



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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Natural Areas & Preserves' 2020 newsletter features Hach-Otis

In 1970, Ohio's Natural Areas Act enabled the creation of Ohio's nature preserve system. Seven years later, at ASGC's request, our 81-acre Hach-Otis Sanctuary became the 27th expanse to be dedicated as a State Nature Preserve. In the 1990s, ASGC's Aurora Sanctuary and Blanche Katherine Novak Sanctuary became dedicated preserves.



Hach-Otis Sanctuary

Photo: J. Lillich

In March, 2017, ASGC completed a seven-year collaboration with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy to

add 46 acres to the Hach-Otis Sanctuary. Almost immediately we began the process of having these additional acres
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**Trail work needed
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Have you noticed?

First Energy is putting a power line through Aurora which will follow the railroad tracks. Part of it will border the Audubon Sanctuary. There is a right-of-way of up to 60 feet on either side of the tracks and workers have started clearing brush, including along the sanctuary's border. Our preserve officer from ODNR, Adam Wohlever, has said that there is nothing he can do unless they cross that 60-foot right-of-way.

A First Energy representative has indicated to Jim Tomko (ASGC President) they might be willing to put an osprey platform on one of the new utility poles. That's the good news. When Jim asked about safe-guarding eagles who may hit wires when they spread their wings (which happened to an eagle near the Hach-Otis Sanctuary), the representative said they might hang the wires farther apart but would deal with that if or when they needed to.

Another concern is the steep slope from the tracks down to Fulton Pond. FE
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Special spring sparrows

April is our best opportunity to see fox sparrows and vesper sparrows as they migrate north to their breeding grounds. When they pass through NE Ohio again in October and November, vegetation will be dense, and they will be harder to find.

At a glance, all sparrows look similar (LBJs – little brown jobs!) but upon closer inspection you will find some have streaks on their breast and others don't. Fox and vesper sparrows have
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Vesper sparrow

Photo: M. Valencic

From the Nest...

Spring is finally here and with it the excitement of migration!

During migration unusual species may show up anywhere. My friend, Education Committee Chairman, and "House Wren" contributor, Matt Valencic, alerted me to a raft of 11 long-tailed ducks on Ladue Reservoir. I have



not seen long-tailed ducks in three or four years as they are quite rare finds in Ohio. These guys were singing loudly and jubilantly, making it easy to hear them from shore.

If you keep your eyes and ears open, there will be special surprises and much delight at your discoveries. We are hoping to re-start our monthly field trips this summer but don't let that date hold

you back from enjoying the emerging wildflowers and avian arrivals.

Stay tuned to our website for updates on these and other events as the year progresses.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Hach-Otis

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dedicated as nature preserve. This process was completed last year and our 127-acre Hach-Otis Sanctuary is fully protected by Ohio's Natural Areas Act.

Personally, I feel a great deal of satisfaction with having this completed. I have been working on adding 25 of the 46 acres for over 40 years.

Natural Areas & Preserves newsletter comments, "With its mature deciduous forests and dramatic, quality scenic bluffs overlooking the Chagrin State Scenic River, Hach-Otis became Ohio's first bird sanctuary in 1944. Now many decades later, it protects quality habitat for Ohio's rich diversity of birds. Located in Lake County, it is owned and managed by the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland."

The newsletter goes on to report two

other additions to the SNP system. Acreage was added to Eagle Creek SNP and a new SNP, Donald G. Brinkhaven Oak Barrens SNP in Holmes County is owned and managed by the Killbuck Watershed Land Trust.

This spring we plan to collaborate with ODNR's DNAP to install four, fenced, 625-square foot deer exclusion areas. Two areas will be at Hach-Otis and two at Blanche Katherine Novak Sanctuaries. The purpose of these fenced in areas will be to observe what vegetation will recover when protected from white tail deer browsing. This project will take several years.

When you visit Hach-Otis and Novak sanctuaries, be sure to watch for them. The plan is to place them near walking trails.

—John Lillich

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Poliptila caerulea*)

Who is doing all that complaining? That high pitched buzzy speeeez and szeeee. Some of us can barely hear it but those younger ears hear it plainly.

When you look up toward the sound you see a small (four-and-a-half-inch) bird with an unusually long tail and a bill that seems a bit too long too! It has grayish white underparts and a blue-gray

upper half. The black tail has white outer tail feathers as in the form of juncos. There is a strikingly bright white eye ring that makes the dark eye strongly stand out. Breeding males have a dark forehead and a black eyebrow that extends from the bill to behind the eye.

These little insect eaters are real dynamos, flitting from branch to branch and nabbing an insect or spider. They are quite acrobatic as they dart through the air flycatcher-style or hunt along a branch creeper-style.

They construct a small cup-shaped nest on a branch about halfway to the trunk of a tree up to 70 feet high. It's made of plant fibers and bark chips camouflaged with lichens and lined with grasses, hair and feathers all bound together with spider webs. These bold little birds are not afraid to mob larger birds near their nest, even the dangerous screech owl.

Blue-gray gnatcatchers are among our earliest insectivorous birds to arrive in the spring. They choose deciduous woodlands especially along creeks, streams, and ponds.

You may have some join you soon in your own backyard!

—Jim Tomko

Sparrows

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streaks as do our year-round and very abundant song sparrows. Get to know the song sparrow and its songs and all other sparrows will stand out as 'different' when you see them.

Vesper sparrows prefer grasslands and fields and are often found in short grass at the edge of fields. At many parks I see them foraging in the mowed grass that separates paths and parking lots from the meadow. Other sparrows forage there as well, but your initial impression will be a grayish bird with a complete white eye ring. The streaks on its breast are finer than the song sparrow. When it flies notice its white outer tail feathers, similar to a junco. It sings late in the evening, hence its name, but also sings early in the morning.

Fox sparrows can be found in a variety of habitats during migration, even under bird feeders. I often see them on the ground in scrubby woods as I walk along the edge of a field/forest.

Get to know their song as you will often hear that unique halting song



Fox sparrow

Photo: M. Valencic

before you see them. Your first impression is a chunky sparrow, reddish-brown in color with gray on its face and coarse streaks and 'arrow points' on its breast. The bill is yellow with some black. It forages with a 'double scratch' technique, jumping forward then scratching backward in a quick movement.

Now you have two more reasons to go birding today!

—Matt Valencic

Did you know?

Some researchers believe that as blue-gray gnatcatchers hunt insects they rapidly and repeatedly spread their tail. This flashes their white outer tail-feathers which startles their concealed prey out into the open for easier capture.

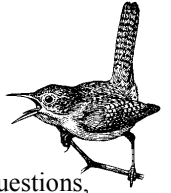
—Jim Tomko



Trail volunteers needed

Audubon's Aurora Sanctuary trail is closed temporarily for bridge repair. If you are interested in joining a Trail Crew in Aurora this spring or summer, please email info@clevelandaudubon.org, subject line "Trail Crew." If you have volunteered to work in the sanctuaries and you think you're already on our volunteer list, please contact us again. No experience necessary, but please indicate if you have any skills or experience in carpentry, building or repairing trails, or a similar skill set. Also let us know your availability, ie weekends only, weekdays or evenings. The Sanctuary Committee will be putting together work crews and schedules soon.

The Squawk



Send your comments, questions,
or complaints to
info@clevelandaudubon.org



Aurora Sanctuary's trails and bridges are in desperate need of repair.

Photos: M. Demyan

Upcoming Events

Third Thursday Series

April 15 7:00pm
"Lights Out Cleveland"
Via Zoom®

Bird-building collisions are a significant source of bird mortality, especially during spring and fall migration. Dr. Jones will update us on the progress being made to reduce crashes, and how each of us can become part of the solution. In the second half of his talk, he updates us on how technology is helping identify new songbird hybrids being discovered right here in northern Ohio.

Presented by Dr. Andy Jones

May 20 7:00pm
"Summer Birds of NE Ohio"
Via Zoom®

Did you know that more than 50 species of birds travel hundreds, even thousands, of miles each spring just to raise a family in NE Ohio? This presentation showcases 50 species of summer visitors through 180 photographs of adult birds, babies, nests and habitats. Hear songs and calls, some sweet and musical like the yellow warbler and others harsh like the green heron, and learn many interesting anecdotes about individual species.

Presented by Matt Valencic

Visit www.clevelandaudubon.org to register for these programs.

Aurora Sanctuary

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will be using herbicides to control the vegetation under the wires, which risks polluting a high quality wetland where we have eagles, beavers, otters and some osprey. FE has assured Jim they will be using proper methods to preserve those wetlands, but please help us in monitoring this ongoing project. If you see something you don't think should be happening, please let us know at info@clevelandaudubon.org.

From the Minutes, BOT meeting,
January 26, 2021

Fulton Pond



DATED MAIL

AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)
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Please recycle this newsletter

A Wry Smile



Accept the fact that some days you're the pigeon, and some days you're the statue!

An Audubon Moment

Rude awakening

The other night I was awakened to some commotion outside in my driveway. There have been some car break-ins in my neighborhood recently which made me concerned for my Jeep. As I made my way to the window, I began to hear some very unusual animal sounds. I recognized part of the sound as a red fox vocalization. But the other was unearthly. I thought it was another fox and that one of them was in heat. As I looked out one fox was poised at the edge of the driveway looking toward my Jeep. Then there were more sounds of bumping, thumping and wailing.

My wife Joan said she thought they were the sounds of a cat fight. All of a sudden, a rather large house cat emerged at rocket speed with its tail flared almost as large as a fox tail. The cat zoomed by the fox with the fox in hot pursuit.

I don't know what the outcome was or what either's intentions were. But it reaffirmed my strong belief that house cats should be just that—in the house—keeping them safe and our small songbirds safe also.

—Jim Tomko

Editor's note: Visit abcbirds.org/catio-solutions-cats/ for information on keeping your cat safe and healthy indoors.

Website photo contest

You're invited to submit your photos representing the best of the **spring** 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. Spring pictures accepted until **May 15th**.

Check www.clevelandaudubon.org for full contest information. So get out those cameras and click away!