



# 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, 2024

## STEAM Night at Kenston High School

ASGC was excited to be invited back to STEAM night at Kenston High School in Bainbridge, OH on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. It is an opportunity for students K – 5 to immerse themselves in a variety of activities related to Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math, as provided by individuals and organizations as varied as Keithly Scientific Instruments, Nestle Food Scientists, and Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland.

Our focus at STEAM was on birds and featured *Fabulous Feathers and Flight*, led by Sarah Mabey, PhD, and Hiram College students Bethany Smith and Lilly Montovan; *Nests and Eggs* by Barb Philbrick; *Beaks*, by Kathryn Craig and Jim Tomko and *Bird Watching* by Matt Valencic. We were very excited to have Rebecca Moore, Curator of Animal

Programs for Hiram College Field Station bring three live birds to the program. Barry the Barred Owl, Mystery the Pigeon, and Willow the Red-bellied Woodpecker are ‘animal ambassadors’ at the field station in Hiram. She was assisted by Mike Sustin, field station Education and Outreach Coordinator, and students Alivia Selander and Sydney Ladage.



Rebecca Moore from Hiram College holds Barry the Barred Owl.  
Photo: K. Craig

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## Wanted! Buckthorn busters

If you love to hate buckthorn as much as I do, or you are a student looking for service hours, we are scheduling two workdays in March to remove invasive buckthorn and autumn olive trees around Hamann and Fulton Ponds in the Aurora Sanctuary.

On **March 9th** and **16th**, we will meet at the Novak Education Center, 382 Townline Road, at 8:45am. From there we will carpool to the Aurora Sanctuary via the First Energy Power line on Chamberlain Road. We pass through a locked gate to get to the work-sites, so you must be on time to join the carpool. We will work until about noon each day. The rain date is March 23rd.

If you would like to help, email [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org). It’s physical work, bending over to cut smaller trees (less than 1”) with pruning loppers, moving the cut trees to create wildlife piles, and treating the cut stumps with

## Nature in My Backyard: Buckthorn explained

Let’s start with the good news...Yes, there is an Ohio native buckthorn!! The alder-leaved buckthorn, *rhamus alnifolia*, is a small (2’-3’ tall), noninvasive little shrub that grows in low, damp areas. If you think you may have found this happy little shrub: it has a five-petaled flower (nonnatives tend to have four petals) and it has no thorns! If you find one on your property, it is useful for our native birds and pollinators, and develops bright, attractive autumn coloration.

As for the foreign cousins—that’s another story completely. The buckthorns native to Europe and Asia are destructive to our habitats and do not present healthy food sources for our pollinators and birds. Because they have no native predators, and because they leaf out earlier in the spring and hold leaves later in fall than native flora, they are able to outcompete desirable plants in our woodlands, where they create a thick undercover that chokes natural under-

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## From the Nest...

The migration is on! Ducks are coming through and sandhill cranes are in some marshes! Bald Eagles and great horned owls are nesting, woodcocks are beginning to claim their dancing grounds and several bird species are singing their territorial songs.

This month we will do our annual Waterfowl Wander to look for a variety



ducks, geese, grebes, and loons. A week or two after that we will have a twilight hike to watch our local woodcocks sing their territorial songs. This is a fascinating time of year for rejuvenation and anticipation of great things to come! I hope that you will have time join us on some of these occasions.

I hope to see you on the trails.

—Jim Tomko, President, ASGC



Treated stumps.  
Photo: M. Valencic

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 extra loppers, a couple chain saws for larger trees, and our gas-powered trimmer with a blade for small trees. Snacks will be provided.

—Matt Valencic

## STEAM Night

(Continued from page 1)

Over 350 students and parents came into our room during the 2-hour program. Students enjoyed hands-on activities at each station including studying feathers under the binocular microscope while learning about flight, probing a tree trunk and container of sand with various pliers for plastic insects, and holding 3-D printed eggs seeing how they fit in real bird nests. But the main attraction was the birds. Everyone en-

## Buckthorn explained

(Continued from page 1)

joyed learning the back story of each bird and many took the opportunity for a photo op next to the birds.

growth. The story is the same in open areas. As relatively heavy feeders, they also deplete soil nutrient levels, and worse still, invasive buckthorns are allelopathic: they release chemicals into the soil around their roots that deter the growth of other varieties of plants.

Thickets of buckthorn establish quickly and are almost impenetrable by wildlife and (take note!) humans trying to eradicate them. The non-native varieties were imported to North America for use as hedging plants. Thick, thorny hedges were useful to settlers.

The foliage is shiny and deep green, and the berries mature to a glossy black, which birds eat. The berries are low in protein and have a notable laxative effect, sometimes killing small birds. Sadly, deer do not find alien buckthorns attractive and will decimate the native plants and leave the buckthorns untouched.

Common buckthorn, *rhamnus cathartica*, is the plant most of us think of when we think of a “buckthorn.” It is a taller shrub growing to 25’ tall or more, with a spread at full growth of 10’ to 15’. Leaves are oval, one to three inches long with finely toothed edges, markedly veined and held sub-opposite on twigs. Thorns project from joints between the twigs.

The plant blooms over multiple months in spring. Late fall leaf color is yellow. The bark closely resembles that of native cherry; it is silvery, with horizontal lenticels.

## Spring Bird Walk Series 2024

The Spring Bird Walks is a celebration of migratory birds and is one of the oldest community science partnerships between Northeast Ohio park systems, Audubon chapters, and other organizations now in its 91st year. Walks are led by experienced birders and will be held on Sundays, April 14, 21, and 28, and May 5, 12, and 19 at 7:30am unless otherwise noted. Visit [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org) for a complete list of locations.

Our mission statement states we are to “... promote the conservation and appreciation of birds and other wildlife through habitat preservation and educational activities ...”. We certainly accomplished that tonight by introducing 350 parents and young people to the wonderful world of birds.

—Matt Valencic



Common buckthorn: small, yellow-green flowers and finely-toothed oval leaves.

Photo courtesy Nature in my Backyard

The other invasive buckthorn in our world is the glossy buckthorn, *frangula alnus*. This one tends to grow in wetter areas—although it will grow anywhere, given the chance. The leaves have many more parallel veins, up to 10 per side, and the top surface of the foliage is very shiny. The margins of the leaves tend to be smooth. The drupes (berry clusters) go through a red phase before maturing to a purple-toned black. It does not usually grow higher than 20’ tall, and its flowers may have five petals, like the native. Bark on this plant is darker and grayer than that of the common.

There are many ways to attack these undesirables, but please know that they WILL fight back. We suggest you research the various methods detailed on the internet. You may find one method more to your liking, or to your tolerance, than another. Better yet, come help our dedicated Trail Crew and volunteer with the ASGC eradication effort—experience will definitely help.

—Robin Schatat



## Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



## Sandhill Crane (*Antigone canadensis*)

Have you had an acquaintance who knows that you are into birding tell you “Oh yeah, I see cranes all the time! They fish in my pond every day.” When they describe the bird, you know they are describing a great blue heron.

Hérons and cranes are not very closely related. Herons are in a family which includes herons and storks. Cranes are in a family which includes rails, coots, gallinules, and cranes. When cranes fly, they leave their necks outstretched with their legs extending behind them. Herons fly with their necks folded in. Cranes often fly in V-shaped flocks circling above the marsh with their loud bugling “Kar-rooo Kar-roo Kar-rooo.”

Historically they were occasional nesters in Ohio but by 1900, due to hunting, wetland drainage, and habitat changes, they were rarely seen in Ohio. In 1987 a nesting pair was discovered in Wayne County and they have been making a come-back ever since. Although still listed as endangered in Ohio, isolated nesting areas are becoming more common.

Sandhill cranes are tall (up to 48 inches) wading birds with black legs, slate gray body plumage which includes a “dress bustle,” long necks, white cheeks, yellow-orange eyes and a bright red cap. They feed on seeds, grains, berries, insects, snails, frogs, snakes, and small mammals.

These cranes nest on the ground near water surrounded by tall emergent vegetation. Two buffy/olive eggs spotted with reddish brown are incubated by both parents for about 30 days before hatching. The youngsters, called “colts”, are able to walk through the marsh within hours of hatching.

Next time you are near a marsh, especially at twilight, tune your ears for that distinctive call.

—Jim Tomko

## In case you missed it!

“Great Backyard Bird Count”

Our annual winter bird survey was like winter! We had weather with temperatures in the low 20s, snow flurries, a chilling breeze and clouds.

We were able to form a bird checklist of 23 species which included a bald eagle, a rusty blackbird, tree sparrows, and a red-breasted Nuthatch (thanks to Matt Valencic).

We all enjoyed each other’s company and stories while relying on individual strengths such as hearing the high

frequency bird calls, the expertise of finding and viewing a bird and the skill to call a species into view or hearing range.

The rest of the world up to this date recorded 7,777 species of birds on this weekend of the Great Backyard Bird Count. Final results on the international statistics are not yet available but I will report on that as soon as all the tabulations are in.

—Jim Tomko

### Garden layering

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occur around the edges such as the wet edges along small ponds or streams, wetlands, meadows and grasslands. Each one of these layers creates a habitat for birds, insects, moths, butterflies and small wildlife such as voles, mice, frogs, chipmunks or rabbits.

As you plan your garden this spring, think about enhancing your layers. Do you need more native shrubs with berries? Early blooming flowers for pollinators? New scents or colors? Look for helpful resource links on the Nature in My Backyard website at [clevelandaudubon.org/nature-in-my-backyard](http://clevelandaudubon.org/nature-in-my-backyard).

Then grab your graph paper (or iPad and Apple pencil) and start drawing.



Ed Center native plant garden

Photo: M. Salomon

Sketch in your existing plants. Mark the non-natives you plan to remove and spaces you hope to fill. You could plan in stages: this spring, next fall, a year from now. Color it in for fun and to see how the colors coordinate and shift through seasons. This plan will focus your spring plant purchases or trades. A list of native nurseries with their spring plant sale dates will be on our website soon.

For an excellent resource on conducting a bird inventory and planning your garden, see [Planting Native to Attract Birds to your Yard](#) (2018) by Sharon Sorenson. Much greater depth on layers in [The Living Landscape](#) (2014) by Rick Darke and Doug Tallamy.

—Kathryn Craig

## Nature journaling workshop

April 21, 2024, 1:00-3:30pm

ASGC Novak Education Center

Join us for this special opportunity to begin (or expand) your illustrated nature journal. Guest artist and nature interpreter Carol Agnew will guide this afternoon of discovery and creativity. Participants will experiment with different approaches to observing nature’s details, field sketching and illustration, and creating a personalized nature journal.

What a great way to greet Spring! All skill levels are welcome.

Registration is required with a \$25/ participant fee. Space is limited to the first 15 registrants.

To pre-register for this event, please email [info@clevelandaudubon.org](mailto:info@clevelandaudubon.org). To complete your registration, make checks payable to Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, and mail to ASGC, 1567 Bell Road, Chagrin Falls, OH 44022.



John Lillich (shown) and Ban Twaddell cut over 60 pieces of wood to repair the boardwalk at the Hach-Otis Sanctuary. They transported the cut pieces from the Ed Center at Novak to the barn at Hach-Otis in preparation for installation later this spring.

## Upcoming Events

### Field Trips

March 23 9:00am

“Waterfowl Wander”

Ladue Reservoir

The northward rush to their breeding grounds is on! Ducks, geese, grebes, and loons act as if it is first come-first served to the best nesting sites. Many pass through our area on their way north. 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.

March 21 7:00pm

“Using eBird Mobile on Your iPhone”

Via Zoom

From downloading the free app to your phone, to creating your first checklist, exploring nearby hotspots, and checking your My eBird status, Kelly Stanek will walk us through the most popular features of this app.

RSVP for this event at

[www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org/Events)

April 2 7:00pm

“Birds of NE Ohio”

Orange Library, Pepper Pike

Get a close up look at 100 of the most common residents, migrants and

### Programs

breeding birds of NE Ohio and learn where and when to find them. Approximately 1 hour in length.

April 7 2:00pm

“Warbler Warm-up”

West Woods Nature Center

Some of the prettiest birds on the planet will be arriving in NE Ohio in April and May, and this program will get you ready to identify all of them. Matt Valencic and Kelly Stanek will show you how to ID more than 30 species and tell you where to look for them. About 1 ½ hour

Public welcome, no RSVP necessary.

**DATED MAIL**

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**Ready to have your garden certified by our Nature in My Backyard program as a diverse native habitat?**

Register now at [clevelandaudubon.org/nature-in-my-backyard](http://clevelandaudubon.org/nature-in-my-backyard).  
Need help to plan? Our Volunteer Gardeners are taking requests for appointments starting in April.

**Planning your new or ongoing native garden? Don't forget to layer!**

Every birdwatcher and hiker knows the rule: for the best outdoor experience, layer! Gardens have layers, too, and diverse gardens with many native plants are especially full of healthy layers from the canopy to the ground.

The best part? Each layer provides habitat for different birds! Oven birds hang out on the ground. Carolina wrens and white breasted nuthatches live in shrubs. In your understory, you may find cedar waxwings, while woodpeckers spend their days in the canopy.

If you're not sure which birds live in the layers of your garden, stop and watch. A yearlong inventory of the birds that live, nest or migrate through your yard will provide you with the most information. But most of us will plan based on more incomplete observations or by the types of birds we hope our new native plantings will attract.

A healthy garden is composed of a canopy of trees, understory trees, shrubs, herbaceous (usually flowering) plants and ground layers. More subtle layers

*(Continued on page 3)*

*A Wry Smile*



Q: What do you call a parrot that flew away?

A: A polygon

***Save the date!***

**The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland's Annual Meeting & Dinner**  
**Sunday, June 2, 2024**  
**Veterans Legacy Woods (new location!)**  
**14085 Ravenna Rd, Newbury Township, OH**  
**Look for details next month!**