



The HOUSE WREN

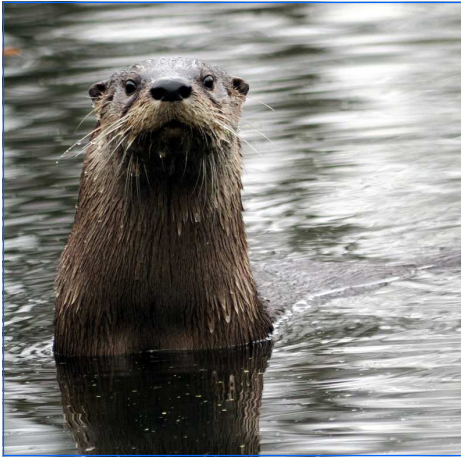
Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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

Volume XLII, Number 8

Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

Dec, 2024—Jan, 2025



Up close and personal with a river otter!
Photo: M. Magree

River otter at Novak

If you sit quietly on the observation platform benches at the Novak Beaver Pond, you might be rewarded with a look at a river otter. Mark Magree was enjoying the solitude of that place in mid-November when a curious otter swam near the deck and stared at him! Fortunately, he had his camera and captured this special experience for future enjoyment. Mark said otters have been seen here over the years, but it certainly is not an everyday occurrence. It's nice to know that the habitat around the Beaver Pond supports this special creature.

Novak is a State Nature Preserve so foot traffic only, stay on the trails and only take away pictures and memories.

—Matt Valencic

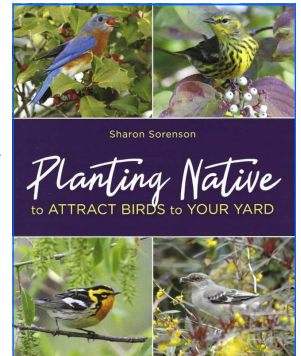
Holiday gifts for yourself, your friends and your birds

Winter always seems like the best time of year to sit by the fire and read. Whether it's seed catalogues, gardening magazines, or bird books, this is a happy time to indulge in a warm and toasty pleasure with a cup of tea (or Irish whiskey?) and a few breaks to rest your eyes watching activity at the feeder outside your window.

Nature in My Backyard would like to suggest a selection of books to feed your indulgent relaxation. Not only that, they will help you feed your birds as well. Here are three we especially like to recommend:

Planting Native to Attract Birds to Your Yard, by Sharon Sorenson, is one we often carry with us on visits to our clients' gardens. Sorenson began, as so many of us have, with the question "Why?". Why do we need to plant more native plants?

Why do we need to remove invasive nonnative plants if our birds seem to eat their berries? And then she explains what she has learned (the why), recommends superior species to plant (the what), and tells us how best to



(Continued on page 2)

Learning by doing

It's been said we learn best by doing, and 17 students from Mrs. Laura Bell's Environmental Science class at Aurora High School did just that on November 18th. Mrs. Bell wanted the students to appreciate the problem of non-native invasives firsthand by seeing and removing buckthorn around the beaver pond in the Novak Sanctuary.



Aurora H. S. Environmental Science class gets firsthand experience with invasive buckthorn.

Photo: B. Twaddell

We started with a brief slide show showing the scope of the non-native invasives problem in our sanctuaries and the substantial progress made since 2021. One example showed how volunteers remediated the peninsula at

Fulton Pond over 24 months, returning it to a showcase of more than 20 species of native perennials, all done with loppers and Buckthorn Blasters, followed by

(Continued on page 2)

From the Nest...

As always, the holidays direct my attention to counting my blessings and joys. I am very fortunate to have such an expert cadre of board members and volunteers to keep our Audubon chapter on the right path and accomplishing our goals.

By now you have received our annual appeal letter which we only send



out once a year to gather funding to operate our chapter. Considering all our programs and managing our almost 600 acres of wildlife preserves, the usual membership fee does not begin to cover those expenses.

I greatly appreciate you remembering us in your end of the year donations. And, I thank all of you for your contributions both monetary and time spent volunteering.

It is also time for Christmas Bird Counts and my own personal "holiday-card bird count". To have some fun, get involved in a nearby Christmas Bird Count or keep checking your mail for the beautiful renderings of birds on holiday cards.

I wish you a peaceful and memorable holiday season.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

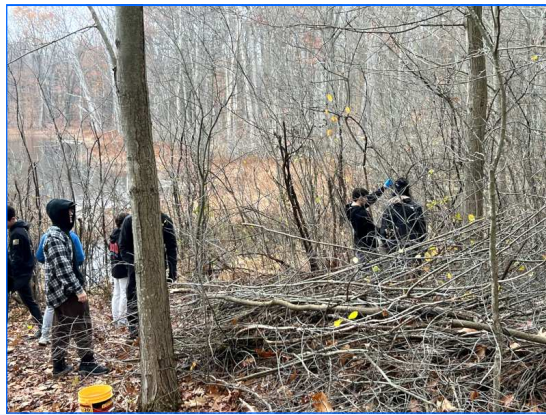
Learning by doing

(Continued from page 1)

spot treatment with herbicide. Removing invasives is hard work!

Mrs. Bell created a BINGO card with native and non-native plants we would likely see on our walk to the beaver pond. We wanted them to appreciate the many native plants already present, just waiting to reclaim areas once buckthorn was removed. It included native trees (we identified them by their bark and leaves on the ground), shrubs like Meadowsweet (*Spiraea alba*), forbs like mountain mint, asters and goldenrods, and even mosses and ferns in the woods. They quickly achieved BINGO in two or three directions.

At the beaver pond some students used loppers to cut trees up to 1" diameter while others moved them to the wild-life piles created last March. Two of our adult volunteers used chain saws to cut larger trees which the students moved to the piles while other volunteers treated cut



Creating wildlife piles from cut buckthorn. Invasives removal is hard work!
Photo: M. Valencic

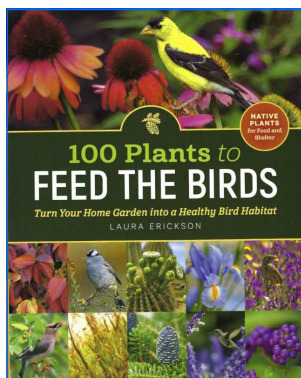
Holiday gifts

(Continued from page 1)

care for gardens and birds together. This is one woman's story of her adventures in learning, and is a joy to read. And if her story makes you curious, remember Nature in My Backyard consultants are always available -- for free -- to help you get started.

Laura Erickson's *100 Plants to Feed the Birds* is an attractive paperback that

presents a small (100 is small, as landscapes go, right?) selection of plant species, one by one, with the reasons they are most helpful to creating bird habitat. Planting conditions for each, as well as a map of its native range, are clearly defined for each species. The book details plants from all over the United States, but almost all are native here in NE Ohio. And will we



stumps with Buckthorn Blasters. After 1 1/2 hours the students realized how hard it is to reclaim an area where invasives get out of control.

Back at the Education Center they enjoyed their lunch and some snacks before returning to school. They will discuss their experiences during their next class and we look forward to hearing their thoughts.

Thanks to our dedicated Trail Crew volunteers for their help guiding the students: Rick Deininger, Keith & Wendy Kohnke, John Senderak and Ban Twaddell.

—Matt Valencic

really mind taking a moment to read about Spanish Moss, anyway? It's winter – indulge!

The National Wildlife Federation's *Attracting Birds, Butterflies, and Other Backyard Wildlife*, on the other hand,

does not deal with specific plants. Instead, its emphasis is on habitat concerns: food, water, cover, places to raise young, and sustainable gardening practices that will pull all of these together. If you have a child settling into his or her first new home, this might be a fine way to start them on their route to a lively, biodiverse backyard.

We wish you all very Happy Holidays, and joyous reading!

—Robin Schachat
Nature in My Backyard



Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Snow Goose

(*Anser caerulescens*)

The snow goose is often the main character of holiday greeting cards. This all-white bird with black wing-tips, pink legs and a pinkish bill with a distinct dark grin-patch delights us when we discover one or two mixed in with a flock of Canada geese. That grin-patch distinguishes it from other white geese.

There is a "blue morph" of the Snow Goose which has a white head and upper neck while the body, tail and wings are dark. Rarely do we have a large flock of these in Ohio because we are in between two of their major migration flyways. There are numerous large flocks using the Atlantic flyway and those migrate from far northern nesting areas to the Chesapeake Bay and farther south. Once I saw a flock of several hundred resting on the Chesapeake Bay off of Kent Island in Maryland. Several years ago, while attending a friend's daughter's wedding in Sacramento, California, I saw enormous flocks of more than 5000 at a nearby National Wildlife refuge.

They nest near rivers, streams, ponds and coastlines in the tundra. The female builds the nest of grasses, sedges, leaves, twigs and her own wonderful goose down. She alone incubates the eggs for about 24 days. The goslings are ready to leave the nest at just one day after hatching.

These are one of the most vegetarian of all geese, dining on grass, sedges, rhizomes, tubers, seeds, grain and fruit.

I hope you are able to see and hear a flock of them this winter.

—Jim Tomko

Did You Know?

Snow geese migrate at very high altitudes—sometimes over 1000 feet—making them difficult to see. Instead of the classic V formation of Canada geese, snow geese migrate in undulating lines and arc formations.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

"Leaf Kicking Hike"

I was a bit shocked when no one showed up for this beautiful, autumn afternoon, woodland walk in the woods except for my birding buddy Kim Pease. We enjoyed the walk anyway, hearing and seeing the northern birds heading south.

Then, Sunday afternoon as I was busy raking leaves, I received a text from my friend Marty Sickinger and a call from Jane asking where I was and if I was going to lead the walk. I had shown up one day early!

Marty saved the day though. She took the lead pointing out the great au-

tumn blooms, birds and features of the Aurora Sanctuary. I rushed over there in my leaf raking apparel and met the group half-way around the loop. Again, it was a spectacular day and we had several attendees that were helping to point out various fungi, ferns, trees and birds. We had another stellar day in the woods.

My apologies for missing the first half and my great thanks to Marty for substituting in my place. Thank you all.

—Jim Tomko



Manure spreader in Amish country. Photo: M. Valencic

Winter car birding

A large part of my winter birding is done from my car as I slowly move along rural roads looking for raptors or parking next to lakes to view migrating waterfowl. The car is my blind, hiding me, somewhat, from the birds I'm watching. And if the weather is cold and blowing, I am more comfortable in the car than standing outside. When I leave the car to set up my spotting scope, I know I can jump inside and warm up whenever necessary. And if you have mobility issues, this will extend your birding opportunities.

Car birding is best done in rural and agricultural areas where there is little

traffic, like some of the back roads in Amish country (Geauga and Holmes counties) which also provide the best habitat for raptors. Winter raptors like open fields that still have some native vegetation on them, providing habitat for small mammals, their favorite food. The hedgerows between fields and roadside ditches are habitat for winter sparrows and finches, doves and other small birds. If you find fields with corn stubble or a recent manure spread, look for snow buntings, Lapland longspurs, horned

A Wry Smile



Grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change.

The courage to change direction when I see them coming.

And the wisdom to not try to smack some sense into them when I can't avoid them.

Amen.

Happy Holidays!

larks and occasionally a bonus savannah sparrow or American pipit. Sunflower plantings are a winter birder's dream come true, sometimes serving up common redpolls in irruption years.

For migrating waterfowl, cruise the shorelines of any lake with open water. Every day is different as the ducks, geese, swans, grebes and loons stop to rest and refuel on their journey east and south. Pay attention to the shoreline for winter passerines and raptors.

Car birding is great but PLEASE, always pay attention to traffic as you cruise and keep those flashers on to alert other drivers that you are moving slowly.

—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

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.

Jan 18 9:00am

"Winter Track Walk"

Novak Sanctuary

Our resident wildlife use our trails too! Due to their nocturnal nature or their skittish wariness, we rarely see them but they do leave evidence behind. You may help me discover "who" walked the trail ahead of us. Let's hope for a thin coating of new fallen snow for them to register their marks on the path.

Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road about a mile north of State Route 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border. Please wear waterproof footwear.

Programs

Dec 19 7:00pm

"Wetland Birds of the Eastern US"

Via Zoom

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.

Presented by Matt Valencic.

Register for Zoom programs at www.clevelandaudubon.org.

DATED MAIL

AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)
Board of Trustees 2024-2025
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! 



Please recycle this newsletter

Audubon Moments

Bully of the “Bog”

I was admiring a beautiful great egret that had been patiently fishing from a partially submerged log in the estuary and regularly catching small fish which it hungrily swallowed head first. This egret was still sporting its resplendent breeding plumage with those long elegant aigrettes flowing in the wind. A great egret is a show stopper due to its pure white plumage, shiny black legs and yellow bill. It is a stunning stand-out in the marsh. The bird I was viewing still had a little hint of green at the base of the bill and lores from its breeding state. I also noticed several great blue herons fishing nearby. There usually are several great blues fishing, roosting or just loafing in this area. A serene and peaceful scene was in place.

Suddenly I heard a loud, harsh call from a great blue heron. Their calls are never described as eloquent and are often startling. Well, this bird must not have had a good morning fishing and as many anglers do, it was moving to a more successful fishing spot. It made a bee-line for the submerged log where my egret was enjoying breakfast, croaking harshly the whole way. As it landed on the submerged log, causing the smaller egret to flee, the heron slipped and fell down on its shoulder and only righted itself after a few seconds of flapping, flailing and fancy footwork. It seems even wild-life has Karma!

—Jim Tomko

“Snipe” hunting

Growing up in a large family camping in tents we would talk about going out at night “Snipe hunting.” You were to take a paper bag and walk out in the pitch dark and find a snipe. It was all fun as a kid when someone would pop the bag really loud and try to startle everyone else. I thought it was a joke because I never saw a snipe up close. Recently I went to Iceland and saw a brown patch outside my window in the morning. Looking closer, it was an Icelandic snipe (gallinago gallinago). It was resting—perfectly camouflaged in the vegetation—until it flew off. Most of the Icelandic snipes will winter in Ireland or the southern part of Iceland. This one was “caught” in southern Iceland. Enjoy Snipe Hunting!

—Stephanie Demyan