



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

P.O. Box 391037, Solon, Ohio 44139-8037 info@clevelandaudubon.org

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

September, 2022

September is Bird Quest month!

The Chagrin River Bird Quest (CRBQ) team birding challenge is for everyone! Beginners and longtime birders alike enjoy the 24-hour birding challenge, contribute to citizen science by using eBird, and enjoy camaraderie, food and fun at the celebration Saturday afternoon at The West Woods Nature Center. There is a pre-event birding workshop, T-shirts for all team members, three guided walks, several team awards (certificates suitable for framing!) covering all levels of experience, and the always popular door prize table of donated items. And it's all FREE!

For the second year in a row, John Lillich has donated a hand carved duck



decoy that will be raffled off at the celebration on Saturday. The male hooded merganser (see above) is carved from cherry and the base is walnut. It is shown swimming among cattails. John

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Invasive species update

Work continues at the Novak Sanctuary to control invasive buckthorn, autumn olive and reed canary grass. The buckthorn that we cut in March and April sprouted aggressively in May, as anticipated, and we spot treated it successfully with herbicide. But even after the new growth succumbed to treatment, more buckthorn kept emerging nearby. So far three spot treatments have been applied and new growth is minimal.

In July the Trail Crew started cutting dense patches of larger trees and treating the cut stumps with herbicide. This 'surgical approach' avoids damage to neighboring plants and effectively kills the invasive trees. Cut trees were put in large piles as wildlife habitat for small mammals, birds and other animals.



Rosepink in the Aurora Sanctuary
Photo: M. Valencic

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From the Nest...

Autumn migration is well underway. Many of the migratory, boreal, forest birds are arriving here as you read this newsletter. It is a great time to see some of the species that only spend several days to several weeks in our area while moving to their southern wintering grounds. There are many opportunities to enjoy this amazing event.



Along with Blackbrook Audubon and Geauga Park District, we're hosting our friendly, 24-hour Bird Quest competition again this year.

Also, we're looking forward to resuming our monthly field trips this month. Here are chances to check out the wonderful trail improvements, and invasive species battle successes that have been accomplished by our ambi-

S/O Sparrows

September and October (S/O) are sparrow hunting months in NE Ohio, and the three species you want to 'hunt' are Lincoln's, Nelson's and LeConte's. Why? Because they are beautiful, as sparrows go, and they are challenging to find.



Lincoln's (above) is challenging but Ohio is part of its normal migration route. If you put yourself in their habitat often enough, you will find them. They arrive about mid-September and can be found in fields, especially near wetlands, and forest edges. They like dense cover and tend to be near or on the ground looking for insects and seeds. Their finely streaked, buff-colored breast stands out, then look for a pale eye ring and grey around the face and eyebrow.

Nelson's and LeConte's are harder to find because they are mid-West birds and only a few stray into NE Ohio dur-

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tious trail crew for which we are extremely grateful.

And, on June 23, 2023, we will be celebrating 100 years of continuous operation of our chapter from its 1923 historic roots in Cleveland. We have an excellent annual meeting planned for that date. Please mark this event as well as our other events on your calendar so that you may join us.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Sparrows

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LeConte's sparrow



ing migration. Both are elusive, but when you find them they reward you with their beauty! They are small, only about five inches long, solitary, and favor dense, wet grassland habitat. They like to stay near the ground! Both have a small gray patch below their eye, and if they sing or call, it reminds you of insect sounds!

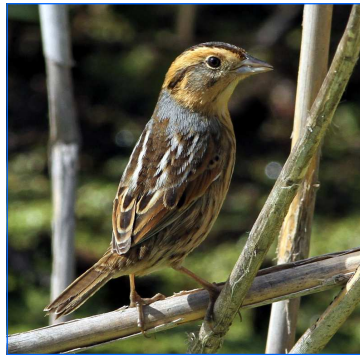
Nelson's will have orange tones in the eyebrow, around the face and across the finely streaked breast. The sides of the neck are gray, and the crown is

strongly striped brown and gray. LeConte's is more yellow through the eyebrow and around the face. The breast is yellow-buff, and the nape is dappled brown and white.

Traditional locations for Nelson's and LeConte's are the Mentor Marsh, especially Wake Robin Trail, the Coliseum Grasslands (Cuyahoga Valley NP), the Lorain Impoundment, and Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve. Watch eBird for sightings, especially starting early October. And while you are there, keep and eye (and ear) out for sedge wrens. They also like this dense, wet, grassy habitat.

—Matt Valencic

Nelson's sparrow
Photos: M. Valencic



Invasive Species

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In June I visited the peninsula at Fulton Pond in the Aurora Sanctuary where the crew worked long and hard last fall removing buckthorn and other invasives. Some native plants were seen but the buckthorn regrowth needed treatment. Three spot treatments have been applied and flowering native plants are thriving in early August. At least 13 native species have been identified so far on the peninsula: Purple Coneflower, Joe Pye Weed, Common



Common milkweed at the Aurora Sanctuary.

Photo: M. Valencic

Yarrow, Wild Burgamot, Allegheny Monkeyflower, Rosepink, Common and Swamp Milkweed, Fringed Loosestrife, Wild Basil, Black-eyed Susan and two species of daisies.

The Invasive Species Project is supported by a generous grant from Shaker Lakes Garden Club which is being used to purchase supplies. Labor for the project is provided by hard working volunteers like you! Become part of the crew this fall by contacting trailcrew@clevelandaudubon.org. No prior experience required!

—Matt Valencic

Bird Quest

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and his wife Carol are ASGC Board members, and they lovingly care for the Hach-Otis Sanctuary in Willoughby Hills.

Teams can be two people or more, family members or friends, birding buddies or work colleagues. We ask that teams bird together and remain within the Chagrin River Watershed IBA (Important Bird Area) so that the eBird checklists submitted help bolster data for

the IBA. It also 'levels the playing field' when it comes to team awards because everyone is birding the same habitats.

Learn more and register today by clicking the Chagrin River Bird Quest button on our homepage (www.clevelandaudubon.org).

Email questions to birdquest@clevelandaudubon.org.

—Matt Valencic and the Bird Quest team

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

I first met this bird many years ago when it was known as the little green heron. After a number of years of taxonomy research, it was renamed the green-backed heron. Several more years of taxonomy research passed and it was renamed the green heron as it is still known today. In all the many times I have observed green herons, I have been curious about the descriptor "green". Most of the time you must talk yourself into the green plumage.

This small heron with the dimensions of a common crow has a black cap, chestnut brown face and neck, white throat and belly, and a blue-gray back and wings. You can see a very faint green iridescence on the back if the sunlight is hitting it at just the right angle.

Most of the time I discover these by their distinctive flight call (SKEOW!) that they shout when they are flushed from cover.

Excellent anglers, they primarily eat small fish, frogs, reptiles, crustaceans, spiders, aquatic insects and an occasional small rodent to round out its diet.

Most often they construct a solitary nest in dense shrubs or trees along the shore line of lakes, rivers, swamps and ponds. The nest is a ramshackle affair rivaling the mourning dove's flimsy see-through nest for minimal effort. Usually, the male selects the location and starts building the nest and the female does the finishing touches.

This is a summer season bird for us. It spends its winters along the southern U.S. coastline and on into Central and South America. If you want to see one now, make haste! They will be headed south for the winter after this month. If you miss them now, you will have to wait until April.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

Our June field trip to look and listen for wood thrush and veery had to be cancelled due to severe thunderstorms and dangerous winds. I am always resistant to walk in a fairly mature forest in high winds because of the chance of heavy, dead limbs (widow makers) breaking off and falling on the trail or possibly on one of us. This is only the second time for a cancellation of a field trip in all the years I have been leading bird walks for our Chapter. I did do a scouting field trip a few days later and much to my dismay, there were no veerys singing. Therefore, we would not likely have heard the nesting veerys on the evening of the scheduled field trip. We did miss out on an enchanting evening woods walk. But we will try again next season. Please consider joining us on the upcoming hikes in field and forest.

—Jim Tomko

Did you know?

Green herons are one of the few bird species to use tools. They are excellent anglers but if the fishing is not productive, they will drop a feather, twig or leaf on the water's surface as a lure to attract a curious minnow within reach of that adept bill.

—Jim Tomko



Photo: M. Valencic

Trail Crew at work

The trail crew has been busy these last few months repairing and restoring trails in the Aurora and Novak sanctuar-



Hal Goodwin & Rick Deininger look on as Henry & Gus Burkhardt secure new steps to the damaged stairway.

ies. In the late spring a large tree limb fell on the stairway in the southern end of the Aurora Sanctuary. Hal Goodwin took a leadership role in designing and supervising crews to repair the damage.

More recently, work has begun on a long-sought goal of replacing the 'pallet stairway' in the northern end of the Aurora sanctuary. Matt Valencic secured a grant from the Shaker Lakes Garden Club to procure materials, and Mark Demyan and Jim Tomko secured permission for access to the First Energy right-of-way path that abuts the northern end of the sanctuary.

With permission and funds in hand, work has progressed rapidly with the leadership of Jim Tolan, a field manager at Hiram College, and Ban Twaddell. Tolan and students from Hiram, along with several Audubon Trail Crew volunteers have created a temporary trail from the right-of-way to the stairway site, pre-cut

the timbers and rebar for the new landscape stairway and transported with truck, trailer and our utility vehicle the necessary materials to the project site. The crew hopes to complete work on the project this fall.

Anyone interested in joining the Trail Crew should contact Ban Twaddell at trailcrew@clevelandaudubon.org.

—Ban Twaddell (photos and story)



Keith Kohnke, Jim Tolan, Matt Valencic and Rob Swaney begin laying timbers for the new landscape stairway.

Upcoming Events

Chagrin River
BIRD QUEST

Sept 9, 4:00pm, to Sept 10, 6:30pm
The Westwoods Nature Center and
Chagrin River Valley

Get your team together and join us for this fun birding challenge! Prizes for all levels of competition! Free t-shirts!

Bird Quest is free for everyone, but registration is required.

Register for these programs at www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events

Third Thursday

Sept 15 7:00pm
"Concert of Crickets & Katydid"
Via Zoom®

This is an introduction to these amazing insects, when and how they sing, and the habitats where they can be found. Presented by Lisa Rainsong. Lisa's amazing knowledge of music, natural history and her ability to communicate effectively make her a joy to listen to.

Field Trips

Sept 24 1:30pm
"Fringed Gentians"
Aurora Sanctuary

The gorgeous fringed gentian is among the most stunning of our native wildflowers. They are also among the last to bloom for the season. We are fortunate to have a patch located in the Aurora Sanctuary and on a sunny September day they open their beautiful purplish-blue blossoms to the sun, dazzling all who view them. Join us to see these and other autumn wildflowers in full bloom. Meet at the Bretschneider Park parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora.

DATED MAIL

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Please recycle this newsletter

An Audubon Moment **Walking on water**

Last month I was at one of my favorite heron watching spots which is on the observation deck at Old Woman Creek State Nature Preserve in Huron, Ohio. There were over a dozen great egrets, a green heron, and six great blue herons in various stages of age and plumage. Some were catching frogs and fish, a few were preening and a few were loafing in the surrounding trees.

An adult and a juvenile bald eagle came swooping across the estuary and while I tracked them with my binoculars, a strange sight appeared before me. A mature great blue was moving quite rapidly across the water with its lower legs and feet obscured from my view by the emergent American water lotus plants. This heron appeared to be an apparition walking on the water. Now most herons are slow, deliberate, stealthy waders. They are patient ambushers. But this bird seemed to be moving unnaturally fast without moving a muscle as if on one of those airport people movers. I was astounded and wondered how it was happening.

Finally, he moved through a gap in the vegetation and I solved the riddle. He was lazily standing on a floating log in a current that was moving toward the estuary opening to Lake Erie. I suppose the herons refer to that as a “heron mover”! What a great way to save energy.

—Jim Tomko

A Wry Smile

Never put both feet in your mouth at the same time, because then you won't have a leg to stand on.



Save the date!

Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland's 100th Birthday & Annual Meeting

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

