



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

September, 2025

Fall birding in NE Ohio

Fall birding in NE Ohio can be a challenge. Some birds have molted into their non-breeding (aka, basic) plumage which looks different than breeding plumage. Birds born this summer may take a full year before they look like their parents and may stray far from their usual homes. Chagrin River Bird Questers may come across these confusing birds in September, so let's look at a few of them.

Bonaparte's gull adults trade their black hoods for a single black spot behind the eye, and first-year birds will



have abundant black markings on the wings and a terminal black tail band.

Little blue herons are abundant along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, but juveniles may stray north to wetlands and lake edges in the fall. First year birds are all white with greenish legs, and a grayish bill with black tip.



Blackburnian warbler males trade their bright orange throat and face markings for a pale 'peachy' tone. Look for the triangular cheek
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Flower gardeners wanted

Do you love flower gardening and have a couple hours a month to volunteer during the growing season? If so, we are putting together a small team to help maintain the perennial flower beds at the Novak Sanctuary in Aurora. The more helpers, the more enjoyable! You don't have to be an expert – we will provide training, tools and any needed materials. If you *are* an expert, that would be awesome, but a love of flowers is all you need.

The team will meet at Novak in late September or early October to meet each other, get an overview of the gardens, and get a feel for everyone's comfort level. Most beds are already established



Clearwing hummingbird moth on vervain
Photo: M. Valencic

so we just need a plan for the spring clean-up, such as removing debris, thinning some plants and transferring them to other beds, and such. We leave clean-up for spring because some pollinators over winter in plant stems, and birds eat the seeds all winter.
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From the Nest...

Welcome September! Just ahead of us are some excellent days of birding and experiencing the remarkable changes in field and forest preparing for the new season. There are many ways to participate, one of which is our fun and friendly 24-hour birdathon that we call Bird Quest. Please consider joining us.



Details of this event and information on how to register appear later in this newsletter or on our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org.

I also want to thank all of you who attended our wonderful annual meeting. I especially want to thank all of you who helped in many different ways to accomplish it. I have the utmost gratitude for Matt Valencic's taking the

Chagrin River
BIRD QUEST
See Upcoming Events
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The beauty of goldenrod

Goldenrod (*Solidago* spp.) is far more than bright yellow blooms in late summer and early fall. It is a **keystone species**, meaning it plays a much bigger role in ecosystems than its abundance might suggest. Goldenrod helps shape entire ecosystems: stabilizing soil, slowing erosion, supporting food webs, resisting invasive species, and maintaining open habitats. It is an important plant across much of North America, thriving in a wide range of habitats.

Goldenrod is well known as a pollinator magnet. Its nectar-rich flowers bloom just when most other plants are winding down, offering a critical food source for bees, butterflies, flies, beetles, wasps, ants, and even spiders. And all these insects are food for birds!

But goldenrod does not just feed the ecosystem, it is building it too. Its deep root system holds soil in place, helps cycle nutrients, and helps damaged land bounce back quickly. It is invaluable in
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lead, with eight months of planning, organizing, reserving a venue, arranging for food and drink, and making sure all the equipment that our renowned speaker, Judy Stemroc needed was up and running along with many other details. Give Matt a thank you next time you see him.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Fall Birding

(Continued from page 1)

patch, pale neck patch, substantial wing bars and white undertail coverts.

Chestnut-sided Warbler males lose their chestnut-colored side markings and black face and back markings, for an overall yellowish appearance. Look for the yellow cap and white eye ring, and note that wing bars can be white or yellow.

Tennessee warblers can be



Chestnut-sided warbler
All photos: M. Valencic

confused with orange-crowned warblers in fall. Look for white undertail coverts, a 'short tail' (which is actually abundant undertail coverts), and no streaking on the sides. Orange-crowned have yellow under-tail coverts.

—Matt Valencic

Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*)

Have you had the chance to see the dazzling, vivid blue plumage on a small sparrow-like bird known as the indigo bunting? If the sunlight hits just right it is as if the male has an electric blue light inside of him!

These small birds are in the cardinal family which, in addition to cardinals, also includes rose-breasted grosbeaks and scarlet tanagers. Like many other members of this family, there is strong sexual dimorphism meaning that the males and females have quite different plumages with the female being muted and subdued in color. Male indigo buntings are blue, with very dark blue on the head. Females are soft brown with a lighter breast and belly along with very faint wing-bars.

Both have large gray bills perfect for cracking seeds. They also eat berries and insects.

Indigo buntings require scruffy, weedy fields often near a forest edge, abandoned field, or power line cuts. Males prefer to proclaim their territory from high in a nearby tree.

The song is a bright, lively doublet of finchy-sounding notes as if saying "What? What? Where? Where? See it! See it!" The males sing late into the day after most other species quiet down.

Females alone build the nest a few feet off the ground in a fork of branches in a shrub or thick weeds.

These spectacular birds winter in very southern Florida and farther south throughout Central America, the Islands and northern South America. I hope you get a chance to hear and see them before they depart.

—Jim Tomko

Did you know?

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their appearance can vary from almost black to vivid, electric blue depending on the angle of the light.

Gardeners wanted

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There are established plantings around the old pump house and between the Ed Center and the barn. We also have five 'Plant by Numbers' pollinator demonstration beds (6' x 10' each) for homeowners to see what mature plants look like and learn what pollinators are attracted to specific plants. And everything is a native plant!

If you would like to join the team, please email me, at info@clevelandaudubon.org. I hope to see you in the garden!

—Matt Valencic



Peck's skipper on ironweed

Photo: M. Valencic

Goldenrod

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habitat restoration and is often the first step in ecological recovery. Further, it plays a role in preserving open habitats. Some species, like tall and Canada goldenrod, produce allelopathic compounds, natural chemicals that slow the growth of nearby plants, especially woody seedlings. This helps keep meadows and prairies open and available to all kinds of wildlife that would not thrive in shady forests, like meadowlarks and bobolinks.

Goldenrod can even help fight invasive species! With its dense roots, fast growth, and chemical defenses, it can compete with invasive shrubs like Japanese honeysuckle, barberry, burning bush, or bishops weed (mugwort), and even Phragmites.

Goldenrod is often unfairly blamed for seasonal allergies since it blooms at the same time as the real culprit,

ragweed. Goldenrod pollen is heavy and sticky, adapted for insect pollination—it is not airborne. It's the ragweed that produces large quantities of fine, wind-borne pollen that causes allergic reactions. Ragweed often grows side-by-side with goldenrod and goes unnoticed due to its inconspicuous green flowers.

Goldenrod is a wonderful, and often overlooked, addition to any garden. Many species stay compact and well-behaved, while others are more vigorous and perfect for spots where you want bold color, dense cover, or natural weed suppression. In a backyard pollinator patch, few plants can rival goldenrod for its mix of beauty, ecological value, and support for wildlife. This bright yellow harbinger of fall does so much more than just look pretty—it will help your garden come alive while providing valuable ecological services.

—Jane Ellison



Wasp on goldenrod blooms

Photo: W. Donkin

In case you missed it

“Aurora Twilight Walk”

It seems as though whenever I advertise hearing or sighting possibilities on a field trip, they never materialize!

Unfortunately, we did not hear or see any owls, raccoons, coyotes, fox, flying squirrels or beaver. We did, however, hear the wondrous changing of the guard made by the daytime *“opening act”* of the annual cicadas convert to the nocturnal katydid *“concert”*.

Bullfrogs and green frogs also kept

the eight of us company with their songs as we braved the mosquitoes, deer flies, and some patches of poison ivy that extended onto a few sections of the trail.

It was a very interested and enthusiastic group who shared knowledge and observations along the way. I look forward to walking with them again. Many thanks to those who joined me.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

“2025 Annual Meeting”

The 2025 ASGC Annual Meeting was held at Veteran's Legacy Woods. Approximately 50 people attended the afternoon event that included a short meeting, an Italian-themed buffet dinner, and a presentation on chimney swifts by renowned naturalist, Judy Semroc.

President Jim Tomko opened the meeting with eulogies for Carol Lillich and Mary Salomon, trustees and valued members of the Audubon family. They will be missed.

Elections for officers followed. Tracy Engle joined the officer cohort as Vice President.

The Seeley Award is given to a member who goes above and beyond for



Mark Magree and Jim Tomko

the chapter, and this year's winner was Don Vorhees. Mark Magree took home the Award of Merit, as a non-member who made outstanding contributions to the chapter. After a delicious dinner, attendees were treated to a talk on chimney swifts by Judy Semroc. Her photos and informative presentation were a delightful way to end a lovely afternoon spent with like-minded friends and acquaintances.

Harvey Webster honored

On July 31, 2025, our own Harvey Webster was inducted into the prestigious Natural Resources Hall of Fame, an honor bestowed on only 200 individuals since its inception in 1966.

One of Harvey's most important contributions to Ohio's natural resources was his role in revitalizing the bald eagle population in Ohio. How dedicated was Harvey to the restoration of bald eagles? In a recent presentation he showed a family picture around the dinner table. His wife, Doris, is feeding their 6-month-old son while Harvey is feeding a recently hatched eaglet a concoction of ground-up fish and mammals. When his son was older and saw this picture, he commented “I hope you didn't get the foods mixed up!”.

Harvey has been a Trustee of ASGC for many years, contributing to



every committee with his vast knowledge and contacts in the conservation community. He has been especially active with Nature in My Backyard, advising and presenting educational programs that help homeowners increase biodiversity in their landscapes. He knows firsthand that all forms of wildlife need the right habitat to survive and flourish, and the basis of habitat is native plants.

Congratulations Harvey! An honor well deserved!

—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Sept 20 1:30pm

“Fringed Gentian: Jewels of Autumn”
Aurora Sanctuary

Join us on our annual saunter to view one of the last wildflowers of the season to bloom. This amazing biennial will dazzle you if we are lucky enough to have a sunny September day. A fantastic shade of violet with the delicate fringed petals will make you glad to have made the two-mile hike. Please wear waterproof footwear as this bloom likes to keep its feet slightly wet! We will meet at the Bretschneider Park parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail just a few hundred yards east of Page Rd. in Aurora. (896 E. Pioneer Tr. Aurora, OH 44202)

Programs

Sept 5 4:00pm to Sept 6 4:00pm

“Chagrin River Bird Quest”
The Rookery/Chagrin River Valley

Get your team together and join us for our 11th Annual Chagrin River Bird Quest. CRBQ is a 24-hour birding challenge in support of the Chagrin River IBA. Teams can be two or more, friends, family members, co-workers or strangers you meet on the street. You can bird for one hour, two hours, or all 24!

It all starts Friday at 4:00pm at The Rookery (10110 Cedar Rd, Chesterland) where you'll pick up your birding checklist, information and FREE t-shirts. Expert birders will be available to offer suggestions on where to get started. At 4:00pm Saturday, all teams will return to The Rookery and turn in their checklists for judging. If you like pizza, this is the place to be because for the first time in our 11-year history, we're serving up a pizza party! So while the judges are hard at work figuring out who won the most species prize (and many other prizes!), you can be enjoying pizza, drinks, and swapping stories with the other teams.

Finally, we'll hand out awards and door prizes. Our raffle this year includes an amazing hand-carved California quail by our own John Lillich. See you there!

Bird Quest is FREE but please register at www.clevelandaudubon.org.



DATED MAIL

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 Jim Tomko, President**

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Please recycle this newsletter

Did you know?

Like other “blue” birds, indigo buntings are not really blue. The blue you see is the result of light hitting crystalline-like structures in their feathers causing the blue wavelengths to be refracted and reflected back to our eyes. This phenomenon explains why

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Audubon Moment

Every summer I sail out of Edgewater Yacht Club near downtown Cleveland. Every year all the sailboat owners get frustrated by the barn swallows that build mud nests under the docks and eaves of the clubhouse so they can



sit on the life lines of the boats. They have rusty cinnamon bellies, rufous/rusty cap and throat, steel-blue back, a deeply forked tail, and are very social. There are more barn swallows partying on the sailboats than teenagers.

This year I helped with the Bluebird Trail and inspection of the boxes in the Molnar Sanctuary. In addition to bluebirds we see tree swallows. These are completely different from the partying barn swallows on the sailboat life lines!

Tree swallows have grassy nests with a white feather or two for a soft bed for the babies. They will build their nests in the bluebird boxes or in tree cavities. Tree swallows have an iridescent blue-

Swallows and sailing

green back and a pure white belly. Their eggs are pure white as well. They live a quiet life in the Molnar meadow area that has a few smaller trees in it.

Their flight pattern is a little smoother than that of the barn swallows

near the boats downtown. We would find mom and dad flying near the nests or watching us while resting on top of the boxes. Their chirp is similar to the barn swallow’s but definitely not as loud and there were not as many birds camping out together.

It was such a wonderful experience to inspect the bluebird boxes this year. If you have never done it but would like to learn more about birds and help encourage bird populations to grow, please contact ASGC at info@clevelandaudubon.org. We also have a bluebird trail in our Hach-Otis Sanctuary in Willoughby Hills if that is closer to you.

—Stephanie Demyan