



# The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Volume XL, Number 7

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

October, 2022

## Bird Quest a success!

Another successful Chagrin River Bird Quest, thanks to perfect weather and the contributions of 20 volunteers from our chapter, Blackbrook Audubon Society and Geauga Park District. More than 100 birders went afield September 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in 28 teams and found 116 species of birds in the Chagrin River Watershed. The Hangry Birders team found the most species overall with 85. The most warbler species award went to the GPD Nat Catchers with 15 species.

We were pleased to welcome 7 first-time teams including our first Amish team, Just Wingin' It, whose members camped at one of the primitive campsites at The West Woods. The GPD Nat Catchers were also camping on September 9<sup>th</sup>, listening for those late-night owls and early morning  
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Chester Kurtz and team "Just Wingin' It" took 3rd Place Overall with 70 species.

Photo: A. DeBroux

## October birding

About the same number of bird species can be found in NE Ohio during October as in September – just over 200. But the mix of birds is different. We say 'goodbye' to the flycatchers, vireos and most of the resident and migrant warblers. Orange-crowned, Nashville and palm will be here through October and the yellow-rumped will arrive in good numbers throughout October, with some remaining through the winter (they love poison ivy berries). American pipits started showing up in late September and will be with us in agricultural feeds and wetlands through November. White-throated, white-crowned and vesper sparrows will also arrive in good numbers during November. You might even get lucky and find a Nelson's or LeConte's sparrow this month (try Mentor Marsh, Wake Robin Trail).



Sanderling

Photo: M. Valencic

We start to welcome waterfowl on our inland lakes and ponds, especially  
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## From the Dustbin... "He began with the Egg"

Among the many stories told me by Dr. Francis H. Herrick, as he and I sat day after day at the top of the tower, built beside the Bald Eagle's nest along the Vermilion River, none has retained its interest for me as has the following.

Francis Herrick as a lad attended a preparatory school in New Hampshire. Even as we did at the same age, many of the boys were enthusiastically collecting birds' eggs, and it came to the attention of 'Prexy' that the practice was getting out of hand. One morning at chapel the announcement was made that this egg collecting and nest robbing was reaching unreasonable proportions and must be stopped. All the collections were to be

brought to the office before 11 o'clock the next morning.

So the boys trooped in with their cigar boxes of eggs and left them on the desk. Among the last and saddest was young Herrick. He placed his box on the president's desk slowly and moved toward the door.

"Francis," said the good doctor, "I want to talk to you. I know how interested you are in the sciences, and the careful study you are making in ornithology. I did not mean to aim my remarks in chapel at you. You need not leave those eggs you have so carefully prepared; take them with you. And take  
*(Continued on page 3)*

## From the Nest...

When I think about it, October may be about the best month of the year all over the world! Here in the northern hemisphere, we are approaching winter rest and dormancy. Our autumn temperatures are mild, sunny days predominate, with about equal hours of day and night and the fall migration is underway allowing us to view the northern nesters



on their way south. In the southern hemisphere, they have the same conditions except, their time is spring with renewal and rebirth. It is a great month everywhere.

Speaking of fall migration, I am eager to give Matt Valencic and his Education Committee along with Black Brook Audubon chapter and Geauga Park district a hearty "Bravo Zulu" for the astounding job they did with this year's

Bird Quest. Each year I feel it is a great success and then the next year arrives and it is even better! Thank you, Matt, *et al.* We greatly appreciate the time, talent and effort that all of you put in.

Last month I made a typographical error in my announcement of our Annual Meeting date. It occurs on the first Saturday in June (06/03/2023). We have some excellent plans for our centennial celebration including Al Batt, a nation-  
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## Birding

(Continued from page 1)

the third and fourth week of the month. Look for gadwall, green-winged teal, shovelers and ruddy ducks, among others. Common loons start arriving as well but get to peak numbers in November.

Regarding shorebirds, sanderlings can be found on mudflats and beaches along with least & pectoral sandpipers and both yellowlegs. A few ruddy turnstones might also show up. By the end of October, you can start looking for dunlin, but historically they make their big appearance in November.

## Bird Quest

(Continued from page 1)



Mark Demyan (rt) celebrates winning the Hooded Merganser raffle item, carved by ASGC Trustee John Lillich (lt).

Photo: A. DeBroux

birds. Both teams were successful with owls, as were those who attended the Owl Prowl led by Jim Tomko Friday evening at the Novak Sanctuary in Aurora.

Our celebration at West Woods provided lots of camaraderie among the teams. Honey Baked Ham Company sandwiches and apple cider were enjoyed by everyone. The door prize table was full again, thanks to generous donations from Wild Birds Unlimited, Geauga Feed and Grain and Centera

## Nest

(Continued from page 1)

ally known birder/humorist joining us as our key note speaker. Please don't forget to put it on your 2023 calendar.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Bonaparte gulls will increase in numbers, especially the second half of the month, and look for common and Forster's terns resting with the gulls.

I saw my first rusty blackbird of the season yesterday (Sept. 22) and you can expect more of them in October in mixed flocks with grackles, red-winged blackbirds and cowbirds. Check wet areas with leaves – they like to flip leaves looking for invertebrates.

No excuses! There is plenty to see during October and the weather is delightful. Grab a friend or family member and go enjoy the birds.

—Matt Valencic

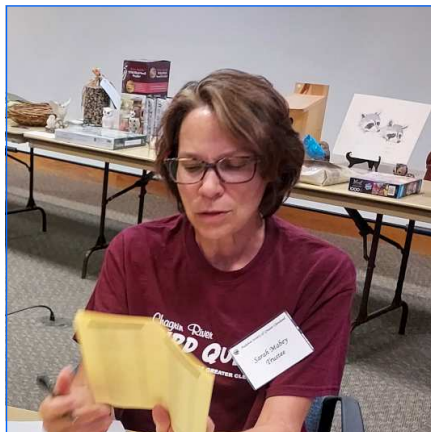
Coop, as well as many anonymous donors. Thanks to all our donors!

Thanks also to all who sent pictures throughout the day to Cathy Green for the continuous slide show at our celebration. It was great to see so many friends and families enjoying their time afield.

The raffles for John Lillich's Wood Duck carving and the framed print of a Northern Flicker were very popular. Thanks to all who purchased tickets and congratulations to the winners.

We hope to see all of you again next year on September 8 & 9, 2023. Please spread the word to your friends and family members about the fun time you had while enjoying the beauty of nature in the Chagrin River watershed.

—Matt Valencic



Sarah Mabey leads the judges in checking and double-checking the birding checklists.

Photo: A. DeBroux

## Did you know?

There is a small population of gray-cheeked Thrush that nest in eastern Russia. Instead of moving south into Southeast Asia, they migrate across the Bering Sea to move south with North American populations in order to winter in Central and South America.

—Jim Tomko

## Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



## Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*)

Mid-September to mid-October are peak times to see the autumn migratory thrushes in our area. The gray-cheeked thrush is a far northern nester but passes through Ohio each spring and autumn. It is our rarest of thrushes that regularly visit Ohio. We do not often hear their amazing song in our area but in the Canadian boreal forests it can seem to ring out from every direction.

This is a secretive thrush that rushes for cover at the least disturbance. Many birders with abundant field time may find these each year but I am lucky to discover one every three or four years. When I find them, it is a process of ruling out the other thrushes. Matt Valencic was able to capture a photo of one last month which inspired me to do a little research on them.

They are the most neutral of our thrushes, colored an overall grayish-brown with a heavily speckled breast and light underparts. They have a very inconspicuous eye ring and a gray cheek. In contrast, Swainson's has a bright buffy eye ring with a tawny cheek. Hermits have a rufous tail. Wood thrush have large spots on the breast with a rusty head and back. Veerys have uniform tawny brown upper parts with many small breast spots.

Gray-cheeks winter as far south as Peru and the Amazon. They nest as far north as the northern reaches of Canada and Alaska. That is up to an 8,000-mile journey!

They weave a tight nest of grasses, mud, bark, rootlets and leaves in a tree six to twenty feet above the ground where they lay three to six brown-speckled, pale blue eggs.

They eat insects, spiders, earthworms, and fruit. One observer watched a parent try to feed a one and a half-inch salamander to its nestling.

The tail end of the gray-cheeked thrush migration is occurring as you read this. I hope you get a chance to see one.

—Jim Tomko



## In case you missed it

*Fringed Gentians, September 24*

We had pleasant weather for our autumn wildflower walk. As advertised the fringed gentian was in bloom. Its violet color really does defy description. The number of individual plants were few in number (a dozen or so), but we took heart in realizing that these are biennial bloomers. We hope to see more abundance next September. In addition to the unusual fringed gentian, we found

bottle (or closed) gentian, ladies tresses (in the orchid family), silver rod (a white goldenrod), wreath goldenrod (a woodland species), calico aster (a profusely blooming mini-flowered aster) and turtlehead. There were numerous other species in bloom and in fruit. A number



Fringed gentian and ladies' tresses.

Photo: J. Tomko

of species of spectacular fungus in various colors were admired. We couldn't have ordered a better day. Thank you to all who joined me.

—Jim Tomko

## The egg

*(Continued from page 1)*

these others as well. Those boys will never use them; they are not interested, and you are.”

The best part of the story, however, is that among those collections was a set of two eggs of the now extinct Passenger

Pigeon! These eggs are now a part of the collection of Western Reserve University.

—C.M. Shipman, *Past President of the Cleveland Bird Club*

*(From Bird Life: Devoted to the Sport of Bird Study, Vol 39, No. 3, October 1943)*

## Bird Family Tree

*(Continued from page 4)*

parakeet, crane, ibis, woodpecker, eagle and others, representing all major branches of modern birds.

The result is a new avian family tree. This new bird tree could very well change the way we think about bird diversity. New relationships have been discovered that will be surprising to many bird watchers and lovers.



Grebes are closely related to flamingoes, and not to ducks!

A few surprises await:

Grebes are closely related

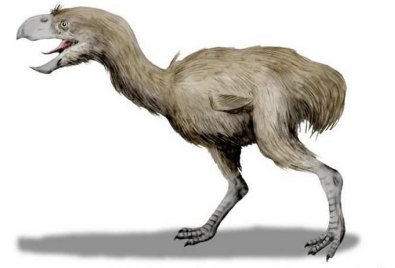
to flamingos, but not closely related to ducks; falcons are closely related to songbirds and parrots but not closely related to hawks; hawks and eagles are closely related to vultures; and swifts are closely related to hummingbirds and not closely related to swallows.

All core land birds, which include songbirds, parrots, woodpeckers, owls, eagles and falcons, share a common ancestor, and that ancestor was an apex predator. Included in that group would be the giant "terror" birds of the Americas.

The studies continue and more surprises will surely follow.

—Jim DeBroux

For more detailed info and surprises visit: 'Big Bang' of Bird Evolution at [nsf.gov/news](http://nsf.gov/news)



## Upcoming Events

### Third Thursday

**Oct 20 7:00pm**

*"Raptors of NE Ohio"*

Via Zoom

Nineteen species of raptors can be found in NE Ohio in a typical year. Some are frequently seen while others are quite secretive. Several are year-round residents while others are here only in summer or winter. Enjoy lots of photographs and learn some things you might not know about our hawks, eagles, falcons and owls. Presented by Matt Valencic.

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

**Oct 22 1:30pm**

*"Fall Leaf Colors"*

Hach-Otis Sanctuary

Often our palette of autumn color will give the New England forests a run for title of the most stunning hues! With the mix of tree species and depending on our weather leading up to the leaf color change, we can have spectacular vistas of wonderful beauty. Join us for a walk at peak color change if mother nature agrees with our timing. Meet at the Hach-Otis Parking lot at the end of Skyline Drive off of River Road in Wiloughby Hills.

### Field Trips

**Nov 5 9:30am**

*"Turkey Trek"*

Novak Sanctuary

Will we be successful in our quest to spot wild turkeys before Thanksgiving? They know how to play the game of Hide and Seek extremely well. These large but wily birds are experts in blending in. Help me find the flock as they roam the sanctuary on the less traveled Mantua side of the sanctuary. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road a little less than a mile north of State Route 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.

**DATED MAIL**

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**A new family tree for birds**

What would you say if you were told that much of what you know about birds may be wrong?

Where did they come from, and what was their evolutionary path? The family tree of modern birds has confused biologists for centuries.

The genomes of modern birds are telling a new story. The common ancestor of all birds finished its teeth-to-beak transition 116 million years ago, and what we see today is what resulted after the mass extinction of the dinosaurs 65 million years ago. Within 5 million years 70 percent of the new bird lineages had evolved.

An international collaboration studying the genomics of birds has been un-

derway for several years. This involved over 200 scientists at 80 institutions in 20 countries. This was not the typical genomics study, it involved analyzing the entire genome of groups of birds, roughly 14,000 genes for each species, and required massive super-computing capabilities. Gone are the days of comparing plumage and other anatomical features.

To resolve the fundamental question of "How did birds become so diverse?", this consortium of scientists has sequenced, assembled and compared the full genomes of 48 bird species. The species include the crow, duck, falcon,

*(Continued on page 3)*

**Save the date!**

**Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland's  
100<sup>th</sup> Birthday & Annual Meeting**

When: Saturday, June 3, 2023  
Where: Cleveland Museum of Natural History  
Keynote: Al Batt



*A Wry Smile*

A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a detour.

