



# The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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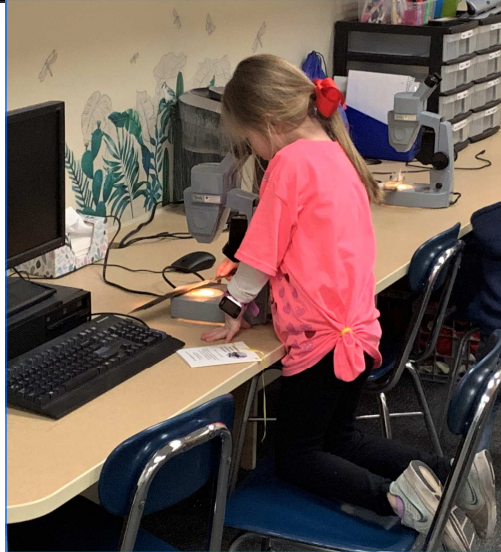
Visit our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org)

March, 2023

## Kenston STEAM night

Teachers know that early exposure to Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math can influence students in a positive way. For a few years, a science teacher at Kenston Elementary School did just that with a STEAM night for students in grades K – 5. She worked tirelessly to find parents and other adults involved in STEAM careers who would participate in a two-hour evening program. Each participant had a classroom and the freedom to create a display and/or activity to engage students when they visited the room. Here are just some of the subject areas presented: cryptography, polymers, neuroscience, astronomy, NASA projects, chemical engineering,

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A student participating in STEAM night examines a feather under a microscope.

Photo: M. Valencia

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Spring Bird Walks  
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## Centennial Celebration!

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland will hold its Annual Meeting and Dinner on June 3, 2023. This is our Centennial year and we will be celebrating at the amazing Lake Metroparks Farmpark in Kirtland, OH. Please note this has changed from the previously announced venue. A full schedule of events and member cost will be announced in the April and May newsletters. We hope you will save the date and help us celebrate 100 years of conservation!

affect change through public policy. In the last few years, many people have become aware that we as individuals can have a significant impact on habitat simply by changing what we grow in our own yards!

Dr. Douglas Tallamy contributed to this understanding in 2020 with the publication of his book, *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation that Starts in Your Yard* (available on Amazon), where he laid out his evidence

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## Backyard gardening initiative proposed

Are you thinking about spring gardening? If you're like me, you might have ambitious plans for new garden beds, better vegetables and more flowers. Now is the time to think about the impact your planting choices can have on birds. To raise a nest of chickadees, for example, the parents need to find 10,000 caterpillars nearby. What plants and trees will provide habitat for so many insects?

As birders and conservationists, Audubon Society members are concerned about plant diversity, habitat, the availability of insects as food sources for birds, and many other environmental



Monarch caterpillar feeds on neighborhood milkweed patch.

Photo: A. DeBroux

issues but often despair of our ability to

## From the Nest...

Signs of spring are here! Red-winged blackbirds are singing to stake out their territory, bluebirds are actively searching for a nesting cavity, sandhill cranes have appeared on the scene, and the waterfowl migration is underway.

There are many opportunities to be fascinated by the change of seasons,



several of which are offered by your chapter of the Audubon Society.

Matt Valencia is invigorating the Bluebird trail in the Novak Sanctuary fields. Monthly bird walks are offered in one of our four wildlife sanctuaries. In April the Annual Series of Spring Bird-walks begins.

I hope you get the chance to participate in some or all of these seasonal events.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko  
President, ASGC

## 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. Please visit our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org) for complete information.

**Aurora Sanctuary** - Park east of Page Rd. on E. Pioneer Trail, Aurora. 216-337-2202

**Bedford Reservation** - Hemlock Creek Picnic Area, off Button Rd., Bedford. 330-715-6300

**Big Creek Reservation** - Lake Isaac, Middleburg Heights. Contact: [info@wcaudubon.org](mailto:info@wcaudubon.org)

**Brecksville Reservation** - Park at Station Rd. Bridge Trailhead, Brecksville. 330-467-3664

**Gates Mills** - Various locations. Call 440-463-5944 for details.

*April 16* - Sunnybrook Preserve - 12474 Heath Rd (off Mayfield), Chester Township.

*April 23* - Orchard Hills Park - 11340 Caves Road, Chester Township, (north of Mulberry)

*April 30* - Frohring Meadows - 16780 Savage Road, Bainbridge Township

*May 7* - Squire Valleeve Farm, CWRU, 37125 Fairmount Blvd., Hunting Valley

*May 14* - White North Property - 3160 Chagrin River Road

*May 21* - Squire Valleeve Farm, CWRU, 37125 Fairmount Blvd., Hunting Valley

**Geauga Park District** – Register at [info@geaugaparkdistrict.org](mailto:info@geaugaparkdistrict.org) or 440-286-9516

*April 16* - Big Creek Park – 9160 Robinson Rd, Chardon

*April 23* - Frohring Meadows – 16780 Savage Rd, Chagrin Falls

*April 30* - The Rookery – 10110 Cedar Rd, Chesterland

*May 7* - Eldon Russell Park – 16315 Rapids Rd, Troy Township

*May 14* - Burton Wetlands – 15681 Old Rider Rd, Burton

*May 21* - Swine Creek Reservation – 16004 Hayes Rd, Middlefield

**Hinckley Reservation** - The south end of Hinckley Lake, on State Rd., Hinckley. 440-570-6192

**Hiram** - James H. Barrow Field Station, 11305 Wheeler Road, Hiram. 330-527-2141

**Holden Arboretum** - Corning Visitor Center, 9500 Sperry Road, Kirtland. 440-946-4400

**Lake Metroparks** - Lake Erie Bluffs, 3301 Lane Rd., Perry Township. 440-256-1404, ext. 2112

**Lorain County Metro Parks** - Elywood Park - 556 Washington Ave, Elyria Note: **Walks be-**

**gin at 8:30am!** For information visit <https://www.loraincountymetroparks.com/cascade-park>.

**Mentor Marsh** - Shipman Pond parking lot, 9600 Headlands Rd., Mentor. 440-257-0777

**North Chagrin Reservation** – 401 Buttermilk Falls Parkway, Mayfield Village. 440-473-3370

**Novak Sanctuary** - park north of Rt. 82 on Aurora Town Line Rd., Aurora. 330-388-9279

**Ohio & Erie Canal Reservation** - 4524 E. 49th Street, Cuyahoga Hts. 216-206-1000.

**Rocky River Reservation** - 24000 Valley Parkway, North Olmsted. 216-924-0188.

**Shaker Lakes** - 2600 South Park Blvd., Shaker Heights. 216-321-5935 [www.shakerlakes.org](http://www.shakerlakes.org)

**Vermillion River Reservation** - Bacon Woods <https://birdinghotspots.org/hotspot/L274600>

Note: **Walks begin at 8:30am!** 440-787-7736

**Medina County Park District** - River Styx Park, 8200 River Styx Rd., Guilford Twp. Will have walks on **Saturdays, April 15 through May 20 at 7:30am.** 330-722-9364

## STEAM

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virtual reality, food science and even BIRDS! About 30 individuals in all.

STEAM night sadly came to an end and was replaced with other programs, but this year, Sophie Voudris, a Kenston High School junior and Girl Scout, decided to resurrect it as her Girl Scout Gold project. She found a teacher to be her mentor and got to work finding adults in STEAM careers. Along the way ASGC was invited to participate. We jumped at the opportunity as it would be our first children's program since the pandemic shutdown in March 2020.

With help from Sandy Hahn (Hiram College Ornithology student), Nicole Ryman (Geauga Park District), and ASGC members Barb Philbrick, Cathy Green, Sarah Mabey and Jim Tomko, we set up six displays from our Junior Birders program and kept our fingers

crossed. At 6:00pm the students and their parents began visiting our room, and we stayed busy for the next two hours, introducing them to Fabulous Feathers, Feet are Neat, Beaks, Nests and Eggs, Owl Pellets and Being a Birder. The students and their parents LOVED it, and we were so happy to be working with kids again.

Congratulations to Sophie on a successful STEAM night and on completing her Girl Scout Gold project. She offered 300 students and their parents the opportunity to visit 32 classrooms of inspiring



Sandy Hahn discusses Nests and Eggs with STEAM participants. Photo: M. Valencic

## Critter Corner

Photo: J. Tomko



### Eastern Skunk Cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*)

Ok it is not a “critter” but it is an exceedingly unusual native wildflower.

Skunk cabbage is a member of the arum family (araceae). Many of its relatives are tropical such as philodendron, calla lily, and taros. Some local relatives are jack-in-the-pulpit and green dragon.

Skunk cabbage is one of the very first native wildflowers to bloom. The amazing part is that this is one of the few plants that can generate its own heat through cellular respiration. In snowy winters, I've seen it melt a hole through the snow above it to bloom in late winter. In fact, some research shows that the temperature inside the spathe cup can reach 60 to 90 degrees above the surrounding air temperature. The spadix (spike) surrounded by the spathe is the source of the heat. The spadix is where the actual petal-less blossoms are located. The bloom emerges first and later in the spring and summer enormous, lush, dark-green leaves replace the mottled burgundy bloom.

The aroma reminiscent of decaying meat from the flower attracts flies and beetles which act as pollinators. The bruised foliage gives off the faint scent of skunk. These are perennial plants that need soggy soil to grow. It is good for them to have plenty of wet woodland to spread and grow.

I expect to discover these plants emerging from the frozen soil in mid to late February but this year I found them blooming in January.

If you are able to visit a wet woods now, you will see the beautiful and interesting plants in full bloom.

—Jim Tomko

displays and activities, staffed by adults who care very much about the students' success. We are confident many young lives were positively affected through her efforts, and we look forward to participating again next year.

—Matt Valencic

## In case you missed it

“Great Backyard Bird Count” February 19th

We had a perfect February morning for the Great Backyard Bird Count walk at the Aurora Sanctuary. I was pleased to have David Factor of the Hiram College field station join us. With his expertise, we were able to find 18 species of birds plus a small flock of gulls that flew over too high in altitude to be identified to species.

As for the international GBBC, over 298,500 checklists were turned in. The U.S. had the most checklists with 183,970 followed by India with 44,915

### Native Gardening

(Continued from page 1)

that small changes in many yards and businesses could patch together large swaths of suitable and thriving habitat. By paring back lawns and changing what we plant to emphasize primarily native plants, we can play an important role in establishing what he labeled “home grown national parks”. Pair that with removing invasives and eliminating pesticides, and we can create environments where insects and birds can thrive.

Those who are concerned about butterfly survival have already heard this message. Patches of milkweed have sprung up in both private yards and public parks around Ohio as individuals, school groups, cities and parks have installed waystations to feed monarchs

and Canada came in third with 25,826 checklists.

As far as species go, 7,348 were identified world-wide. Columbia listed 1,261 species, followed by India with 1,066, and Ecuador with 1,049. The U.S. listed 661 species. Those numbers may change slightly as checklists will be counted for several weeks.

Thank you all for participating in the largest citizen science project in existence!

—Jim Tomko

on their long journey to Mexico and back.

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland will soon join other Audubon societies and launch a program to assist members who would like to learn more and make changes in their own yards to benefit birds and pollinators.

The following resources will get you started:

- For pollinator conservation and native plant lists: [www.xerces.org](http://www.xerces.org)
- For native plants by region: <https://www.nwf.org/NativePlantFinder/Plants>
- Learn more about connecting small pieces of land and regenerate biodiversity: <https://homegrownnationalpark.org/>

—Kathryn Craig

### Hawks

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together they create a ‘window’ at the end of each wing.

After all this, realize there can be a lot of variability among juveniles. The experts tell us to look for more than one feature before making your ID. And when your more experienced birding friends say your ID is incorrect, walk through your picture(s) together. Who knows ... maybe THEY are the ones who made a mistake!

—Matt Valencic

### Ducks heading north

March in NE Ohio is all about ducks heading north to their breeding grounds in Canada. Check large lakes near you for new birds every day.

**American Black Duck.** Look for the chocolate-brown ducks among mallards during migration.

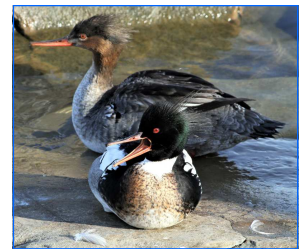


### Canvasback.

The female builds a floating nest in dense cover.

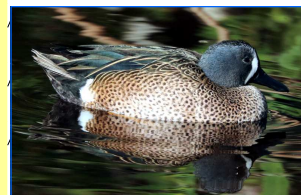
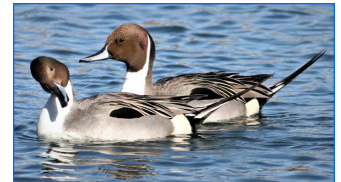
### Red-breasted Merganser.

Eating 14 – 20 fish every day, these ducks always seem to be looking for food.



### Northern Pintail.

Among the earliest northbound migrants, arriving on breeding grounds right after ice-out.



**Blue-winged Teal.** One of the last migrants in spring.

Photos and text by Matt Valencic

## Upcoming Events

### Third Thursday

### Field Trips

Mar 16 7:00pm

“Amphibians of NE Ohio”

Via Zoom®

Meet our smooth and slippery neighbors as they emerge from their winter hibernacula and learn how they survive in NE Ohio.

Apr 20 7:00pm

“Warbler Warm-up”

Via Zoom®

This presentation uses actual photographs to help group birds by appearance AND preferred habitat.

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

Mar 11 9:00am

“Waterfowl Wander”

LaDue Reservoir

Join us to view the astounding plumage of the drakes as they head north to their breeding grounds. It is amazing to me at the number of species with the possibilities of grebes, loons, and both diving and dabbling ducks. This is a caravan style birding tour where we will stop at several favorite lakes and ponds in southern Geauga and northern Portage counties. Make sure to have a full tank of gas because gas stations are not one of our stops. Meet at the boat ramp parking lot at the end of Washington Street off of St. Rt. 44 in Auburn Corners.


**DATED MAIL**

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*A Wry Smile*

I have a bumper sticker that says "Honk if you think I'm sexy."



Then I just sit at green lights until I feel better about myself.

**Juvenile hawk ID challenge**

Juvenile hawks are hard to identify because they have many similarities. When they molt into adult plumage, they become much easier.

Let's consider two of our year-round buteos, the red-tailed and red-shouldered, and see how juveniles compare when soaring overhead.

Both show a lot of banding on the tail. The bands on red-shoulders are darker, fewer in number and more well

defined than red-tails. Bands on red-tails are lighter and closer together.

The breast of red-tails is mostly white with a well-defined 'belly band' of dark feathers. They carry this into adult plumage. Red-shoulders show striping on the breast and belly, starting just below the throat, and it is replaced with orange plumage as adults.

Wings offer some good clues. Red-tailed hawk wings have a dark 'patagial bar,' the leading edge of the wing from the head to the 'wrist.' They are the only buteo with this feature. Move out to the wing tips (the primary feathers) and red-tailed primaries are light-colored where red-shouldered primaries are dark. Look closely at those dark primaries and notice the base of each feather is lighter, almost tan colored. When held



Red-shouldered and red-tailed juveniles.  
 Photos: M. Valencic