



# The HOUSE WREN

## Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org)

April, 2023

### Forestry grinder used at Novak Sanctuary

When you visit the Novak Sanctuary and see lots of bare ground and tread marks, not to worry. These are signs of progress in the ongoing fight against invasive buckthorn.



Not looking its best: Novak Sanctuary after the grinder.

Photo: J. Tomko

Last year the Trail Crew removed a lot of buckthorn in the open areas of the fields, using loppers, chainsaws and other tools to cut the trees. Their work made a huge impact, but the buckthorn in hedgerows and edges of fields is so dense that it's beyond our physical ability to tackle. The best way to efficiently remove that dense growth is using a forestry grinder,

an awesome tool attached to the front of a skid steer that grinds everything in its path to mulch! At the January meeting, the Board of Trustees approved a request from the Sanctuary Committee to rent a forestry grinder for Novak.

The Novak Sanctuary is a State Nature Preserve, so we consulted with our partners at ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP) before moving forward. They were pleased with our plans and said

(Continued on page 2)

### Centennial Celebration!

**When:** June 3, 2023

**Where:** Lake Farmpark, 8800 Euclid-Chardon Road, Kirtland, OH

Transportation will be provided from the guest center (parking lot) up to the Red Machinery Barn and back.

**Schedule:**

3pm — Nature Walk

4pm — Social Hour

5pm — Annual Meeting and Awards

6pm — Dinner

7pm — Al Batt, Guest Speaker

**Cost:** \$40 per person

Please send your reservation with name, number attending, and payment to our Solon address. Include an email or phone number in case we need to contact you. Reservations need to be received by Monday, May 22. Seating is limited.

Get your reservations in early and help us celebrate 100 years of conservation!

### Arizona in winter...? (silly question!)

It started with a December text from our friend Kelly: "I have to work a tradeshow in Phoenix the end of February. You guys want to go birding in Arizona when I'm done?" Of course, we want to go birding in Arizona! Check the calendars. Three of us, Dave, John and me, could join her for 5 ½ days of birding. Let the planning begin.

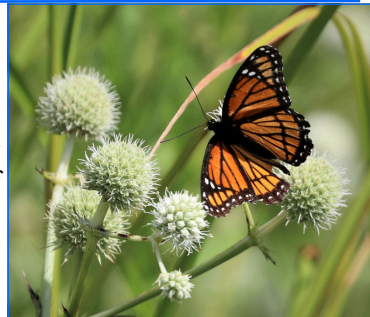
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### Creating a pollinator garden

Plant sales have started, and some of us will start seeds indoors or are trying "winter seeding" outside. How will we decide which flowers, shrubs and trees will best help us create the lively pollinator-filled garden we hope to have this year? And what if we're first on the street, as I will be, in planting a pollinator strip! What will the neighbors think?

If you've heard that pollinator strips are a tall weedy mess – they certainly can be – and don't want that for your yard, don't despair. Careful plant and variety choice is key to having the pollinators you hope to attract as well as a neat and beautiful garden along your tree

lawn. There are many types of insects, bees and butterflies that may land in your garden need a wide variety of flowers, shrubs and trees as food sources.



Viceroy on rattlesnake master plant. Photo: M. Valencia

(Continued on page 2)

### From the Nest...



Our chapter is 100 years old this year! We are planning a centennial celebration for Saturday June 3<sup>rd</sup>. We have arranged for Al Batt, a nationally known speaker, author, storyteller, humorist and birdwatcher to be our keynote speaker. You may recognize his name from *Birdwatchers Digest* or his book, *A Life Gone to the Birds*. I hope you will be

able to join us for the celebration and Al's always entertaining style.

Speaking of anniversaries, this is the 90<sup>th</sup> year of the Annual Series of Spring Birdwalks. It's a great way to sharpen your skills and pick up new tips and techniques. These walks are sponsored by your Audubon chapter in addition to the Cleveland Museum of Natural His-

tory along with several park districts and other nature organizations.

Spring is the quintessential season to get out and absorb the astounding changes Mother Nature provides!

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko  
President, ASGC

## Forestry grinder

(Continued from page 1)

they employ similar techniques at many other DNAP properties around Ohio.

This is not new concept to ASGC. Several years ago we rented a forestry grinder to tackle the buckthorn at the Molnar Sanctuary with good results. Ken Kresina, a long-time ASGC volunteer and former heavy equipment operator, did the work back then and is doing the work again this year. He can finesse the fearsome device around trees and vegetation we want to save, while removing the buckthorn and other invasives down to the ground. Even though



Forestry grinder turns everything into mulch!

Photo: J. Tomko

the ground is wet, the tracked vehicle is 'gentler' on the soil than tractor wheels.

There is a tremendous 'seed bank' in the soil being disturbed, so all that bare ground will sprout new vegetation throughout the spring and summer. Some of it will be buckthorn which will be sprayed with herbicide at the end of the growing season, probably in September.

We will see the results of these efforts in 2024.

—Matt Valencic

## Pollinator garden

(Continued from page 1)

So if you do nothing else this spring, plant more flowers. Flowers of any type will serve as a food source for someone. According to Dr. Harlan Patch of the Penn State Arboretum, flowers of different shape, color and height all attract different pollinators as pollinators have very specific needs. And we can carefully plan to make our gardens beautiful and enticing.

From research done by Dr. Patch's doctoral students, he has confirmed that insects are very particular!

Here are the five points Dr. Patch suggests can guide our plant choice:

1. The identity of the plant matters. As you research plants to add, be sure to use the Latin plant names to en-

sure that the plant you choose is the one you mean to add and not a similar cultivar.

2. High coverage of your ground will create a more pleasing and also more productive pollinator garden.
3. Plant a majority of native plants.
4. Plant community-based designs – vertical layers of compatible species.
5. Consider your landscape's context. What habitat is nearby? What is already attracted to your area?

Curious to see this in practice? Plan a field trip this summer to the new Bird and Pollinator Garden in the Penn State Arboretum. Read more at [arboretum.psu.edu](http://arboretum.psu.edu).

—Kathryn Craig

## Warblers

(Continued from page 4)

gray and yellow. Look for the combination of bright yellow patches on either side of the breast and the 'yellow rump' (upper tail coverts) to separate it from other warblers with yellow upper tail coverts (palm, magnolia and Cape May).

To get ready for the rest of the spring warblers, register on our website for the FREE Zoom presentation of Warbler Warm-Up on April 20<sup>th</sup>.

—Matt Valencic



Yellow-rumped warbler

Photo: M. Valencic

## Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



## Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*)

Who is that delightful singer out under that dense shrub? He seems to be singing almost every phrase in a doublet.

Brown thrashers are in the "mimic" family of birds (Mimidae) of which we have three members in Ohio. The Northern mockingbird, the gray catbird, and the brown thrasher are all in the same family and all are excellent mimics. The key is mockingbirds sing phrases in triplets, brown thrashers in doublets, and catbirds in single phrases.

Brown thrashers can vocalize over 1,100 distinct songs which makes them one of the North American champions of song repertoire! Brown thrashers are the only one of the three species of Mimidae that are in a considerable population decline. Because brown thrashers seem to be more particular about their brushy habitat, they are losing nesting areas as eastern forests regain ground and fence-rows are lost.

These are beautiful, long, streamlined birds at almost a foot in length. They have reddish-brown upper parts with pale, heavily-streaked under parts and a long rufous tail. They have amazing orange-yellow jewel-like eyes and a dark down-curved bill.

The nest is a well woven cup of grass, rootlets, twigs and leaves lined with very fine grasses and placed on the ground or low in a shrub at the edge of an overgrown field or meadow. Up to four speckled, pale bluish-white eggs are laid.

They feed on many invertebrates such as insects, spiders, and ticks. They will also take worms and small amphibians. The diet is diversified with some seeds, grains, and berries.

So, when you hear a Chuck-will's-widow calling from under your shrub around here, think again. It is likely our local mimic the brown thrasher!

—Jim Tomko

## Spring bird walk series for 2023

This is one of the oldest community science partnerships between Northeast Ohio park systems, Audubon chapters, and other organizations now in its 90th year. Walks are led by experienced birders and will be held on **Sundays, April 16, 23 and 30, and May 7, 14 and 21 at 7:30am** unless otherwise noted. See the full list of walks on our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org) under Birding.



## In case you missed it

“Waterfowl Wander” March 11th

The waterfowl wander field trip provided wonderful views of 13 species of ducks, two species of swans, one species of goose, two species of grebes and one sandhill crane!

Those drakes were jaw-dropping gorgeous and some were beginning to court the females. The grebes were still in mostly winter plumage but we could see that they were changing into their more stunning breeding plumage.

The weather was cooperative for birding but not for fishing and therefore the rafts of ducks were not getting flushed by eager anglers.

By now most of the migrants are north of us on their nesting grounds. There are always some stragglers.

Please keep your eyes on the ponds, lakes and rivers for spectacular sightings.

—Jim Tomko

## Arizona birding

(Continued from page 1)

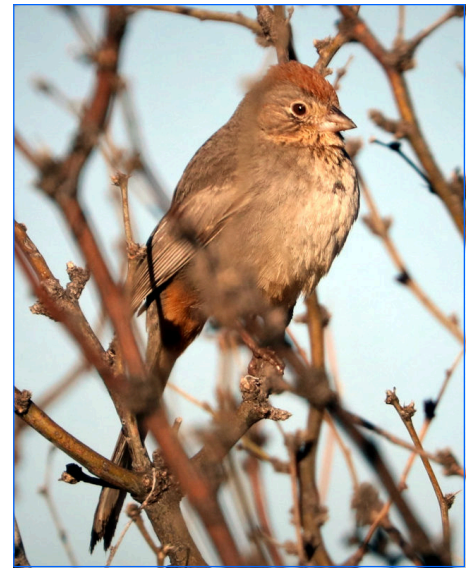
Dave loves road trips and would drive his wife’s SUV, taking a week to get to Phoenix. John and I would fly out Sunday morning and Dave and Kelly would pick us up at noon. We rented a four-bedroom house south of Tucson.

I subscribed to eBird Rare Bird Alerts for the counties we were likely to bird. The strategy was to ‘chase’ rarities across the region and pick up lots of other birds along the way, which proved very effective. Over the following weeks these alerts, plus Tucson Audubon’s excellent book, *Finding Birds in S.E. Arizona*, helped us get acquainted with the birds and locations across S.E. Arizona. I compiled all the data by county and this became our source material for daily planning once we arrived.

Sunday started with a three-hour plane delay, but Kelly had a Western screech owl located near Scottsdale, so

with three hours of daylight left we headed there. We found 28 species (including Gamble’s quail, vermilion flycatcher, Say’s and black phoebe, Anna’s hummingbird, and lots of ducks) before finding the owl in the hole of a Saguaro cactus. My first ‘lifer’ of the trip. John had never been to Arizona, so he came away with nine lifers. Almost dark so we grabbed a bite to eat at a nearby hotdog shop (ugh!) and started the two-hour drive south to our Tucson home.

The rental was perfect, and we settled in with an adult beverage to plan the next day at Madera and Florida (Flo-ree-da) Canyons. We did not expect to stop so frequently on the way there, but there were birds everywhere. We had canyon towhee, black-throated sparrow, ladder-backed woodpecker and Chihuahuan meadowlark, along with 20 other species before reaching Madera Canyon. Raptors were a daily occurrence, especially



Canyon towhee

Photo: M. Valencic

red-tailed hawks, Northern harriers and American kestrels. We found 25 species in the canyon, including Rivoli’s hummingbird, Hammond’s flycatcher, Arizona woodpecker and red-naped sapsucker. Santa Rita Lodge feeders were the best where a hepatic tanager made a stunning appearance.

The ride up Florida Canyon produced three more hepatic tanagers and three Townsend’s solitaire. At the end of the road a painted redstart played ‘hard to photograph’ with us. We finished the first day at Canoa Ranch Conservation Park with Lawrence’s goldfinch and green-tailed towhee.

A total of 64 species and John is up to 27 lifers! He is beyond excited!

(To be continued next month...)

—Matt Valencic

## Upcoming Events

### Third Thursday

### Field Trips

Apr 20 7:00pm

“Warbler Warm-up”

Via Zoom®

Some of the prettiest birds on the planet are in NE Ohio from April through October. Most just pass through during May on their way north, but some stay here to have their babies. Because we only see them for a short time every year we forget how to quickly identify them. This presentation groups birds by appearance AND preferred habitat. Learn common behaviors and calls.

Approximately 1 – 1 ½ hours in length.

Register for the above program at [www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events)

April 14 7:30pm

“Woodcock Watch”

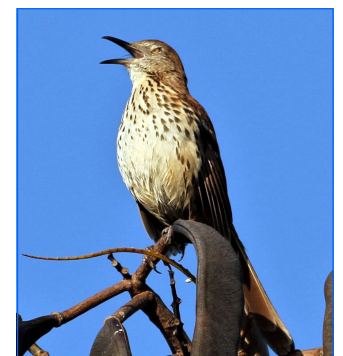
Novak Sanctuary

At this time of year male woodcocks woo the females with a basic “soft shoe” and a simple nasal call and then take off in a wonderful flight display that must be seen to believe! If you have not had the chance to witness this then you are missing a fascinating romance of our local wildlife! Join us for a sunset performance that you will talk about for weeks! Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road about a mile north of State Route 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.

## Did you know?

Brown thrashers are aggressive, vigorous nest defenders protecting their clutch from such predators as snakes, raccoons, skunk and other egg eaters. They have been known to strike dogs and humans with such force as to draw blood!

—Jim Tomko



Brown thrasher wintering in Florida.  
Photo: M. Valencic

**DATED MAIL**

**AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)**  
**Board of Trustees 2022-2023**  
**Jim Tomko, President**

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*A Wry Smile*

In filling out an application, where it says, 'In case of emergency, notify:' I put "DOCTOR."



**April warblers**

Are you ready for warblers? Louisiana waterthrush (LOWA) and pine warbler (PIWA) should be here the first week of April. Both are rarely found outside their preferred habitat and both nest in NE Ohio. LOWAs prefer open, deciduous ravines or rolling topography with a clear-running stream. They feed on invertebrates in those streams and build their nest along its banks. Pine warblers, as the name suggests, prefer pine trees or mixed pine-deciduous forest. They sing from pine trees and nest in them.

LOWAs blend in with the drab branches they perch on, so knowing their sweet song helps in locating them. Their voice is loud and travels well up and down their streamside territory. PIWAs are a drab yellow and have an almost familiar trill, like a junco or chipping sparrow. If you hear it coming from a pine tree start looking for yellow, not charcoal or brown.



Louisiana waterthrush

Photo: M. Valencic

As mid-April approaches black-throated green (BTNW) and palm warblers (PAWA) begin to show up. Look for BTNWs in the canopy and PAWAs on the ground. Both are just passing through on their way north. The

sweet song of the BTNW is a higher pitch so might be hard for some of us to hear, but the striking black throat of the male against a yellow face makes them easy to identify. PAWAs' song reminds us again of a chipping sparrow trill. Watch for them foraging on the ground in open areas, bobbing their tail as they go. Their rusty cap helps with the ID.

Finally, anytime in April we can expect yellow-rumped warblers coming through on their way north. Spring males are a striking mix of black, white,

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