

# The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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## Bird Quest: Not just a walk in the park

In a short 24-hour period between the late afternoons of September 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, six dozen or so birdwatchers, first-timers and long-timers, found and identified 140 different species of birds within the Chagrin River Corridor Important Bird Area (IBA). That set a new record for the annual Chagrin River Bird Quest event. As a migratory bird specialist and conservation biologist, I want our participants, partners, and members to know just how extraordinary that number is!



2023 Questers, young and old, collectively found a record 140 species of birds in the Chagrin River IBA.

According to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, 225 bird species oc-

cur regularly in Ohio as breeders, passage migrants, or winter residents. Let's do the math: in one watershed on one day, we observed 62% of Ohio's birds. Our collective accomplishment gives us more than just bragging rights. It reminds

us that we are better together. No single team saw all 140 species alone. Not even close.

It also shows us that migrating birds don't discriminate between nature preserves, backyards, farm hedgerows, urban parks, or sewage treatment plants. They go where they can, they go where

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## Ready for winter birds

I'm anxious for the winter birds to get here, but not the cold weather. Fall warblers were few and far between for me this year, as were shorebirds, from late August through October. So, I am ready for ducks, geese, tundra swans, grebes, loons, gulls, winter raptors, sparrows, larks, snow buntings, longspurs, siskins, and, hopefully, some redpolls and evening grosbeaks.



Ducks and gulls on Lake Erie.

*Photo: M. Valencic*

In our six-county area you can find over 200 species of birds during November, IF you visit enough different habitats. For waterfowl that means Lake Erie and the large inland lakes like LaDue, East Branch, and Mosquito Creek. When Lake Erie freezes, the Cuyahoga River will be THE place for ducks and gulls.

Large farm fields with vegetation growing on them will be good for winter raptors. Small mammals live in that vegetation and that's what rough-legged hawks, harriers, short-eared owls, and

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## "Beaver Deceiver" installed at Molnar Sanctuary

After years of trying to keep the drain standpipe of the Molnar Sanctuary pond clear of blockage caused by beavers, our team installed a "beaver deceiver," or pond leveler, to provide an alternative drainage outlet for the water.

The notion for this project started with a suggestion some time ago by Trustee Sarah Mabey as a way to control water levels without attacking the resident beavers. Beavers are very sensitive to the sound and movement of water escaping their bodies of water. The beaver deceiver encloses the inlet for a drainage pipe with a wire mesh frame large enough to prevent the beaver from detecting the water movement into the

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Steve Godale and Keith Kohnke prepare the beaver deceiver. *Photo: B. Twaddell*

## From the Nest...



Autumn may be my favorite time of year. The leaf colors have been awesome. The weather has been comfortable, and the autumn migration continues.

It is fun to stumble upon a feeding flock with a mix of chickadees, titmouse, kinglets, nuthatches, brown creepers and yellow-rumped warblers.

They are a constantly moving, energetic group concentrated along the trail when a few hundred yards before all was quiet and peaceful.

Speaking of trails, under the leadership of Matt Valencic and Ban Twaddell, our trail crew has been busy improving and making our trails safer. The fields have also undergone a mi-

raculous change from buckthorn thickets to meadows, allowing native plants to get a chance to grow.

When you see them, please take a moment to thank them for all their work.

I hope to see you on the trails.

—Jim Tomko  
President, ASGC

## A walk in the park

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they must, to rest and refuel for the next grueling and unpredictable leg of their journey. Each spring and fall, migrating birds flood through Ohio turning every scrubby, wooded, or wet bit of land into something worth noticing and protecting. A migratory journey is made up of many long flights and short stops. The exact path of a bird's migration, the duration of each flight, and the location and length of each stop will depend on winds and weather, the availability of food and shelter on the ground, and the competitors and predators present during each stop. There is little time (and often little excess energy) to spend finding the 'best' habitat. This may be especially true for songbirds.

From the perspective of a migrating bird, a landscape that is rich with small opportunities may be as valuable as a vast nature preserve. Within the Chagrin

River IBA, every yard, every scrubby abandoned lot we pass on our roads, the playgrounds, woodlots and farm fields, the small nature preserves, and extraordinary Metroparks all matter. Collectively, our local landscape is a sanctuary for a remarkable diversity of migrating birds from merlin and Wilson's snipe to Swainson's thrush, blackburnian warbler, bobolink, and more.

Bird Quest is a day for fun, challenge, and camaraderie. It's also a day for citizen science and an opportunity to consider how our individual and collective land use and land management decisions will continue to support and protect the many thousands of hungry and tired migrating birds that depend on the resources of the Chagrin River Corridor every year.

Thank you Questers for taking a walk in the park – and so much more!

—Sarah Mabey

## Beaver deceiver

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pipe. The whole apparatus is submerged with the drainpipe snaking its way up to the pond edge where it carries outflow down the outer bank.

Mark Demyan helped procure materials and Steve Godale, Keith & Wendy Kohne, Rick Deininger and Ban Twaddell were all involved in the project. Additional pond levels are being planned in the Aurora Sanctuary at the Fulton and Hammond ponds.

—Ban Twaddell

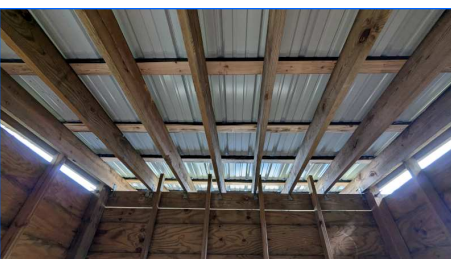
## Roof repaired at Hammond Pond bird blind



For some years our Audubon Society has had a relationship with Hiram College whereby students gain practical experience in environmental management while volunteering on projects in our sanctuaries.

This past summer, Jim Tolan, the Field Manager for the Hiram Biological Field Station, brought several students to the Aurora Sanctuary bird blind at Hammond Pond. After 20+ years the roof had begun to leak and rot. After planning and consulting with Ban Twaddell and Hal Goodwin, Jim worked with his students as they removed the old roof and installed a new metal roof. This fall, Hal Goodwin and Ban Twaddell installed a new step at the entrance of the bird blind. Soon a crew will be moving the debris from the tear off and using it to create habitats for ground creatures.

—Ban Twaddell



Top: Old roof with rotting timbers  
Middle: Transporting new roofing materials  
Bottom: New metal roof

Photos: B. Twaddell

## Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



### Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auratus*)

What a wonderful gem of migration are our horned grebe visitors.

If we met them north of here on their summer nesting ground, this beautiful bird would have a rich chestnut neck, breast and sides, gray back, dark black cap and cheeks with wonderful golden "ear" tufts. When we see them in our area this time of year most of them are in non-breeding plumage, which consists of a black cap, wide white cheek patch, and many shades of gray on the body.

Grebes are water birds with flat lobed toes instead of webbed toes. When they draw their feet forward through the water the foot folds together offering very little resistance. When they stroke back through the water, the whole foot and lobed toes flare out to provide strong forward propulsion. They need strong swimming skills to catch their prey of fish, frogs, salamanders, crayfish, mussels, snails, leeches, worms, aquatic insects, and many other aquatic invertebrates.

Grebes are known for their elaborate, almost choreographed, breeding displays, apparently dancing on the surface of the water. Since they are not Ohio nesters, we are not likely to see their courtship displays.

They usually build a floating nest of a mat of wet vegetation anchored to emergent aquatic vegetation usually within 20 feet of shore where they lay three to seven pale green eggs which are incubated by both parents. The hatchlings can swim on their own within 24 hours. The young often hitch a ride on the parent's back even when they are diving for food.

These amazing birds are here in significant numbers now. They could be on any lake, pond, or creek that offers a long enough runway of open water to take off in flight. I hope you are able to spot some on your November forays to nearby bodies of water.

—Jim Tomko

## In case you missed it!

*"Fall Color Walk"*

What a spectacular fall day. The leaves were in full color and the sun began to peek through the cloud cover as the walk finished up.

John Lillich led 14 of us on the walk with his wonderful way of interpreting the natural wonders ranging from witch hazel in fruiting condition to massive hemlocks on the slopes, our native magnolia the ducumber tree, and an ancient wild black cherry tree.

We also learned about the geology and the formation of the cliffs and the underlying blue clay.

We were fortunate to have Dr. Todd J. Pesek, M.D., a holistic physician, join us on the trail. He was able to teach us the health values of numerous herbs, trees, and fungus.

This hike is always fantastic with John as the leader. Thank you, John, for a very enjoyable afternoon.

—Jim Tomko

## Winter birds

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kestrels are looking for. Corn stubble is generally good for horned larks, snow buntings and Lapland longspurs, especially if there is a fresh manure spread on it. You might even get lucky and find a snowy owl in the largest of fields.



Common redpoll feeding on an alder cone.

*Photo: M. Valencic*

Keep your feeders filled with black oil sunflower seed, thistle seed, and suet for pine siskins, redpolls, and our many year-round birds. Siskins and redpolls also like the seed cones of alders which often grow along the edges of our lakes.

Bundle up, grab a buddy and get out birding this fall and winter. If you have mobility issues or it's just too cold, consider car birding. The car is a great blind, and the birds often get very close which bodes well for pictures.

—Matt Valencic

## Volunteer opportunity

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pruning loppers, moving the cut trees to create wildlife piles, and treating the cut stumps with herbicide in 'daubers' (rubber gloves provided). You need sturdy footwear, work gloves, and if you have loppers that would be great. We will have a few loppers, a couple of chain saws and our gas-powered trimmer with a blade for small trees. If you have similar power tools and would be willing to bring them, we could really get a lot done in one day.

—Matt Valencic

## Did you know?

Many grebes continuously molt throughout the year. They eat a good number of their own feathers which forms a matted plug in their stomach. This mat may act as a filter or hold fish bones in the stomach longer allowing digestion of the bones.

—Jim Tomko

## New bookcases installed at Education Center

Shelving at the Ed Center has been completed. They have been treated with polyurethane, installed and anchored (thanks to John Lillich, Ban Twadell and Hal Goodwin). Jim DeBroux (Chair of Documentum Committee) has begun sorting and arranging ASGC's book collection onto the shelves.

While not an official "library," there is some organization to the placement of the books. Generally, books about birds, including field guides, can be found on the left-hand shelves; other books, more related to ecology, conservation, nature etc. are being placed on the right-hand bookshelves. Most of these books, up until now, have resided in cardboard boxes. There are still boxes of old books, some of dubious quality and/or usefulness, to be sorted and either placed on the shelves or disposed of.

*Excerpted from the Documentum and Sanctuary Reports, BOT Meeting 10/24/23*



Bookcase at the Ed Center.

*Photo: J. DeBroux*

## Upcoming Events

### Field Trips

**November 11 9:30am**

*"Turkey Trek"*

Molnar Sanctuary

Over the years, the walk has consistently failed to produce a single wild turkey! It is likely because they all know Thanksgiving is close at hand. Please help me find one (or a flock) of these wily, elusive birds which were once extirpated from Ohio but are now found in every county? Even if the wild turkeys do not show up, it will still be an enjoyable walk in our less traveled sanctuary. Meet at the Aurora Dog Park parking lot on the east side of Page Road just a few hundred yards north of Mennonite Rd. in Aurora.

**December 22 7:00pm**

*"Winter Solstice Night Hike"*

Novak Sanctuary

Help us celebrate one of the longest nights of the year one night after the winter solstice with a night hike in the Novak Sanctuary. The sights, sounds, and aromas of a night hike in the woods give a very different experience than the same trail in the daytime. Let's see what we discover. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road about a mile north of State Rt. 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border. Please wear waterproof footwear.

**DATED MAIL**

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*A Wry Smile*

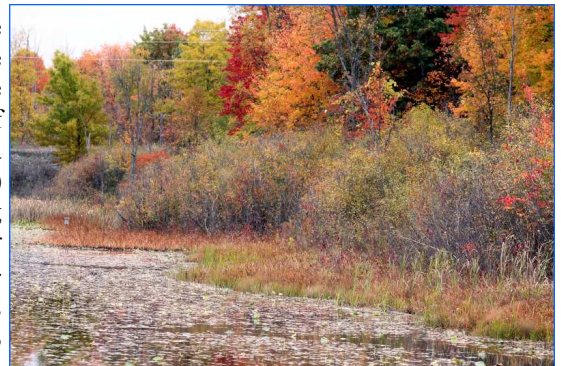
About exercise...

I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me.



**Volunteer opportunity**

Would you like to help improve bird habitat while creating a more serene place to relax and enjoy the birds, plants, and wildlife in one of our sanctuaries? Maybe you are a high school student (or know one) looking for service hours doing meaningful environmental work. Or maybe you just enjoy working outdoors. If any of this strikes a chord, consider joining us on **Saturday, November 11<sup>th</sup> from 9am to noon**, to continue the work of removing invasive buckthorn trees along the shore of Fulton Pond in the Aurora Sanctuary. Rain date is November 18<sup>th</sup> if it's pouring rain on the 11<sup>th</sup>.



Buckthorn surrounding Fulton Pond in the Aurora Sanctuary.

*Photo: M. Valencic*

No natural area is immune from invasive plants, but wetlands are especially vulnerable. Left alone, these plants out-compete native species but bring no value to the environment. We started clearing buckthorn at Fulton Pond in the fall of 2021, first clearing the peninsula that was once a showplace of native flowers. By the summer of 2022 many of those flowers were seen again, and by this past summer, the pen-

insula was abundant with over 20 species of native flowers and grasses. It was hard work by our small trail crew, but it paid off! Now it's time to continue removing more buckthorn along the shoreline.

If you would like to help with this one-day project, email us at [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org) for more details. It's physical work, bending over to cut smaller trees (less than 1") with

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