



The HOUSE WR

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland



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December, 2020

Put ASGC on your gift list

It is our generous members that allow us to continue to fulfill our mission of nature education and preservation. We feel it is of the utmost importance to increase our understanding and appreciation of our natural world for our own health and the health of all creatures who share this world with us.

As with many organizations, we have had to change our activity schedule and methods due to the Covid 19 pandemic. But we have persevered thanks to the imagination and ingenuity of our dedicated trustees. Our BirdQuest fall migration contest was the biggest ever and culminated with a well-attended virtual celebration. We have

activated our speaker's bureau to do monthly nature programs via the "Zoom" platform on the third Thursday evening of each month. The Hach-Otis Sanctuary addition is being improved and developed to encourage native flora and fauna. Trail improvements and an observation deck are being constructed at the Novak Sanctuary along with plans for trail improvements in the Aurora and Molnar Sanctuaries. We plan to continue our support of "Buster's Bird Nerds", an enthusiastic inner-city youth birding group, with their exploration of nature and birding throughout the city including field trips to other areas.

These and other activities depend on
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ID Challenge: Swans

Trumpeter, Mute & Tundra

At a distance, these swans look pretty much the same. Adults are large and white while their first-winter juveniles are large and dingy gray/brown. Adults are similar in length (52" - 60"), weight (15# - 23#) and wingspan (52" - 60"). Practically speaking, you cannot differentiate them on size if you only see one of them. Identification really comes down to two criteria: voice and bill shape/color.

Trumpeters have a strong, bugle-like honking. I think it sounds like a student learning to play the trumpet, hitting notes but not really playing anything recognizable (I had a son who played trumpet in middle school!)

Tundra calls are higher pitched and sound more like 'klooo' or 'kwooo'. In migratory flight they can be heard at a great distance. Mute swans don't make any honking sounds, just grunts and growls.

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Irruption year 2020!

As if 2020 was not already an incredible enough birding year, we are finishing with some Canadian specialties - pine siskins, common redpoll and evening grosbeaks! We don't see these species in NE Ohio every year, so this is very exciting, especially the widespread presence of evening grosbeaks. Why? Two reasons: the spruce budworm was abundant in Quebec region this year, providing birds with unlimited food for their babies, and the conifer cone crop in eastern Canada is poor to fair, causing birds to travel great distances to find winter food (from the Finch Research Network, forecast for 2020).

Pine siskins feeding on alder cones.
Photo: M. Valencic



Pine siskins are literally being seen everywhere, often in flocks of 50 to 100! They seek out alder trees, often found

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From the Nest...



This time of year brings to mind the long-standing tradition of the Christmas Bird count. 120 years ago, New York ornithologist, Frank Chapman, converted the Christmas bird hunt to a bird count. Each year many chapters of the National Audubon Society participate and collaborate by sharing

their bird census results with National Audubon. This year National Audubon is encouraging us to count our feathered friends without gathering in groups, with tabulation done remotely at each chapter's discretion. Please help out if you can safely join in on one of these counts. It is amazing what unusual species are detected or how many of the common species that are here.

I would like to remind you also that this is the time of our annual appeal and by now you have likely received our letter of request. Remember that this is the only time that we ask for your donation and your gift stays 100 percent local for the operation of this chapter alone. My sincere thank you for including us among the other donations you make during the holiday season.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Irruption 2020

(Continued from page 1)

around lakes, and will hang upside down while eating seeds from the cones. In your backyard they seek thistle seed (nyger seed) in tube feeders.

Common redpolls have been following the siskin flocks and will also come to thistle feeders. Look carefully for their red caps and a blush of red across the breast. They are about the same size and shape as pine siskins, making them hard to separate.

Evening grosbeaks have been seen extensively in the last 30 days at 18 Lake Erie hotspots and over 30 backyard feeders (eBird species search). These heavy-beaked birds are looking for berries and fruit like crab apples, but easily come to platform feeders containing sunflower seed. Keep watch in fields that have trees laden with fruit.

Unfortunately, the Finch Research Report suggests that red and white-wing crossbills tend to move east or west when local seed crops are insufficient. But keep an eye on spruce and pine trees that have visible cones near the top.

You might get lucky!

—Matt Valencic



Common redpolls at a thistle feeder.

Photo: M. Valencic

Did you know?

Evening grosbeak flocks are often followed by flocks of small finches such as pine siskins and redpolls because they are able to glean crumbs and particles of large tough seeds that are cracked open by the powerful bills of the evening grosbeaks.

—Jim Tomko

Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

Evening

Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*)

I hope you experience the gasp of astonishment while a flock of evening grosbeaks settle in for a gorging session at your feeder. If you see some huge “goldfinches” at your sunflower seed platform feeder you may be hosting these northern visitors. Every few years there is a southward irruption of these birds when their winter food source of conifer seeds or alder seeds fail.

The males have a yellow body with a dark brown to black head featuring a bright yellow eyebrow stripe and an enormous pale white to greenish-white bill. They have a black tail and wings with a large white patch. Those bills are just made for crushing the seeds which are too large for the smaller finches.

Yes, these are large finches and are not as closely related to grosbeaks even though their name includes the word “grosbeak”. Our other grosbeaks are in the family cardinalidae with cardinals and grosbeaks while the evening grosbeak is in the family fringillidae which includes goldfinches, house finches, house sparrows, red polls, and pine siskins.

They nest in conifer and mixed deciduous/conifer forests of Canada and the far northern United States following the high-altitude climate of the western mountains all the way to Mexico. Females build the flimsy nest and lay two to five blue-green eggs with purple splotches which she incubates for 12-14 days.

They feed their young innumerable insects and insect larva including great numbers of the devastating spruce bud worm, helping to keep them in check. Those large bills can even handle food items as small and delicate as aphids. They are hearty insect eaters all summer but winter fare turns to seeds, fruit and buds. Keep your eye on those feeders because this is an irruptive year for the nomadic evening grosbeaks.

—Jim Tomko

Gift List

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donations above and beyond the basic membership contribution. Once and only once a year we look to our membership for financial help allowing us to accomplish our goals. Our annual appeal involves just this chapter and all gifts will benefit the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland chapter exclusively.

We are an all-volunteer organization with no paid employees, and every penny contributed goes toward achieving our purpose. Our chapter is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization so all donations are tax deductible.

Please consider us as a recipient of your charitable donations. Rest assured that we will make careful and thoughtful use of your generosity.

Please return this form and your tax-deductible donation to:

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

P.O. Box 391037

Solon, OH 44139

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Please contact me about volunteer opportunities.



Trumpeter



Mute

Photos: M. Valencic



Tundra

ID Challenge

(Continued from page 1)

The bill is where you really make your ID. Adult mute swans are unique with a deep orange bill and large knob on top. Trumpeters and tundras have black bills without a knob.

The trumpeter bill is noticeably longer than the tundra, and the base, from the eye to gape, is almost a straight line. Where the bill meets the eye, it

appears the bill encompasses the entire diameter of the eye. Finally, if you can see between the eyes, the base of the bill appears to come to a point between their eyes.

Tundra bills usually have some amount of yellow on the lores, right in front of the eye. (trumpeter bills have no yellow). The base of the tundra bill, from the eye to the gape, is straight then takes an abrupt turn downward, like a

45° angle. The bill appears to narrow to a point just before it reaches the eye, and between the bird's eyes the base is rounded.

A lot to remember, but a good reason to get out in December and find some migrating flocks of tundra swans on inland lakes and study them.

Trumpeters and mute swans tend to be on smaller ponds in isolated areas. Do a species search in eBird to learn where they are being seen near you. Check accompanying note for instructions on doing a species search.

—Matt Valencic

(Reference: The Sibley Guide to Birds, Copyright 2000)

eBird Tutorial: Species search

Go to www.ebird.org

- Click on EXPLORE then click on SPECIES MAPS
- Enter your species name (Mute Swan) then enter a location (Cleveland, OH)
- Move the map around with your mouse and find RED markers (sightings within last 30 days)
- Click on a marker to see recent sightings at that location
- Click on the date to view the eBird checklist for that sighting

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday Series

December 17 7:00pm

"Owls of Ohio"

Via Zoom®

Twelve species of owls have been spotted in Ohio. Several are residents, some are migrants, and a few are accidental visitors. Interesting owl trivia and some tips on when, where and how to spot owls will be shared.

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

Fungi

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Unlike plants, fungi do not photosynthesize. Many plants are capable of producing wood, but even "woody mushrooms" cannot produce wood; their "woodiness" is attributable to chitin.

Animals and fungi share some significant similarities including chitin production (lobster shell and shrimp peel are chitin), and the inability to photosynthesize. But fungi cannot move and do not have a mouth at any phase of their development.

Not all molds are fungi. Slime molds move in their aggregation phase. They are classified as proctocistans and may be related to amoebas, or flagellated protozoa similar to the gut organisms of termites.

What is a mushroom?

A mushroom is a fungus that grows on an organic medium, absorbs nutrition through strands of chitinous (never woody) mycelium called hyphae, occurs in many shapes, colors, textures and sizes, needs lots of moisture and grows with or without sunlight. There are thousands of species worldwide, all are beautiful to see and many are very good to eat providing minerals, micronutrients and vitamins.

—Bob Bartolotta

DATED MAIL

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To be or not to be—fungi

What are fungi?

Fungi are mostly multicellular organisms with rigid cell walls (like plants), often with more than one nucleus per cell. Fungi absorb their nutrition and there are no photosynthetic fungi. Fungi are incapable of movement at all stages of their life cycle. Their mycelial body (spongy or thread-like) is composed of hyphal filaments, capable of producing chitin but never wood. Included are mushrooms, yeasts, molds, water molds, wilts, rusts, anthracnoses, mildews, lichens and medical conditions like yeast infections, ringworm and athlete’s foot.



Shelf fungi

Photo: M. Valencic

Uses and functions of fungi include but are not limited to decomposition of organic material, fermentation, and food for animals including humans. They form mycorrhizal relationships with almost every plant and yield antibiotic compounds that humans use in defense of bacterial infections.

What are not fungi?

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A Wry Smile



During the middle ages they celebrated the end of the plague with wine and orgies. Does anyone know if there is anything planned when this one ends?

Website photo contest

You’re invited to submit your photos representing the best of the **winter** season from one or more of our sanctuaries. The winning photo will be featured on our website’s homepage and the winner will receive a \$10 Subway gift card. Winter pictures accepted until **January 7**. Check www.clevelandaudubon.org for full contest information.

Missed the winter deadline? We’re having another contest for spring! So get out those cameras and click away!