



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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October, 2024

10th Annual Bird Quest sets records in spite of rain

The 10th year of Bird Quest saw almost constant rain, but it did not dampen the spirits of 121 Questers on 28 teams as they searched for birds throughout the



Questers brave the rain at The Rookery in Chesterland, OH, on September 7.

Photo: M. Valencic

Chagrin River Watershed from 4pm, September 6 through 4pm, September 7. And they were rewarded with a record number of 153 species! Does that prove the adage of “bad weather equals good birding”? Maybe!

Another record was set when 83 birders came to The Rookery in Chesterland to celebrate their accomplishments with delicious wraps, mixed fruit and cookies from The Hungry Bee (Bainbridge, OH).

This year there were awards for family teams as well as the ‘hard core’ birders. The youngest birder was four years old on team “Lord of the Wings.” The most species found by a team with chil-



The “Youngest Birder” accepts her award from emcee Harvey Webster.

(Continued on page 2)

‘Tis the season! (Halloween, that is...)

It’s Killing Time, bird lovers! Time for the Big Five to bite the dust, to drop their leaves for the final time, to turn up their roots and rot. In short, fall is the perfect time of year to declare the worst invasive, nonnative shrubs in your garden to be bad memories.

The Big Five offenders are Japanese barberry (*Berberis thunbergii*), the Asiatic shrub honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.), burning bush (*Euonymus alatus*), privet (*Ligustrum* spp.), and buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica* and *Frangula alnus*).

Why kill them? Because the Big Five tempt migrating songbirds to eat their berries, Halloween candy that does not provide sufficient nutrition to get birds safely all the way to their winter digs in Costa Rica. Our birds evolved alongside native plants whose carbohydrate-stuffed fruits are perfectly suited to fuel their long migration. That is what they should be eating, not imported junk food!

Why kill now? Consider the annual cycle of a woody plant. In spring, sugars rush upward through the plant stem’s xylem, pushing nutrition stored all winter up through the branches to bring new buds to life. Leaves unfurl and begin doing their job—photosynthesis! Breathe in the CO₂; pump up water from the soil; mix liberally with sunshine in the green foliage’s chlorophyll. Instant chemical energy!

Down the magical fluid flows through phloem to the roots, and up

(Continued on page 2)



Blue-headed vireo.

Photo: M. Valencic

October migrants

Don’t feel bad if you didn’t get out much in September to look for migrating warblers and shorebirds because October is bringing good numbers of more passerines (perching birds).

Numbers of forest birds like hermit thrush, winter wren and blue-headed vireo will peak throughout October. American pipits will be found on open ground of fields and wetlands while pine siskins will come

(Continued on page 3)

From the Nest...

Here we are in my favorite month of the year! Generally, we enjoy sunny days, comfortable temperatures and the viewing of colorful forests that rival autumn leaf change anywhere. For us birders, there is continued excitement as



the southward migration is still in full swing.

Speaking of migration, I would like to thank Matt Valencic and his team along with the Blackbrook Audubon chapter and Geauga Park District for the fabulous Bird Quest event that, although a bit rainy, was a huge success from the num-

ber of participants to the number of species seen.

I hope that you are able to get out in the woods to soak up the amazing spectacle of bird migration. Please let me know of your unusual sightings.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Bird Quest

(Continued from page 1)

dren under 18 went to “Fried Chicken,” with 68 species. And the most unusual name went to a new family team, PHANtom of the Osprey (the family’s surname is Phan). The East Clark Bird Nerds (middle school team led by teacher Buster Banish) was back again with seven students and a respectable 68 species.

The most species found this year went to team “Just Wingin’ It” with 95 species. They also found a yellow-breasted chat to win the Rarest Bird award.

Special thanks to John Lillich for his donation of a hand-carved Northern Shoveler, and Steve Cagan for his two framed and matted prints (Great Blue Heron and Peregrine Falcon) which were raffled during the celebration. Our door prize table was full again this year with special donations from Wild Birds Unlimited (Mayfield and Willoughby), Centera Coop (Chardon) and Geauga Feed and Grain (Newbury). We also



Jim Tomko (right) bought the winning ticket and took home John Lillich’s hand-carved Northern Shoveler.

thank our many anonymous donors for their contributions.

Thank you to our co-sponsors – Geauga Park District and Blackbrook Audubon Society – and the 20 or so volunteers who helped make this 10 year anniversary Chagrin River Bird Quest a huge success.

—Matt Valencic

Killing time

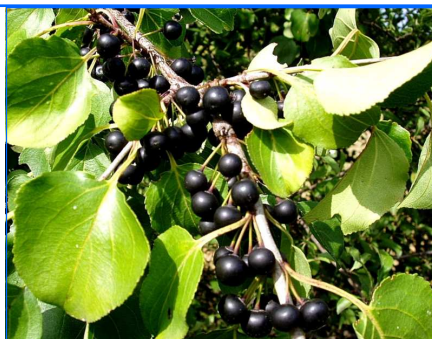
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through the xylem flows water, carrying trace minerals to add into the energy creation process, Repeat all summer! In fall, the roots stop pumping food upward, sending instead a brief burst of abscisic acid. The leaves are sealed off from their twigs; chlorophyll fades, and the true colors of the plant’s foliage explode in autumnal glory. Yet throughout this process, downward flow continues rushing through phloem to winter storage.

Now if you wanted to kill a plant, wouldn’t it make sense to introduce poison into its “blood stream” at the time the plant was most vulnerable?

Killing Time – just as the leaves are preparing to fall.

Killing is a job best done by two. One cuts the stems/trunks of the plant in question just above the soil. Immediately the second murderer, gloved, dabs the exposed remaining stubs with his handy Buckthorn Blaster! Continue cutting and dabbing until the deed is thoroughly done. Then carefully cap the Blaster, cleaning its outside and the gloves, and store them away for the next time you and your partner feel the need to kill.



Buckthorn berries: “Halloween candy” for birds.

Oh—that Blaster will need to be filled with poison. The Big Five are not playing around; fall pruning alone will not finish them off. Most herbicides for sale in the US now rely on a chemical called triclopyr. Triclopyr remains mobile in the soil surrounding the plants it targets for some time after application. It’s like a Zombie movie: after application, it spreads further afield and kills desirable plants. Please use glyphosate, concentrated to at least 18%; just dab it very carefully.

Happy Halloween!

—Robin Schachat
Nature in My Backyard

Did you know? Ring-necked Ducks have gathered in flocks of several hundred thousand on several lakes in Minnesota as they stage for autumn migration, gorging on wild rice to fuel the flight!

—Jim Tomko

Critter Corner

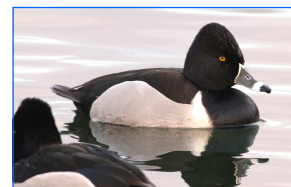


Photo: M. Valencic

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*)

Ring-necked ducks seem, to most birders, inappropriately named! The faint, narrow, chestnut colored neck ring is almost never seen by birders. Duck hunters and scientists notice it because they have the bird in hand.

Birders, on the other hand, would likely name it “Ring-billed Duck” because of the conspicuous white ring on its gray bill with a black tip that is easily seen from across the water. Drakes have a glossy black head, wings, breast, back and tail. The belly and sides are grayish white with a vertical white wedge between the black wing and breast. Adult drakes have a golden eye. Hens are a blend of brownish gray with the white ring on the bill.

Rarely do we have a nesting pair in the western Lake Erie marshes. Typically, they choose small wooded lakes, beaver ponds and other impoundments in the northern boreal forests for nesting on a loosely woven mound of emergent vegetation one to ten inches above the water where six to fourteen eggs are laid and incubated by the hen for three to four weeks.

Most of the year these ducks make shallow dives to eat aquatic vegetation, tubers, leaves and stems. They also eat aquatic invertebrates including insects, worms, mussels, snails and seeds.

Even though these ducks are considered diving ducks (which generally need a runway to paddle across the water when taking flight), they are able to leap directly into the air puddle-duck style. They migrate in flocks of a few to several thousand.

I enjoy these elegantly plumaged ducks as they are often near the shore allowing satisfying and easy viewing. When you see them, make sure that you do not confuse them with our migrating scaup.

I hope you get a chance to see these amazing birds this month or next.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

"Fringed Gentians"



Nature favored us on this fine last day of summer! The sun was out and there was an intermittent light breeze. The trails were very dry allowing the six of us an easy walk with spectacular views of the coming autumn's bounty. The incomparable violet colored fringed gentian were in bloom though we had to work to find them. I believe the drought caused them to be shorter in stature and sparse with blooms. We also saw lady's tresses, bottle gentian, silverrod, and great lobelia in full bloom. One of our attendees even read us a William Cullen Bryant poem, "The Fringed Gentian," which she had to recite from memory during her school days!

A better walk could not have been had. Thank you to all who joined me.

—Photo & text by Jim Tomko

October migrants

(Continued from page 1)

to your thistle feeders or will explore conifers and alders. Several sparrow species will make their appearance in fields, edges and prairie habitats. Look for vesper, LeConte's, Nelson's, and Lincoln's.

While most warbler numbers will be dwindling, orange-crowned, blackpoll, palm, Nashville and yellow-rumped will be increasing. Those first two are especially tricky to ID so look carefully for all the field marks.

There will be plenty of other birds during October, so just approach each trip without too many expectations and enjoy what the habitat produces. Mornings are always best and visiting different habitats will increase your checklist. But most of all, just enjoy the beauty, wonder and awe of fall migration.

—Matt Valencic



Le Conte's sparrow at Frohning Meadows.
Photo: M. Valencic

Trail Crew Update

The trail crew has been active this summer clearing and marking trails. With the weather cooling, we'll be clearing invasive plants, primarily buckthorn, in our sanctuaries.

We could really use some help with this, and we've scheduled work days for: Mon. Oct. 7, Sat. Oct. 12, Mon. Oct. 14 and Sat. Oct. 19, all weather permitting. Work times for all four dates will be 9am – 1pm.

The work is moderately physical but requires no experience or special skills. If you're able and interested, contact Ban Twaddell or Matt Valencic via email at trailcrew@clevelandaudubon.org.



Dan Vorhees marking the White Trail in the Aurora Sanctuary.

Photo: B. Twaddell



Ban Twaddell and John Lillich install a sign in the Hach-Otis Sanctuary.

Photo: R. Twaddell

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Oct 19 1:30pm

"Autumn Leaf Hike"

Hach-Otis Sanctuary

We are very fortunate to have the spectacular view of the palette of autumn leaf colors spreading out as far as the eye can see over the beautiful Chagrin River Valley in our own Hach-Otis Sanctuary. The mix of tree species is just right to give a dazzling fall view. Meet at the Hach-Otis parking lot at the end of Skyline Drive off River Road in Wiloughby Hills.

Programs

Oct 9 12:00pm

"The Worst Invasives (and how to put an end to them)"

Via Zoom

Matt Valencic has always appreciated habitat. Today he is helping manage habitat in the sanctuaries of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland where he and other volunteers battle invasive plants that compete with natives, all this in the name of increasing biodiversity.

In this presentation he will share some of the methods used in that battle. Sometimes they dig ... sometimes they cut and treat stumps ... and sometimes the only solution is chemical. He is going to share when each is appropriate and why.

Oct 17 7:00pm

"Extraordinary Adaptations"

Via Zoom

The migratory life is more than just an easy trip to the sunny tropics. Migration is a demanding and dangerous endeavor. Learn how migratory birds meet the challenges of life on the move and how scientists are uncovering their extraordinary adaptations.

Presented by Dr. Sarah Mabey.

Register for Zoom programs at www.clevelandaudubon.org.

DATED MAIL

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An Audubon Moment

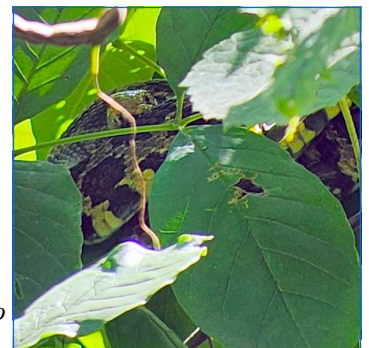
A few weeks ago, I was enjoying a solitary, beautiful, September saunter at one of my favorite birding spots: Old Woman Creek State Nature Preserve in Huron, Ohio, happily noting some migrating warblers, flycatchers, and thrushes. The black gum trees had changed to their beautiful scarlet color along with the wine-colored Virginia creeper. Of course, poison ivy was also changing to a spectacular, vivid, red. The Ohio buckeyes had ripened and were beginning to fall from the tree.

After awhile I was able to tear myself away from watching herons and egrets at the overlook of the estuary and continued working my way along the trail. A rose-breasted grosbeak was sounding its “tennis shoe squeak on the wooden gym floor” call letting me know he was there. Off in the distance I began to hear blue jays carrying on and on with their warning cries. As I approached closer, I could hear black-capped chickadees, tufted titmouse, and Carolina wrens sounding their agitated alarm calls.

They were all concentrated in a particular tree on the edge of the forest. This tree was about 12 feet tall and surrounded by increasingly taller trees all in full leaf. When I hear that kind of commotion, I usually think the birds have discovered a roosting owl. In this short tree it had to be an Eastern screech owl. As you know, I have a fascination with owls so I was determined to scour this tree through my binoculars, keeping a safe distance away so as not to flush whatever was there. I was thinking owl, feral cat, fox, or what else?

After about 15 minutes of searching branch by branch through my binoculars, I found it. There was a dazzling, beautiful, full adult Eastern fox snake coiled on the branches eight feet up in the tree. I would have loved to move closer for a better photograph but I did not want to disturb the natural world at its best!

—Photo & text by Jim Tomko



Do you have an Audubon Moment to share?

Email text (and photo, if possible) to info@clevelandaudubon.org.