something we missed in this pandemic year.

—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday Series

October 15 7:00pm

"Feeding birds and others in your own backyard"

Via Zoom®

This presentation is built on over 70 years of bird feeding experience. It contains ideas and information for beginners and tips for established feeders. Join John Lillich as he covers subjects such as feeder locations, types of feeders, what to feed, feeder maintenance and what you can expect to attract, plus a few stories that will warm your heart.

To register go to www.clevelandaudubon.org and look under EVENTS. Limited number of spaces available.

DATED MAIL

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A Wry Smile



When you're dead, you don't know you're dead. The pain is only felt by others.

The same thing happens when you're stupid.

An Audubon Moment

On a Tuesday in late August, I made my first pilgrimage to an unbelievable avian phenomenon. It is the autumn migration staging of purple martins at Lake Nimisila at Portage Lakes State Park.

For a number of years, thousands of purple martins congregate for their evening roost in the cattails of this lake prior to migrating south for the winter. Each year there have been more and more, reminiscent of sandhill cranes on the Platte River in Nebraska. Some experts have estimated in excess of 30 thousand birds roosting overnight. It was an awe-inspiring sight topped off with a backdrop of a spectacular sunset across the lake.

While watching the martins come in just before twilight, I noted an unusually shaped bird fly right by parallel to the shoreline and only a few yards from shore. It reminded me of a large kingfisher but with a longer neck and tail. Plus, the bill was the wrong shape.

I convinced myself that the fading light, reflections and shadows were playing tricks on me and uncomfortably



Brown booby

Photo: M. Valencic

listed it as a belted kingfisher.

The next day birders who had been there earlier in the evening had posted photos of this odd bird on the internet sites, clearly identifying it as a juvenile brown booby. This was an unexpected first record for Ohio since the closest colonies are in the Dry Tortugas and other islands south of the Florida coast.

Have you ever heard the idiom "if you hear hoofbeats, think horses not zebras"? Well, sometimes it is a zebra!

Always get a good look before you settle on an ID because it might be you that turns up a rarity.

—Jim Tomko