



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

February, 2024

Monitoring the Bluebird Trail

About one year ago I read in *The House Wren* that Audubon was restoring its bluebird box monitoring at the Novak Sanctuary, and they were looking for volunteers to help maintain and monitor the boxes along a trail in the sanctuary. I used to maintain two bluebird boxes of my own on my property and I thoroughly enjoyed it, so I signed up.



Nesting on the Trail.

Photo: J. Tomko

In February we got a crew together to go out and get the boxes ready for Spring. We secured the poles, ensured the boxes were firmly



Bluebird on nest box.

Photo: M. Valencic

attached, replaced boxes in poor condition and cleaned the boxes and numbered them. Shortly after that I attended
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Wanted!

Bluebird box monitors

We rekindled our bluebird trail monitoring at the Novak Sanctuary in 2023 with several new volunteers. They enjoyed the experience so much that all agreed to come back again for the 2024 season.

Now we need help monitoring the boxes in the meadow at the Hach-Otis Sanctuary in Willoughby Hills. If you love bluebirds or have an interest in learning more about them, this might be for you. No previous experience is needed.

Training will take place on **Saturday February 24th, 10am-noon at the Novak Sanctuary**. After some classroom work we will visit a few of the boxes outside the Education Center.

Monitoring begins mid-March and goes through August. It involves opening and inspecting each nest box and recording data about the presence of a new nest, eggs and/or chicks. When the brood has fledged, we clean out the box for the next occupants. There could be two or three broods in a box during the season. The number of volunteers will determine how frequently YOU would make your rounds, but no more frequently than every two weeks. You can work individually or in teams – your choice.

If you would like to join the team or have questions, please email us at info@clevelandaudubon.org.

New Zoom programs

One of our ASGC members, Marcia, sent us an email asking if we could do a program on sparrows and related species. She was seeing birds at her feeder that she knew were sparrows or related species but was having problems identifying them. I immediately got excited because I knew this would be something many people would find helpful.

So, on Thursday, February 15 at 7:00pm, we will debut LBJs: Sparrows and Finches of NE Ohio via Zoom.

It features 28 species of sparrows and finches found in NE Ohio and elsewhere in the region. Enjoy lots of photographs while we discuss the field marks of each bird, some of their habits, the typical habitat each prefers, and what
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From the Nest...

It is mid-winter and time to celebrate the season by getting in some field time! An upcoming opportunity is the Great Backyard Bird Count. If you have not ever participated, please consider it.

As each year begins, I am curious as to what my first bird of the year will be and how that may set the tone of the year. What was yours? Mine was an American goldfinch! What a great little gem. Shortly after that I saw a barred owl flying through the woods, and on



the way home there were 17 hooded mergansers loafing on a lake.

My deep gratitude to all who have contributed to our annual appeal drive. We rely on those funds to help us improve and advance the state of our natural world and educate others about how they can help. If you have not yet contributed there is no deadline. We will gladly accept any amount of your generosity and at any time.

I hope to see you on the trails.

—Jim Tomko, President, ASGC

Special event

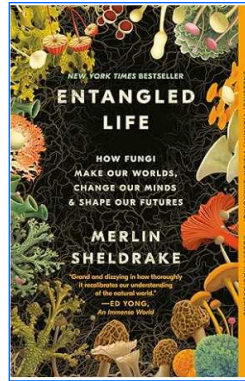
February 11 2:00 to 3:30pm

“Entangled Life”

Novak Education Center

Winter is made for reading, especially about nature! The Education Committee invites you to join us in reading *Entangled Life: How fungi make our worlds* by Merlin Sheldrake this winter. We'll gather over warm beverages and snacks at the Novak Education Center to discuss this fascinating book about the important role of fungi in sustaining nearly all living systems on earth.

RSVP for this event: info@clevelandaudubon.org



Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*)

A neighbor told me he had a very dapper looking robin eating seeds under his birdfeeder. He was surprised to see it in the winter. He said it had red eyes, a bit blacker on its throat than usual and it was scratching the ground while eating seeds.

Well, American robins can be found all year in our area and they will sometimes visit seed feeders but this fellow was not an American robin. This bird used to be called a ground robin or a chewink. In recent times it was called a rufous-sided towhee. Then in 1995 the name was changed to the Eastern towhee in order to distinguish it from the spotted towhee of our western states.

Red eyes, black head, throat, back, wings and tail set off by wonderful rufus flanks and a white belly are captivating. It has some white streaking in its wings and large white patches on the outside corners of its tail which it flashes when disturbed or to signal other towhees. Very dapper indeed!

They prefer brushy fields, hedgerows, and open woods edges where the female builds a four-inch, firm cup of weed stems, twigs, bark shreds, and dead leaves lined with fine rootlets, grasses and hair. Usually, the nest is in a tangle on the ground, sunken almost to the rim in the leaf litter, but it can be low in a bush. She lays two to six grayish to greenish cream-colored eggs spotted in rufus.

While foraging, towhees do an amusing, two-footed backwards hop, scratching the ground as they go, ready to lurch forward onto any edible item they may uncover. They eat insects, centipedes, millipedes, spiders, snails, seeds, acorns, fruit, and tender flower and leaf buds.

Most of our towhees do migrate but many hardy individuals overwinter with us. If you have one gracing you with its presence, then this spring listen for his delightful song demanding that you “Drink your teeeee”!

I know it will make you will smile.

—Jim Tomko

Monitoring the Bluebird Trail

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the training session at the Education Center and then we began monitoring the boxes in March.

The trail is beautiful, and it is a real treat to watch the sanctuary “wake up” as the year progresses. You start seeing and hearing a few birds early on and you get an occasional nest and then summer comes, and the sanctuary explodes with activity.

The birds are everywhere and even with 23 boxes there were times we had no vacancies. It's extremely rewarding to watch the nest construction, then the eggs, then hatchlings, then nestlings and then successful fledglings. Clean out the box and wait for the next family to move in. Watching the plant life in the sanctuary grow and change as the year progresses is equally rewarding.

Monitoring and recording the progress of these wonderful creatures is a great excuse to get out and walk a beautiful trail and enjoy and appreciate nature and all it has to offer. I enjoyed it so much that I was sad when the season ended because I would have to wait until next spring to see those little guys again. If you love birds, nature and being outside in a beautiful environment, I think you would enjoy the Bluebird Trail. The good news is, only a couple months to go.

—Bill Rucki



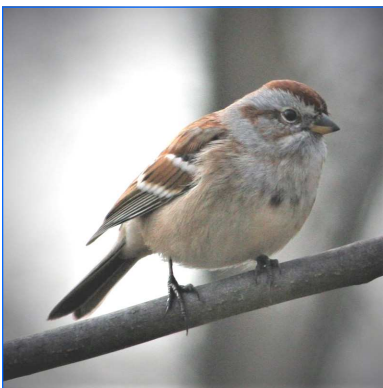
Hatchlings on the Trail.

Photo: W. Kohnke

New Zoom programs

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time of year to expect seeing them. They are divided into Year-round, Winter,



American tree sparrow.
Photo: M. Valencic

Summer, and Migration species. This one-hour talk will be recorded so if you can't make it on the 15th, you can request a link to the recording. This program will also be added to our Speaker's Bureau offerings.

The other talk, Using eBird Mobile on your iPhone, will be presented by Kelly Stanek on Thursday March 21st, at 7:00pm via Zoom. You may remember Kelly from our Warbler Warm Up talks over the last several years.

Kelly will use her iPad to share the ins-and-outs of eBird Mobile for iPhone users, starting from downloading the app to your phone, to setting your preferences, downloading packs, and creating a checklist. She will share some shortcuts, like using 4-letter codes (breeding bird codes) instead of typing the entire name of a bird and clicking on the ‘checked birds’ to make adding additional individuals to the list quick and easy. She will also access My eBird and explore nearby Hotspots.

Visit www.clevelandaudubon.org and look for the Events listing on the left-hand side for registration information.

—Matt Valencic

In case you missed it!

"Winter Solstice"

We had a wonderful night hike one mile back to the Novak observation blind to watch the marsh water glisten and hear the Canada geese jostle for the most desired position to rest for the night.

We strained our ears in vain to hear any other wildlife activity. All was silent.

We then moved to the new observation platform to watch for beaver or otter activity on the pond. No wakes or ripples were detected. We wondered if the people who live on the opposite side of the pond have a deep appreciation for the wonderful overlook in their backyard.

On the way out we hoped to lure an owl to serenade us. Then all of a sudden from directly behind me about 25 yards down the trail an Eastern screech owl burst into a wonderful clear trill. It took a moment but then I realized that it was an exact rendition imitated by fellow night hiker Kelly. She is the most amazing Eastern screech owl mimic!

We did hear one short utterance from a barred owl far to the southeast of our spot on the trail. That call was answered by a barred owl off to our northwest.

When we arrived at the trailhead, we all enjoyed some hot chocolate and gingerbread cookies. It was a wonderful way to greet the season.

—Jim Tomko

Winter reading

Winter World: the ingenuity of animal survival by Bernd Heinrich. This book was published 20 years ago but what a gem!



I've often wondered how the tiny (3.9" long and 0.2 oz) golden-crowned kinglet could survive the winter when temps dip below 0°F. Heinrich explains how in amazing detail, compliments of his own years-long research. He tells how the body temperature of these tiny birds needs to be at 111°F while it forages for the tiny caterpillars of a woodland moth, then how it stays alive through the long (15+ hour) winter night when temps go below zero F. You will be fascinated to learn how they do it.

He also covers other birds, northern flying squirrels, turtles, frogs, insects, bats and bears. You don't have to be a scientist to enjoy Heinrich's writing, but if you are, you will be impressed with the depth and breadth of his knowledge. Guaranteed to elicit wonder and awe in anyone who enjoys nature reading.

—Matt Valencic



nature
in my backyard

Your garden will make a difference.

A step-by-step process to increase biodiversity in your yard for the benefit of birds, bees and other wildlife. Certify your yard now or schedule a **FREE** site visit and evaluation and we will guide you through.

Now scheduling visits for Spring!

This is a certification program of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland and the Shaker Lakes Garden Club. Please visit clevelandaudubon.org/nature-in-my-backyard or email at natureinmybackyard@clevelandaudubon.org.



Upcoming Events

Field Trips

February 17 9:30am
"Great Backyard Bird Count"
Aurora Sanctuary

Join in on this fun international bird count to help us do our winter bird survey and to contribute to the statistics managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collaboration with National Audubon. This is an excellent time for novice birders to begin as the number of species is not overwhelming and there are no leaves to obscure views of the birds and other wildlife. Meet at the Bretschneider Park parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Rd. in Aurora. Please wear waterproof footwear.

February 11 2:00 to 3:30pm
"Entangled Life"
Novak Education Center

See Page 2 of this newsletter for more information.

Email your RSVP for this event to
info@clevelandaudubon.org

February 15 7:00pm
"LBJs: Sparrows & Finches of NE Ohio"
Via Zoom

It's possible to find 28 species of sparrows and finches in NE Ohio during the year. Meet these birds (lots of pictures), learn their field marks, habitats and habits so you can get excited, rather

Programs

than frustrated, the next time you see these LBJs (little brown jobs). Presented by Matt Valencic.

RSVP for this event at
www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events

February 18 3:00pm
"Birds of NE Ohio"
North Chagrin Nature Center

Get a close up look at 100 of the most common residents, migrants and breeding birds of NE Ohio and learn where and when to find them. Approximately 1 hour in length. Public welcome, no RSVP necessary.

DATED MAIL

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Great Backyard Bird Count

This fun and interesting event began in 1998 and is one of the longest ongoing citizen science projects known. To participate is easy. All you need to do is spend at least 15 minutes or as long as you desire to look out the window, take a walk or drive and count as many birds as you see or hear. Then you may enter your checklist by way of your eBird account or your Merlin account. If you do not have an account, you can download these free apps.

This international event takes place over four days beginning on Friday, February 16th at midnight and ending on Monday evening, February 19th at 11:59 pm.

This information is almost instantly visible to scientists all over the world who are studying trends in bird populations. And you can view a real time map of the world with points of light flashing on as everyone's checklists are submitted throughout the world. You can see which countries are awake and birding and which countries are owling at night. All this data gives ornithologists the chance to take the pulse of wild bird populations throughout the world.

—Jim Tomko

A Wry Smile

Every time I hear the dirty word 'exercise,' I wash my mouth out with chocolate.



Happy Valentine's Day!



Did you know?

The alternative name for our Eastern towhee is chewink. And that name is an imitation of one of his calls. Also, a group of towhees is called a "tangle" or a "teapot" of towhees.

—Jim Tomko

Eastern towhee or "chewink."
Photo: M. Valencic