

The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

P.O. Box 391037, Solon, Ohio 44139-8037 info@clevelandaudubon.org

Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

Volume XLII, Number 7

November, 2024

Save the bridge!

Left to themselves, streams change course over time by eroding bends and depositing material in backwater eddies. That's been happening on Kinky Creek in the Aurora Sanctuary, threatening the foundations of the 'Case Bridge.'



Erosion threatens the foundations of Case Bridge in the Aurora Sanctuary. Photo: B. Twaddell

Kinky Creek is the clear water stream that flows south through the ravine between Fulton and Hamman Ponds and on into the Aurora Branch of the Chagrin River. The Case Bridge is so named because it was a 1999 project for the Civil Engineering students at Case Western Reserve University. They were challenged to design and build a bridge that could meet ODOT standards, the components of which could be hand carried to the job

site! The result was the erector set-like design that you see today.

Because the Aurora Sanctuary is a State Nature Preserve, any impact on the streams that flow through it are strictly controlled. In short, one might say it has to look like Mother Nature herself fixed the problem!

To accomplish this, we contracted Mark and Candace Medford of Proven Plots LLC to consider the challenge. After a site review by the Army Corps of Engineers and stream survey by Ohio EPA (really!), Mark met with ASGC Sanctuary Committee members and our ODNR contact and agreed to do the job.

Mark and Candace used their John Deere tractor equipped with a skidding winch, 160 feet of steel cable and a cou-

(Continued on page 2)

NMB in MY backyard

In late September, we invited two experts from Nature in My Backyard (NMB) to visit and evaluate our yard and garden. I had resisted getting involved, afraid they would tell me to dig up my day lilies or something equally judgmental. Finally, after a conversation with Jane Ellison, ASGC Trustee and NMB founder, who assured me they would never ask me to dig up anything, and a gentle nudge suggesting that trustees REALLY SHOULD support our chapter's initiatives, I signed up for a garden visit.

It was GREAT! Robin (retired landscape designer and co-founder of NMB) and Susan (certified Master Gardener) spent two and a half hours with us, sharing their expertise and passion for native gardening.

It turns out we did have a couple of invasive species—a Callery pear our landscaper planted five years ago (he should have known better), and a ground cover that I chose—and we learned about alternatives and best practices for getting rid of them. If we so choose... There was no deadline and no pressure to do anything.

Most of our plants, like the day lilies, hydrangeas, arborvitae... are "no harm, no foul"--not necessarily beneficial but not harmful either.

The best part of the visit was the suggestions for replacing the things in our landscape that we either no longer like or that aren't doing well. Such as the Japanese maple that got hit with a beetle infestation a couple of years ago. Doubt-

(Continued on page 3)

Sparrows and finches

I talked briefly about sparrows in last month's newsletter (see October Migrants), but let's focus a bit more on them here. Some will have already migrated through our area by the time you read this, like Nelson's, LeConte's, clay-colored, vesper and white-crowned sparrows. The first three are Midwest birds, so if you saw any of them count yourself lucky! Vesper's breed all over Canada and are regular April and October migrants, though this year sightings have been few. And some white-crowned can be



American tree sparrow. Photo: M. Valencic

found throughout the winter even though the big push south was in October.

Look carefully in November at what you think is a chipping

sparrow. Some will still be moving out of our area while American tree sparrows are moving in. They can be tricky. The latter will be here all winter and often found in flocks of 20 or more in fields and edges of wetlands.

(Continued on page 3)

From the Nest...

I'm still reeling from the fantastic autumn leaf walk John Lillich led at our Hach-Otis sanctuary last month. The full color palette of our maples, oaks, hickories and tulip trees were on display and the weather was among the best of the



year. The bird migration continues. In addition to small songbirds like kinglets and brown creepers to large birds like waterfowl and hawks, it always turns up some treasures.

Some wonderful trail improvements have been made under the supervision of Ban Twaddell and the "war" on invasive

species continues by Matt Valencic and his crew along with Aurora High School's environmental club. I wish you could get out there to see the excellent work they have done.

I hope you are able to enjoy these banner days of autumn. See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Bridge repair

(Continued from page 1)

ple devices called Snatch Block pulleys, to pull large fallen trees into the creek bed and position them along the two banks that were eroding. It was quite a process to watch. They secured the logs by drilling half inch holes into them and pounding rebar into the holes to hold the logs together. They cut and placed more fallen logs behind them and with some help from the Trail Crew, put several buckets of sandstone rocks among and on top of the logs.

Finally, large rocks (soccer ball to basketball size) were harvested from the area and placed by hand at the base of the logs to prevent the water from eroding underneath the structure. Mother Nature provided most of the materials



Trail Crew volunteer Don Voorhees views the logs placed for erosion control on the east bank of the creek.

Photo: M. Valencic

and the result looks like the logs drifted perfectly into place. Amazing!

Our sincere thanks to Mark and Candace for their fine work and their commitment to wildlife and the environment.

—Matt Valencic

Seeing red in the fall

Many gardeners swoon with pleasure when they see the screaming magenta fall color of the burning bush, *Euonymus alatus*. Perhaps they would be even more weepily emotional if they knew what this plant does to our beautiful Ohio state bird, the northern cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*).

Cardinals flourish readily in urban and suburban environments; they are well-adapted to living in human contact. The best sources for cardinal food are the insects and fruits with which they co-evolved over millennia. Cardinals are dependent upon native insects (in spring during nesting and fledging) and native fruits (up to 88% of chosen food in winter) that are exceptionally high in carotenoids. An important advantage gained from high carotenoid levels is greater intensity and brightness of plumage. This especially benefits the males in attracting mates.

Recent studies suggest that the brightest red coloration can be a direct effect of a diet including many non-native red fruits also – for example, those of burning bush. Males feeding heavily on these fruits are brilliant in color, and this is directly correlated to earlier mating and nesting, selection of choicest nesting sites, and selection of territories with higher vegetation density.

BUT when a cardinal eats the healthiest fruits available – fruits of native grape, dogwood, and sumac species most particularly – he is stronger and

healthier than his counterpart who eats the invasive “foreign junk food.” So the junk food eater may LOOK really red and attractive, but he is never the best breeder to sustain the species. He is, not by his own fault, a faker.

Which brings us back to the humans. When we plant hedges of burning bush, we are providing a food desert in which cardinals preferentially choose to live. After all, most cardinals choose to nest in thick shrubbery four-to-eight feet tall. Substandard housing and feeding, all in one spot!

If we want to see beautiful, brilliant red fall foliage, the various native dogwood (*Cornus*) species can provide it, and their berries are terrific food for cardinals. Another great choice of shrub that turns screaming red? *Rhus typhina*, the staghorn sumac, or *Rhus aromatica*, the fragrant sumac, both with excellent red berries. How about *Aronia arbutifolia*, the native chokeberry, with its brilliant leaves and berries in fall?

Let's support our brilliant red birds by planting eye-catching, red-fruiting trees and shrubs that, having evolved along with them, provide the RIGHT nutrition to guarantee cardinal survival. And so many supportive native plants also allow the local humans to enjoy seeing red foliage as well! Let's do our best to guarantee “seeing red” in our gardens year round.

—Robin Schachat for
Nature in My Backyard

Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*)

It is a thick, foggy, November morning at Ladue Reservoir and I know the ducks are out there resting from the night's migration. But I can't see quite well enough through the fog to make out which species are present. Then a pair takes flight and the ID is confirmed. I hear the loud whistling of wings. Common goldeneyes are also known as whistlers as they have the loudest wings of all ducks in our area. I know that when the fog burns off, I am in for a real treat.

Drake common goldeneyes have an amazing iridescent dark green head that changes hue from green to purplish-black as the drake changes the angle of his head in the sun. He also has a distinctive roundish white spot on his cheek. The black back and wings make the bright white throat, breast, sides, and belly stand out with incredible contrast.

Females have chocolate brown heads and brownish gray bodies. But those eyes! Adult goldeneyes have a captivating bright yellow eye when seen from relatively close range.

They are hardy birds, often remaining in our area among Lake Erie's watery leads in the ice. Goldeneyes are cavity nesters, filling the lower part of the hollow with down and laying 6 to 16 eggs which the female incubates for about 30 days. Then within a day of hatching the ducklings are ready to make the leap from the nest which can be up to 40 feet or more above the forest floor.

The mother does not need to provide much care as the ducklings are ready to forage as soon as they get to water. Goldeneyes are great divers down to 20 feet below the surface, hunting mollusks, crustaceans, insects, and small fish in addition to some tubers and seeds.

They will be arriving shortly. I hope you get a chance to see these spectacular birds this month or next.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

"Autumn Leaf Hike"

We could not have ordered a more perfect autumn day for our leaf-viewing walk. Thirty-six of us were entertained and educated by leader John Lillich who was in his usual mode of making learning fun. You do not even realize that you are learning natural history facts from his stories and explanations of nature around us.

There was a bit of green still on the trees but we must have seen every shade of yellow, orange, red, scarlet, and burgundy! Those colors against the cloudless, rich, blue sky were awe inspiring!

We crunched leaves and marveled at the view of the Chagrin River gorge

The Chagrin River gorge as seen from the Hach-Otis Sanctuary. Photo: J. Tomko



with two human fly fishermen in the river and five bird fish-hunters (common mergansers) working their way upstream.

Thank you, John, for hosting such an excellent afternoon in the fabulous Hach-Otis Sanctuary.

—Jim Tomko

Finches and sparrows

(Continued from page 1)

Fox sparrows were being reported in early October and will be around in good numbers through November with a few spending the winter. Look for them in scrubby, brushy woods and forest edges where you might also see white-throated sparrows that will be here all winter.

If you have agricultural fields with corn or soybean stubble, you can start looking for snow buntings, Lapland longspurs, pine siskins, *maybe* common redpoll, and large flocks of American goldfinches and horned larks (not a sparrow!), along with the northern harriers, Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks that come for the party.

South of Parkman (Geauga County), Soltis Road has two large fields of corn stubble and nearby Brosius Road has a massive sunflower planting you can walk through. Both of these hotspots are rural, gravel roads with very little traffic, but still be careful and use your flashers when birding or parked along any road.

So, dress in layers, pack some snacks, grab your bins and camera and get out of the house! It's time for fall birding in 'the best location in the nation'!

—Matt Valencic

MY backyard

(Continued from page 1)

ful it will survive, so how about an oak tree? It's the best single thing anyone can plant to improve and create habitat for birds (one oak tree can support several hundred species of caterpillar).

Then there's the non-native dogwood. I've never really liked it. It's too thick and trimming makes it uglier than it was before. How about a serviceberry? It's a smallish, multi-stemmed tree that would provide food for pollinators and less dense shade above my hostas.

We also discussed replacing a row of perennials on the east foundation.

They've been overcome by grass and weeds and no longer bloom like they used to. And because they're perennials, they're a mess to clean up every year. So how about a row of winterberry (native holly) or St. John's wort? Or both? So many possibilities.

In the end, we cannot save the world. But with the help of ASGC's Nature in My Backyard initiative (in partnership with The Shaker Lakes Garden Club) we can improve our own little corner of it, even if we only plant one small tree.

—Alison DeBroux

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Nov 3 1:30pm

"Leaf Kicking Hike"

Aurora Sanctuary

Remember the sound and feel of wading through a carpet of leaves as a kid? Consider joining us for a walk through the fallen leaves. We will have a chance to see a turkey flock but we are not announcing that because when we do, they all take cover and remain out of sight.

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

Dec 20 7:00pm

"Winter Solstice Hike"

Novak Sanctuary

Have you ever taken a night walk in the winter field and forest? The winter woods are quiet and peaceful if the weather is calm. It will restore and reset your inner peace. We will be celebrating one of the longest nights of the year with this winter night hike. Let us hope that the stars and moon will shine brightly through the cool clear atmosphere and know that we have a chance of hearing an owl or a coyote singing to the moon.

Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road a little less than a mile north of State Route 82 in Aurora.

Programs

Nov 21 7:00pm

"Owls of Ohio"

Via Zoom

Twelve species of owls have been spotted in Ohio. Several are residents, some are migrants, and a few are accidental visitors. Interesting owl trivia will be revealed. Some tips on how, when and where to spot owls will be shared.

Presented by Jim Tomko.

**Register for Zoom programs at
www.clevelandaudubon.org.**

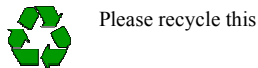
DATED MAIL

**AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)
Board of Trustees 2023-2024
Jim Tomko, President**

Alison DeBroux	Sarah Mabey
Jim DeBroux	Mary Salomon
Stephanie Demyan	Ban Twaddell
Jane Ellison	Matt Valencic
Tracy Engle	Harvey Webster
John Lillich	

To contact an individual trustee, send an email to info@clevelandaudubon.org

Like us on Facebook! 



An Audubon Moment

When Jon and I were out with Jim Tomko looking for fringed gentian violets last weekend we heard the loud calling of a blue jay and I told Jim of an encounter between a robin and a blue jay I had witnessed one spring several years ago on my newly planted vegetable garden.

I think the loud shrieking call of blue jays makes us think of them as being dominant and belligerent, so I found this interaction very interesting. The blue jay and the robin were hopping around each other on the ground taking turns yelling at each other, the blue jay giving his strident call and the robin giving out chirps.

I had no idea a robin could have such a loud chirp.

They hopped around each other, keeping about eight or ten feet apart and alternately calling out, paying no attention to me as I stood there watching them for at least 5 minutes.

Suddenly the blue jay flew away. And then the robin flew up to an overhanging clothes line and sang his little heart out! He definitely sounded triumphant!

Cool, huh? I felt so privileged to have been there!

—Laurenda Messer

Ornithology at Tri-C



Cuyahoga Community College (Tri-C) Eastern Campus is offering an Ornithology course (Bio 1815) this spring on Tuesdays and Thursdays 09:00-11:45 am, January 14 to May 6, 2025, taught by Dr. Sean Williams (sean.williams@tri-c.edu). In the classroom, learn about evolution, behavior, ecology, anatomy, energetics of flight and more. In the field, learn to identify >150 species by sight and sound, bird banding demonstrations, conduct biodiversity surveys, and collect behavioral data. Regular tuition fees apply for Cuyahoga County and Ohio residents. Books and fees are separate from tuition.

Do you like math?

We are looking for someone that is interested in volunteering their time as an Assistant to the Treasurer to learn the process and eventually take over the position of Treasurer in the future.

If interested please email info@clevelandaudubon.org.