



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

September, 2024

Bird Quest celebrates 10 years!

The Chagrin River Bird Quest began in 2015 as an alternative to “the best four weeks” of birding, the yearly celebration of spring migration. Little attention was paid to FALL migration and we set out to change that.

It is perhaps not as exciting to watch birds heading south for the winter—leaving us to brave the cold and dark without their cheerful song and bright colors—as it is to celebrate spring with their arrival. But we can say good-bye knowing they’ll return in good time, and bask in the knowledge of their amazing feats of endurance.

While its purpose was to celebrate fall migration in general, Bird Quest is also intended as a neighborhood activity.

We wanted to attract Audubon members, families and neighbors of ASGC’s sanctuaries and realized the Chagrin River IBA (Important Bird Area), which encompasses all of our sanctuaries as well as most of our chapter area, gave us a



A young Quester shows off his mastery of his binoculars at Bird Quest 2020.

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In memoriam

Sadly, we recently lost a prized gem from our Audubon family. Our long-time Board of Trustees secretary, Carol Lillich, age 80, passed away July 6th 2024.



She was born on Christmas day in Toledo, Ohio, to Joseph A. Taylor and Emily M. Taylor (Chaney), then moved to Cleveland at an early age. Carol was a graduate of Notre Dame Academy.

She retired in 2012 as the assistant to the President and CEO of the Lubrizol corporation in Wickliffe, Ohio, after almost 40 years of service. In retirement, Carol volunteered with the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland as a Trustee and then Secretary. She also served as a Trustee for the Willoughby Hills Historical Society. A fellow trustee commented that Carol was “so smart and strategic in her thinking and so efficient and organized in her execution, she made everyone look good.”

She loved the variety of birds that she and husband John were able to attract to their yard. She had binoculars near every window. She is survived by John, her sister Barbra Ammons, and niece Caroline Miller.

Carol helped us in countless ways using her skills, judgment, and knowledge of proper etiquette to keep our Audubon chapter running smoothly and

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Nesting red crossbills



A male red crossbill has earned celebrity status in Chesterland, OH. Photo: D. Factor

This species occasionally shows up in NE Ohio during winter when the conifer seed crop in Canada is poor. You can go years without seeing them, but every winter we search the cones of tall conifers with hope. But who looks for

them during July and August? This year EVERYONE is because a pair has chosen Observatory Park in Chesterland, OH, as their nesting site. At this writing (August 8), more than 110 eBird checklists have been submitted confirming the first documented nesting of red crossbills in Geauga County.

As many as six individuals have been reported throughout the park, but a breeding pair has chosen a tall white pine on the western side as their nest site. According to Cornell’s AllAbout-Birds.org, red crossbills can nest at any time of year, even winter, if they find an area with abundant cones. If conditions

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From the Nest...

Amazingly, September is already here! We all enjoyed another excellent Annual Meeting in June with internationally known keynote speaker, Julie Zickefoose, delivering a fantastic presentation. Many thanks to all those who made it happen each doing their small part, but the majority of thanks go to



Carol Lillich for arranging catering and planning and Matt Valencic for securing the venue and making sure that everyone had what they needed to pull it off. Please consider putting it on your calendar for the first weekend in June next year.

Equally exciting is our upcoming annual Bird Quest now in its 10th year. Join us for some friendly competition

and camaraderie as we see which team recorded, among other awards, the most species, the rarest species, and the best team name. The 24-hour bird-a-thon will be topped off with dinner and the awarding of prizes. Let’s get on alert for the beginning of autumn migration!

Let me know what great birds you encounter.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

2024 Annual Meeting brings members together

The 2024 Annual Dinner and Meeting was held June 2nd at Veterans Legacy Woods in Geauga County. In spite of some inclement weather, a number of hardy participants came early for a guided nature walk in this newer addition to the Geauga Parks District.

Social hour began at 3pm and provided a variety of adult beverages and tasty snacks. Our business meeting and awards followed. All officers and trustees were duly re-elected.

ASGC's Seeley Award was given to Keith and Wendy Kohnke, two of our truly unsung heroes. They are always willing to help no matter the weather or project, and unfailingly show a deep-

seated passion for improving our sanctuaries for wildlife.

The Award of Merit went to Jim Tolan, former manager of the James H. Barrow Field Station at Hiram College. He has been instrumental in involving student volunteers with many of our most difficult projects in the sanctuaries.

Dinner was catered by Dab of Class, a respected Aurora company that we have used for many of our events. President Jim Tomko gave the vegetarians in the crowd first dibs, as all the choices of meats and vegetarian options and sides satisfied the most discerning palates. Desserts disappeared quickly.

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In memoriam

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timely. Without her assistance and thoughtful ideas, ASGC would not have accomplished all the goals that we set for ourselves. Carol will always be remembered for the wonderful way she shared her time and passion for perfecting and advancing our chapter. We will miss her deeply.

Crossbills

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are right, they may even have a second nest. Lots of birders are watching this pair so I'm sure we will know if a second brood happens.

If you go to see these celebrity birds, please DO NOT use playback calls on your cell phone as this may cause the birds to abandon the nest. Those calls are threatening to the birds. Be patient and wait for them to return after foraging. They have been very reliable, and you can see them easily with binoculars. For good pictures you will need a telephoto lens (400mm or more) or spotting scope.

Please visit www.allaboutbirds.org to learn more about these very special



A female red crossbill shows off her signature bill in her favorite top-of-the-conifer habitat.

and interesting birds.

—Matt Valencic

Bird Quest

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focus for our event. That is how it became the Chagrin River Bird Quest, and participants are asked to bird within the confines of the IBA (map provided at check-in). This FREE family-friendly event is an opportunity to get outside and enjoy all of nature during the fall bird migration. It also serves as an annual snapshot of the birds present in the IBA which includes all the Chagrin River watershed.

New to Bird Quest? This is a great year to jump in! You don't need to be an

experienced birder (but if you are, please join us!), you just need to love birds and nature and be ready to enjoy the outdoors with family or friends.

Registration is ongoing until September 6. Please visit our website and click on the Bird Quest button on the right side for information and to register. Remember—FREE! Free t-shirts, food, prizes and a special 10-year anniversary gift for every participant.

Is this the year you'll find the most species? Competition is stiff, but fun.

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Wilson's Warbler (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Have you seen a Wilson's warbler recently? It is not likely as they spend the summer well north of us in the boreal scrub around bogs, ponds, streams and other wetlands.

Wilson's warblers are among our later migrants as they move north in the spring. But now is the other time to see them because they will be moving south through our area over the next few weeks.

Wilson's are one of our smallest warblers with delicate, thin bills perfect for gleaning insects from leaves and blossoms toward ends of branches. Usually, they forage within 10 feet of the ground, seemingly unfazed by our close presence.

They are hyperactive birds quickly flitting from branch to branch, often flicking their tails. You've got to see their dazzling yellow head and throat plumage with greenish yellow wings that lack any wing bars or spots. Their captivating beady, black eyes are set off by that amazing yellow face. Best of all, the males have a dark black skullcap. Some females also have a faded black skullcap. And once again the black cap is set off distinctly by the brilliant yellow head and face.

These birds are not forest nesters. They prefer brushy, shrubby wetland areas.

The females construct a nest on or near the ground laying two to seven creamy, brown speckled eggs which she alone incubates until they hatch in 11-15 days.

I hope that you are able to catch a glimpse of this one in the next few weeks.

—Jim Tomko

Did you know?

Wilson's Warbler was described in 1811 by preeminent ornithologist, Alexander Wilson (one of John James Audubon's contemporaries) and evidently named it after himself!

In case you missed it

"Summer Twilight"

We enjoyed a quiet summer evening sauntering through the Mantua (east) side of the Novak Sanctuary in Aurora. The avian community was on the quiet side.

We marveled at the array of fungus species that were growing on the logs and deadfalls. Raccoon tracks and squirrel tracks were spotted in the soft soil near the wet areas. The insects were rehearsing for the full concert which would occur a few weeks later. It was relaxing, rejuvenating, and healing to soak in the aura of the forest at twilight.

—Jim Tomko

Northern shoveler



John Lillich's hand carved birds are award-winning works of art. This year John carved a Northern shoveler and donated it to ASGC. It will be raffled off at the Chagrin River Bird Quest celebration on Saturday afternoon, September 7th. Raffle tickets will only be available at the celebration and you must be

registered for this FREE event to participate. Tickets are \$5 each or five for \$20.

John is a long-time member of ASGC, a past-President and member of the Board of Trustees. He has lived his entire life in the Chagrin River IBA and manages the Hach-Otis Sanctuary in Willoughby Hills which was recently accepted into the National Old Growth Forest Network.

Bluebird Trail

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so you can guess that our results will be down this season.

The end of the nesting season saw 18 bluebirds and nine tree swallows fledged. Many thanks to the nest monitoring team!

—John Lillich

Annual Meeting

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Then it was time for our much-anticipated speaker, Julie Zickefoose, a world renown writer, artist and naturalist. She discussed the books that set her on her career path as a child, explained how her 13-year project, *Baby Birds: An Artist Looks Into the Nest* came about, and explored the changing landscape of her creative life living on 80 acres in the Appalachian mountains. The audience enjoyed a show packed with natural history, bird behavior and widely relatable personal insights, with a good dash of humor.

Afterwards, trustee Harvey Webster thanked Julie "for an outstanding program! Your unique insights into the natural world really resonated with our group as did your stories, humor, and artwork. You inspire us to invite nature into our yards and lives."

It was a memorable night of fellowship, fun and good food!



Seeley Award-winners Wendy and Keith Kohnke painting a sanctuary kiosk.

Photo: B. Twaddell

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Sept 21 1:30pm

"Fringed Gentians"

Aurora Sanctuary

These beauties are among the last to bloom of the season but well worth the wait. There are several species of gentians in our area but the fringed gentian is an unusual and fabulous one. Also in bloom will be closed or bottle gentian, ladies tresses, great lobelia, wingstem, goldenrod and aster. Join us for a fall wildflower hike and you will be amazed at the color and bounty of autumn!

Meet at the Bretschneider parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Rd. in Aurora.

Sept 3 7:00pm

"Wetland Birds of the Eastern U.S."

Fairview Park Library

Wetlands are highly productive ecosystems that support aquatic AND terrestrial plants and animals. They provide nesting habitat for many species in the summer and resting/feeding habitat for migrating waterfowl and passerines in spring and fall. This presentation showcases iconic wetland species like Egrets, Herons, Ibis and Rails along with raptors, waterfowl, warblers and more. There is even a bonus section presenting insects, reptiles, amphibians and mammals that make their homes in wetlands.

Programs

Sept 6, 4:00pm to Sept 7, 4:00pm

"Chagrin River Bird Quest"

The Rookery, 10110 Cedar Rd

Get your team together and support the Chagrin River IBA and enjoy fall migration! Share the day with family, friends, or random strangers you meet on the street. Explore the Chagrin Valley from Lake Erie south to Audubon's sanctuaries in Aurora. Win prizes for most warblers, most species overall, and most creative team name! Special prizes offered just for families this year!

Help us celebrate 10 years! Bird Quest is free, but registration is required. Register at www.clevelandaudubon.org.

DATED MAIL

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An Audubon Moment

It was a late spring night and I was enjoying a solitary hike through the Novak Sanctuary’s mostly silent forest. I could hear some gray tree frogs calling and some mice or shrews scurrying through the leaves on the forest floor. There was also the sound of claws scrabbling high on the trunks of trees that was likely southern flying squirrels or raccoons or Virginia opossums. All the birds had gone to roost.

Then I heard some white-tailed deer snorting a few hundred yards off the trail. That sound often startles me and then I think, “Are there coyotes lurking nearby?”

As I continued down the trail, I detected some movement and an unusual, complaining, screeching sound from an old hollow sugar maple about ten feet up. I froze in my tracks, hoping I had discovered a barred owl nest site.

As I got closer the complaining continued. I still could not detect exactly what critter was there. I did not want to disturb it because I assumed it was involved in its nightly routine of searching for a meal. A little closer and I could see that it was a very large bird, but in the dim light not identifiable.

Finally, I could make out that it was a fledgling turkey vulture sitting on the edge of the hollow. Its head was inside the hollow and its tail end protruded out to the forest. I suppose it was thinking, “If I cannot see you then you cannot see me!”

I’m glad that I did not get too close as turkey vultures, in self-defense, are known to empty the unsavory contents of their stomachs onto marauders below!

—Jim Tomko

Hach-Otis Bluebird Trail: season results

First the bad news: Four house sparrow nests with eggs were removed from two houses with one dead male bluebird. One bluebird nest had five eggs, then none the following week (possible snake). Three tree swallow nests with eggs were torn apart with nest remains on the ground. I caught an older man releasing a live-trapped raccoon right in the middle of our bluebird trail. Had a long discussion with him. I believe he did not know what he was doing was against the law. He had previously released three raccoons,

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