



Sunrise at Lillich Meadows – Hach-Otis

Photograph by John Lillich

Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland



Annual Report to Members For the Year 2023

P. O. Box 391037, Solon, Ohio 44139, 216/556-5441 www.clevelandaudubon.org



Overview

The information in this report is based mainly on accomplishments, events, and activities during calendar year 2023. Exceptions to that timeframe, e.g., the listing of trustees and officers for the period June, 2023 – May, 2024, are noted. The individuals listed as chairs and members of the committees are also individuals who served from June, 2023 through May, 2024.

Reports from the following committees are contained in the pages that follow:

- Communications Committee
- Documentum Committee
- Education Committee
- Field Trips Committee
- Finance Committee
- Important Birding Area (IBA) Committee
- Sanctuary Committee

Interested in helping?

Reading through the attached reports will give you a sense of the many activities involved with meeting the mission of our organization (see boxed text to the right for our mission statement). We could use your help.

If you are interested in learning more about how to become involved with The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland please contact Jim Tomko, Board President, at 216/556-5441

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland (ASGC) promotes the conservation and appreciation of birds and other wildlife through habitat preservation and educational activities. ASGC, a chapter of the National Audubon Society, has over 1,400 member households throughout the Greater Cleveland area, owns over 500 acres of protected land, and is one of northeast Ohio's oldest continuously operating environmental organizations.



June 3, 2023

From the President



Now in our 101st year of operation, ASGC has been fully occupied with multiple programs that fulfill our mission statement: “To promote the conservation and appreciation birds and other wildlife through habitat preservation and educational activities.”.

Our secretary, Carol Lillich, provides us with timely reports and accurate minutes allowing us to refer back to previous discussions and the reasons for our decisions. Without Carol’s friendly prodding and vigilant watch on the calendar, we would have never been able to accomplish our goals. We can count on Carol keeping us on track with proper custom and protocol.

Matt Valencic and his Education Committee have continued to polish our excellent education program. He and his team of dedicated volunteers have made our education programs sought after over a wide area. Please read the education committee report to be amazed at all the people those programs have touched. We are all give great gratitude for their highly successful efforts.

“Captain” Matt Valencic and his warriors have continued the battle against horribly invasive species known as European Buckthorn, Reed Canary Grass, Japanese Barberry and Multiflora Rose. Their passion in restoring fields and forest from being overwhelmed by invasive species is quite astounding. When you visit the sanctuaries, you will see a fantastic improvement.

Ban Twaddell continues to lead our dedicated trail crew constantly looking for ways to make the trails easily passable and safer. The Beaver Deceiver/Automatic Pond Leveler device they modified and installed have been working wonderfully providing a dry walk across the north shore of Fulton Pond at the Aurora Sanctuary and lake drainage control at the Molnar Sanctuary. Ban is always thinking and planning ahead for the next evolution of trail improvement. Our trails provide an awesome and much needed way to get back to nature.

I regularly hear comments from members about our excellent newsletter the “*House Wren*” created and edited by, Alison Debroux. She has kept us up to date with news on events, accomplishments and educational articles. Face Book provides another form of contact with our membership. Cathy Green kindly volunteers to monitor our Face Book account. Sharon Swaney, our Webmaster has kept our website easy to navigate and up to date.

The Documentum committee headed up by, Jim DeBroux, along with his small crew are making steady progress at sorting through our ancient document history with the goal of getting our history uploaded onto our computer providing access to all interested parties.

Stephanie Demyan is a treasurer to emulate! Her carefully and accurately maintained records of our finances show us to be in good condition. Stephanie’s clear style of reporting makes the information easy to understand and allows us to plan for current and future activities. We thank her for accomplishing that tedious task.

John and Carol Lillich continue to lovingly watch over and maintain Hach-Otis our “crown jewel” sanctuary. Due to our State Nature Preserve Manager, Adam Wohlever’s nomination, Hach-Otis was inducted into the Old Growth Forest Network. John and Carol also enjoy monitoring an extremely productive Bluebird trail at Hach-Otis. Thanks to Jonn and Carol for all their work.

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland



Ken Kressina always aims his efforts towards improvement for wildlife. He has made nice improvements in all of our Sanctuaries. For many years Kenny has worked behind the scenes with often heavy work to keep our sanctuaries enhanced for native flora and fauna.

Our chapter continues to financially support Cleveland City School's East Clark elementary school's bird club the "Bird Nerds". Even though the leader and birding coach, Buster Banish, has retired from teaching he continues his supervision and coaching these children piquing their interest in nature and allowing study, field trips and interaction with birds and birding. Buster provides an opportunity for these children that they would not otherwise have.

Jane Ellison's Nature in Your Backyard program has taken off. This program provides expert on-site advice on how to restore native habitat in their backyards to wildlife enriching the quality for wildlife. In consultation with Harvey Webster, Matt Valencic and the Shaker Lakes Garden Cub, she is refining and developing her plan. We thank her for taking on this interesting and needed program.

Mark Magree, our caretaker of the Novak Education Center maintains the building and grounds at the Novak Sanctuary. Mark is a jack of all trades when it comes to repair and enhancement of our equipment, building and grounds. Mary Salomon's work has provided a beautiful native wild flower garden with sequential blooming throughout the season. We thank them for their continued care.

Sarah Mabey is always available to offer wise and scientific advice and suggestions on projects and other evolutions for our chapter.

We have welcomed the input and participation of Tracy Engle as a new board member. Even though he is still working full time he has jumped in with both feet making his valuable time and expertise available to us.

I am quite awestruck with the bank of knowledge and professional expertise that we have on our board of directors. They are the ones who have guided and moved our chapter to the prestigious and respected level that we all can be proud of.

Thank you to all of you. Without your assistance we would never accomplish our goals. It gives me great pleasure to serve our organization with these outstanding people.

Also, thank you to all those who have generously contributed time, talent and funds. With your assistance we have met our mission of education and conservation of our natural resources.

I am confident that with the human resources and generous donors that we have, we will continue on this successful trail.

Submitted By Jim Tomko, President



Communications Committee

Alison DeBroux, Chair

The Communications Committee encompasses five aspects of ASGC's efforts to communicate with members, the public, and the Board of Trustees. These are: the monthly newsletter *The House Wren*; the website www.clevelandaudubon.org; mass email campaigns via Constant Contact; Facebook; and the U.S. Post Office.

The House Wren

Editor: Alison DeBroux

Contributing writers: Jim Tomko, Matt Valencic

Photographer: Matt Valencic

Many thanks to the following for their submissions during the 2023/2024 season: Ban Twaddell, Carol Lillich, Kathryn Craig, John Lillich, Sarah Mabey, Jim DeBroux, Keith Kohnke, Bill Rucki, Robin Schachat.

For the 2nd year, *The House Wren* was published 8 times per year instead of the traditional 9, combining the December and January issues into a single issue. This has been a successful change, as it reduces printing costs and simplifies production during the busy holiday season.

The printed version is produced by Minuteman Press, 33528 Aurora Rd., Solon, OH 44139. Phone: (440) 543-5547. Our contact is Sheila Boros, sheilab@minutemanpress.com.

Our mailing list comes partly from National Audubon and partly from a list of local members who are not NAS members. We averaged 1193 mailings during 2023-2024, and the monthly printing and mailing costs averaged \$801 per month. The average cost per recipient was \$.67, a \$.04 increase over last year.

www.clevelandaudubon.org

Webmaster: Sharon Swaney

ASGC Liaison: Alison DeBroux

The website is the “face” of ASGC, often the first introduction someone has to our organization. Audubon members and the general public can find out about upcoming events, issues concerning birds and wildlife, and read a web-version (low resolution) of *The House Wren*. Through the connected email address (info@clevelandaudubon.org) they can request specific information, sign up to receive our email newsletter (see below), volunteer, or register for various programs.

Set-up of new web pages, changes to existing ones, or addition of registration forms and photographs are done by the *webmaster*. The *Liaison* adds new events that cycle automatically through the calendar.

New this year: an addition to the website of *Nature in My Backyard* (NMB), an initiative produced in partnership with the Shaker Lakes Garden Club. Design elements were carefully vetted in order to keep the site cohesive and recognizable as that of ASGC. Further changes may involve a “sub-domain” for NMB, currently in discussion.



info@clevelandaudubon.org

Email monitor/designer: Alison DeBroux

Our email address is not only our members' and the public's primary contact with the organization, it is also the portal through which we connect with them via Constant Contact (CC), a mass email distributor. Their fee is based on the number of email contacts we have. As of May, 2024, ASGC had 993 email contacts. Once a month or as often as we wish, CC will send out our email “campaign” that may include upcoming events, a link to the web-version newsletter, general information about birds and wildlife, and progress on various ASGC projects like the Trail Crew. These campaigns act as supplements to *The House Wren*. They are designed and edited similarly to the newsletter. Contributions are welcome.

Facebook

Monitor: Cathy Green

ASGC has had a Facebook page since 2011. Content is currently handled by member Cathy Green.

U.S. Post Office

Donations and communiques still require “snail mail” capability. Some of our members do not use email and send us notes written by hand. ASGC currently has a post office box at the Solon, OH, Post Office. Our mailing address is: P.O. Box 391037, Solon, OH, 44139. There are two extant keys to this box, currently held by Alison DeBroux and Mark Demyan. Incoming mail is forwarded to the appropriate Board member or distributed at our quarterly meetings.

Submitted By Alison DeBroux, Chair



Documentum Committee

Jim DeBroux, Chair

Members: Mark Demyan, Carol Lillich, John Lillich, Mary Salomon

The number of formal meetings of the Documentum Committee has been minimal for the last year. However, we have accomplished quite a few things.

Most of the historical documents have been scanned and archived, there are only a few remaining. The next step for the scanned documents is to develop a storage and retrieval strategy.

The file cabinets have been placed in the appropriate place in the attic to store the physical documents, as well as some of redundant copies of some important books and ornithological journals. The large bench cabinets in the attic have had tops installed and are ready to receive and store large flat documents for their safety. Thanks to the volunteers that worked on this project.

We have new beautiful book shelves at the Education Center. Many thanks to the volunteers that acquired these and to those that finished and placed them. All of our donated books have been sorted and have a place on these shelves. Once the books on the shelves are organized, we hope to be able to provide access to these books to ASGC members. We always appreciate appropriate donated books for our library.

As always, thank you to the volunteers that have helped during the past year. Also, if you have anything to offer in terms of volunteering, we are a welcoming committee. None of the work we do is physically demanding.

Submitted by Jim DeBroux, Chair



Education Committee

Matthew Valencic, Chair

Members: Julie Albrecht, Richard (Buster) Banish, Laura Bell-Peters, Cathy Cochran, Kathryn Craig, Alison DeBroux, Joan Demirjian, Jane Ellison, David Factor, Cathy Green, John Lillich, Sarah Mabey, Barb Philbrick, Betsy Siman, Andrea Story, Jim Tomko, and Harvey Webster.

The Education Committee is committed to the mission of promoting the conservation and appreciation of plants, birds and other wildlife through a variety of educational activities for adults and children in the Greater Cleveland community. The backgrounds of our members in science and education are varied and impressive, which contributes to the success of the programs and events offered. It is a privilege to work with such a talented and generous group of people.

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland



During calendar 2023 the Education Committee presented 52 programs and events that reached 1,727 adults and children.

Our **Backyard Naturalist Speaker's Bureau** presented 38 talks in-person or via Zoom that reached 943 people. Programs were created and presented by John Lillich, Dr. Sarah Mabey, Dr. Jim Tomko, Barb Philbrick and Matt Valencic covering topics such as bird migration, bird study, the migratory bird act, bird identification, feeding birds in your yard, and programs about specific groups of birds. We also presented a program about the role of native plants for birds and insects (see the ASGC website for a complete list of Speaker's Bureau talks). Talks were presented to a variety of groups such as other Audubon Chapters, libraries, Nature/Conservation Organizations, garden clubs, Scouts and retirement communities.

'Third Thursdays' are talks on a variety of nature/conservation topics for general audiences and presented via Zoom®. Four talks were presented in 2023 that reached at least 165 people (often more than one person viewing the program in their homes). The presenters were Dr. Christine Pappas, Dr. Jim Tomko, Matt Valencic and Kelly Stanek.

On February 2nd ASGC members and volunteers presented ornithology displays at the **Kenston High School STEAM night** for K – 5th graders (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math). The students and their parents learned about feathers and flight, beaks and their adaptation for foods, and nests and eggs. We also had tables about bird art (photography, paintings, pictures and books), and about bird watching. It was a huge success with over 100 parents and students visiting our room during the evening.

Our first **Winter Book Discussion Group** was held in February with 9 people attending to discuss the book *What a Plant Knows*. It was a small group, but the discussions were very interesting and often took us on unexpected tangents. All agreed we should do it again next year.

Training for the 6 members of the Novak Sanctuary **Bluebird Box Monitoring Team** took place in late February and included an hour of classroom work followed by a walk through the sanctuary to visit all 23 bluebird nest boxes. This was a collaboration with the Sanctuary Committee and led by John Lillich.

Three of our volunteers led bird walks for 40 **Aurora High School students** at the Hiram College Field Station as a component of their annual water quality survey of Silver Creek. Besides learning to use binoculars, students were introduced to two useful birding apps for their phones. The Merlin app helps identify birds and their songs and eBird is a citizen science project for recording your personal bird sightings anywhere in the world. Both apps are free and produced by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The students enjoyed the experience, and we were invited to come back again in 2024.

A new pilot program titled **Nature in My Backyard** (NMB) was launched at the ASGC Annual Meeting in June. Conceived by Jane Ellison of the Shaker Lakes Garden Club, the program aims to improve biodiversity in our backyards through education, identification and control of invasive plant species, the addition of native plants to the landscape and a reduction of turf grass (see the ASGC website for more detailed information). Homeowners are welcome to just use the resources on our website or have NMB volunteers visit their property to help them get started. The first 6 months of this pilot program included presentations to area gardening groups, garden tours, and visitation to a handful of homes. A few unsolicited and generous contributions were received for which we are very grateful. More talks and resources are planned for 2024 as well as increasing the number of volunteer team members. Jane is a member of the ASGC Board of Trustees.



Chagrin River Bird Quest (CRBQ) was September 8-9 with 109 people participating in the 24-hour event. A new record 140 total species of birds were identified by the 26 teams that included families, birding friends, and park naturalists from Geauga and Lake Counties. A record 72 people attended the celebration on Saturday at West Woods Nature Center where prizes and awards were presented to birders of all ability levels. This event continues to be a success because of the hard work of 20 volunteers from ASGC, Blackbrook Audubon and Geauga Park District.

2024 is off to a strong start with many Speaker's Bureau presentations and in-person events. We welcome new members to bring their knowledge, ideas, and enthusiasm to the Education Committee. Contact us at info@clevelandaudubon.org.

Submitted By Matt Valencic, Chair



Field Trip Committee

Jim Tomko, Chair

Members: John Lillich, Carol Lillich

As is our custom, seasonally appropriate field trips have been offered on a monthly basis emphasizing the amazing display of beauty and intrigue that our natural world provides. Attendance varied from 1-12 with age ranges from teenage years to twilight years.

Once again, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, Sarah Mabey and Matt Valencic were able to organize a limited number of spots to a closed WRLC property with an astonishing array of waterfowl during the spring migration.

If anyone has an idea for a field trip or would like to lead one, the request will sincerely be considered.

Submitted By Jim Tomko, Chair



Finance Committee

Stephanie Demyan, Chair

Members: Jim Tomko,

Financial Report Highlights - Year Ended December 31, 2023

Income Statement

Income Items

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland has been supported through donations in form of estate bequests, memorials, and the generous gifts received through the Annual Appeal. In 2023 the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland received an increase in donations through several Memorials where the family of the deceased requested donations to the society in lieu of flowers. We are especially grateful to those families and their generosity.

\$49,446 – Annual Appeal, Matching Funds, Memorials, Estate Bequests

\$8,295 – Rental income has been steady during 2023

Expense Items

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland focused on improvements in the Sanctuary's during 2023 with primary focus on invasive species management, sanctuary water management, storage barn improvements and improvements to trails. In addition, the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland teamed with the Shaker Lakes Garden Club to begin a program titled "Nature in My Backyard" (NIMB).

Sanctuary Equipment, Materials & Tools - \$18,157

Education Center Expenses - \$3,916

Education Program Expenses \$3,830 were higher than last year due to start-up of NIMB and the wonderful Annual Bird Quest which was well attended again this year.

Newsletter - \$6,294

Support to Buster's Bird Nerds - \$3,000

Operations - \$13,701 includes postage, annual appeal & 100-year celebration/annual dinner.

Insurance - \$8472 for all properties, buildings, and equipment

The Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland



Other Income & Expense

Total Investment Income gained \$51,224. Investments in 2023 increased modestly from 2022.

Overall, for the year 2023, the overall society funds were increased by \$55,068 inclusive of investment value.

Balance Sheet as of 12/31/2023

Cash at year end was \$64,700

All of our board is volunteer and you can locate detailed information regarding our Non-profit status and Annual IRS 990 filings online.

Please reach out if you have any questions or would be willing to consider helping on the finance committee.

For further information on the financials, please contact the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland at: 216-556-5441.

Submitted by Stephanie Demyan, Chair



Important Birding Area

Jim Tomko, Acting Chair

Members: Jane Ellison, Sarah Mabey, Mary Salomon, Matt Valencic

The National Audubon Society has assigned our chapter the Chagrin River Corridor as our IBA which we share with Blackbrook Audubon chapter. Our goal for this IBA is to educate landholders to protect, conserve and restore their properties in order to promote a healthy ecosystem. Our field trips, bird censuses, speaking engagements and property preservation promote this mission.

Submitted By Jim Tomko, Chair



Sanctuary Committee

Jim Tomko, Chair

Members: Mark Demyan, Tracy Engle, Ken Kresina, Carol Lillich, John Lillich, Rob Swaney, Ban Twaddell, Matt Valencic

Our four wildlife sanctuaries are doing very well and are undergoing needed restoration with continued control of invasive species (European Buckthorn, Reed Canary Grass, Japanese Barberry, and Multiflora Rose). This and other activities fit nicely with our mission statement in habitat preservation.

In the **Aurora Sanctuary** Ban Twaddell and his trail crew installed a Beaver Deceiver/Automatic Pond Leveler to control the water level at Fulton Pond. The Beaver have continued to raise the water level causing the northern board walk to be regularly awash or under water. This device has worked perfectly since it was installed. Ban is planning to re-route the white blazed trail due to the extreme number of ancient trees that fell across it in a strong windstorm. Matt Valencic and his crew have cleared vast areas of Buckthorn allowing natives a chance to reclaim ground. The city of Aurora has received funding to begin its rails to trails all-purpose trail along the First Energy right of way at the northern border of our property

In the **Novak Sanctuary** Matt Valencic and his crew have cleared acres of Buckthorn from the 4 fields by mowing, lopping and daubing, and chain sawing this resistant invasives. The hours of backbreaking work are paying off. Kenny Kresina also provides mowing to keep the fields in good condition.



At the **Molnar Sanctuary**, Kenny Kresina battles invasive species, plants native species, helps keep the trail clear, and continues to keep the drain pipe free of blockage caused by Beaver. Ban Twaddell and his trail crew have installed a Beaver Deceiver/Automatic Pond Leveler to keep the water level low enough so as not to overflow the dam or release water in an unwanted direction. This Beaver Deceiver is also working very well.

Due to the dedicated care by John and Carol Lillich the **Hach-Otis Sanctuary**, is in excellent condition. The board walk underwent some deck repair. The original section of the property was nominated by State of Ohio Nature Preserve Manager, Adam Wohlever, to be included in the Old Growth Forest Network. The induction ceremony was held in late April 2024. The new section of the sanctuary is remaining a preserve for wildlife and at this time no trails have been planned. The John and Carol Lillich Meadows are periodically mowed to enhance the area's Bluebird habitat. John and Carol's Bluebird Trail fledge numerous Bluebirds each year.

Mark Magree has kept the Novak education center in fine condition. He is always ready to help with maintenance, cleaning, trimming and mowing. Mark helps greatly in trail maintenance. Mary Salomon continues to maintain the native plant wildflower gardens on the grounds around the education center and it looks fantastic.

Jane Ellison's native plant demonstration gardens were increased this year. The hope is that visitors will see the wonderful blooms that some of our natives provide sparking an interest in planting more native plants in their own backyard.

Our sanctuaries provide a protected area for our native plants and wildlife and a place for visitors to disconnect, relax, and recuperate from the stresses and intrusions of daily life. Walks in nature have undescribed healing power giving us a chance to reset our emotions and recharge our energy. We hope that many of us can benefit from these natural areas.

Submitted By Jim Tomko, Chair



2024-2025 Officers



President - Jim Tomko*: *Chair, Sanctuary and Field Trips Committees, Member of IBA and Newsletter Committees; Spring Bird Walk Leader.*

Vice President* – Position Open



Secretary - Carol Lillich*: *Chair, Chapter Only Membership, Member of the Documentum, Sanctuary, Field Trips, and Newsletter Committees; Schedule Gates Mills Spring Bird Walks*



Treasurer - Stephanie Demyan*: *Chair, Finance Committee, Member Newsletter Committee*

*Member of Executive Committee



2024-2025 Trustees



Alison DeBroux: *Chair, Communications Committee and Member of Education Committee.*



Jim DeBroux: *Chair, Documentum Committee; Member Newsletter Committee.*



Jane Ellison: *Member, Education, IBA, and Newsletter Committees.*



Tracy Engle: *Member of the Sanctuary, Education, and Newsletter Committees. AAS*



John Lillich: *Member Documentum, Education, Membership, Sanctuary, Field Trips, and Newsletter Committees, and Gates Mills Spring Bird Walk Leader.*



Sarah Mabey: *Member IBA, Education, Membership and Newsletter Committees.*



2024-2025 Trustees



Mary Salomon: *Member Documentum, Important Birding Area, and Newsletter Committees.*



Ban Twaddell: *Member Sanctuary and Newsletter Committees*



Matt Valencic*: *Chair, Education Committee; Member Important Birding Area, Membership, Sanctuary and Newsletter Committees*



Harvey Webster: *Member Education and Newsletter Committees.*

*Member of Executive Committee

Trustee terms are typically 3 years and they are elected on a rotating basis.

*Annual Report Prepared by Carol Lillich, Secretary
Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland*