



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

May, 2024

A kindness to birders

In April I did a week-long birding trip to South Texas with three friends, staying near McAllen, Texas, and birding just three counties from South Padre Island to Roma, Texas. We had a fantastic time, finding 180 species of birds and adding many new species to our life lists, including the rare mottled owl.

But the biggest surprise came on the last day when we discovered that a Southern lapwing, a plover-like bird from South America, was being seen on a nearby golf course. We drove to the levee that provided an overlook to the golf course and started scanning for the bird.

After a bit, a lady named Mary drove up to the base of the levee in her



Southern lapwing.

Photo: M. Valencic

personal golf cart and asked, "Are you looking for the bird?" We said yes, and then she asked, "Want a ride to see it?" We were SHOCKED, to say the least, but quickly agreed to cram four of us into the cart with her.

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The best four weeks of birding

May is arguably the best month of birding in NE Ohio. According to eBird Bar Charts, 324 species of birds have been recorded in the last 10 years in this seven-county area during May.



Prothonotary warbler along the upper Cuyahoga.

Photo: M. Valencic

But the real stars of May are the WARBLERS—those small, colorful, hyperactive insect-eating birds that are resting and refueling as they pass through our area on their

way to northern breeding grounds. Only about 10 – 12 species will stay to nest while the other 20+ continue north. The pandemic restrictions of 2020 taught us that you can find almost as many species of warblers, vireos and other passerines in your own local patch as are found at Magee, Ottawa NWR and Cleveland lakefront hotspots.

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From the Nest...

We are now in the very peak of songbird migration! Hummingbirds are back, chimney swifts are in their constant flutter, and the warblers are in town now. I hope you are able to get out and be astonished at the beauty and sound of our feathered friends.

It is also time to make your reserva-



tion and buy a ticket to our membership's Annual Meeting. We were fortunate to get the renowned and ever-popular author, artist, and naturalist Julie Zickefoose for our keynote speaker. This will be a presentation that you will not want to miss.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

ASGC Annual Meeting

Date: Sunday, June 2

Location: Veterans Legacy Woods
14085 Ravenna Rd
Newbury Township, OH

Schedule of events:

Nature Walk.....2:00pm

Social Hour.....3:00pm

Business Meeting & Awards.....4:30pm

Dinner.....6:00pm

Guest Speaker.....7:00pm

Julie Zickefoose, Author "Bird Watchers Digest," artist and naturalist at home in the Appalachian foothills of Ohio.

Caterer: "Dab of Class"

Cost: \$40.00 per person

(We are keeping the cost the same as last year even though prices have increased.)

Make check out to: Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland and mail to:

ASGC Annual Dinner

P.O. Box 391037, Solon, OH 44139

Reservations must be in and paid for by Friday, May 24, 2024.

Books, birds, and following your passion

World renowned writer, artist and naturalist Julie Zickefoose discusses the books that set her on her career path as a child, explains how her 13-year project, *Baby Birds: An Artist Looks Into the Nest* came about, and explores the changing landscape of her creative life flying solo since 2019.

Meet the charming Carolina wrens who dominated Julie's summer in 2023. This show is packed with natural history, bird behavior and widely relatable personal insights, with a good dash of humor.

—Jim Tomko

Kindness

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It turns out that Mary (we gave her the title “Mary, Queen of the Golf Course”) saw the bird the day before and was asked by some birders if she would take them around the course to look for it. She was hesitant and said “no,” not being sure about strangers. She felt so bad afterward that she determined to help birders find it the next day, and we were her first ‘customers.’

After driving around for 10 minutes and asking others where the bird went, we found it near a pond, preening and resting. We parked about 150 feet away and took lots of pictures of this ultra-rarity, a species that has only been reported in the United States on eBird twice before, in 2006 near Ocean City, Maryland, and in 2022 near Oscoda, Michigan.

Then Mary drove us back to our car, saving us a quarter mile hike in 90 degree heat. Thank you, Mary! You will always be our “Queen of the Golf Course”!

—Matt Valencic

Best four weeks

(Continued from page 1)

Certainly not the numbers of individuals, but just as many species.

How do you do this? Get out early and visit a variety of habitats! Look for flowering trees, scrubby/shrubby areas with wet soils, lake edges, wildlife areas, wetlands and field edges. If you have a kayak or canoe, take a friend and paddle down a river for prothonotary warblers, Northern waterthrush and more. Think of what the habitat looks like at Magee and Ottawa and try to find it near home.

So, if you don't have the time or money to go to NW Ohio, spend quality time in your local parks and natural areas. In my own home county of Geauga, 222 species have been reported during May the last 10 years and 36 of them were warblers! In Ottawa and Lucas Counties (Magee Marsh and Ottawa NWR), 299 total species have been reported (they have the extensive marsh-



Wilson's warbler

Photo: M. Valencic

lands), and 38 of them were warblers. You never see all the warblers anyway, so save some money and bird your local patch if you can't get away.

But if you can get away, a day or two in NW Ohio is still an awesome experience.

—Matt Valencic

Frog Fugue

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water waiting for the temperature to warm her to activity. Hopefully she became alert as we saw a Northern water snake slowly cruising in the shallows. The toads had been active because we discovered some distinctive strands of toad eggs in addition to spotted salamander and wood frog eggs. There were tadpoles hunkered down on the bottom of the ponds and pools. Coyotes howled as we left the pond and there was one short hoot from a barred owl. We enjoyed a great night hike.

—Jim Tomko

Don't miss the migration!

The Spring Bird Walk Series is a celebration of migratory birds and is one of the oldest community science partnerships between Northeast Ohio park systems, Audubon chapters, and other organizations.

The 2024 series is still going on! Walks are led by experienced birders and continue on May 5, 12, and 19 at 7:30am unless otherwise noted. Visit www.clevelandaudubon.org for a complete list of locations.



Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

Northern Parula

(*Setophaga americana*)

This warbler is among our smallest warblers but they have it all plumage-wise! Blue-gray upper parts with a bronzy olive-green back patch, orangish yellow chin, throat, and breast with a black and chestnut necklace. There are two bold white wing-bars and a bi-colored bill: yellow lower and grayish upper. They have a white belly and white between the legs.

Even with that amazing array of colors, I usually discover them by their song which is a buzzy rising trill that abruptly trips over the top.

It would be unusual for them to nest in our area but they do nest in southern Ohio. Northern parulas nest all the way south into Florida and north of us into southern Canada. There is a mysterious gap of nesting in northern Ohio, northern Indiana, and northern Illinois.

They are one of the few birds that will nest in dangling Spanish Moss down south and in dangling vegetation tangles up north. The female will construct a side entrance nest and hollow out a cup lined with grass, fibers, hair and pine needles in the tangle up to 100 feet high in a tree where she lays two to seven cream-colored eggs speckled with brown, red, purple, or gray. They feed on caterpillars and other insects in addition to spiders, and occasional fruit and nectar.

They flit and scurry on branch tips searching for their quarry. This foraging technique earned them the colloquial of “Finch Creeper.” John James Audubon and Alexander Wilson referred to this species as the “Blue Yellow-backed Warbler.”

I hope you are able to add this one to your spring migration checklist this year.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

“Woodcock Watch”

Birding is in a way like fishing. Sometimes the birds are cooperative as when the fish are biting. And sometimes the birds are quiet and concealed. If the fish are not biting usually one moves to another spot. We exerted great effort searching for a good performance by the courting American woodcocks but they seemed to always be on the opposite side of the field. We would carefully and quietly work our way through the wet and mud to the other side and once again they began singing on the opposite side. We crossed the road to the wet fields over there and then they began calling from the other side of the road where we had just been.

We wondered if those birds were busy feeding rather than flying because the extreme wind and cold temperatures the day before may have kept them from fully feeding the previous day and night.

Those in our expedition with younger hearing ability had a good rendition of the woodcock “peent-peent.” The rest of us enjoyed watching the moon, planets, and stars light up the night sky while feeling the soft ground and mud under our feet as we marched around the fields at twilight.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

“Frog Fugue”

It was a cold and quiet night with barely a sound except the wind in the tree-tops. Though we were persistent in our search for frogs and toads, not a peep was heard. Finally, after darkness fell, we began to hear spring peepers sing in chorus. When close by, they can be deafening! Such little frogs to produce such a big voice, and the fortitude to withstand temperatures just above freezing is astounding.

The toads took shelter from the cold and were quiet as if they were still in hibernation. We did find a cold and sluggish female green frog suspended in the

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Bird Quest 2024



Questers at The Rookery in 2021.

Photo: M. Valencic

This year’s Chagrin River Bird Quest will be Friday and Saturday September 6 & 7, 2024. Because of road repairs at West Woods, we will be headquartered at The Rookery, 10110 Cedar Road, Chesterland. This Geauga Park District location is a favorite birding location because of the variety of habitats – two wetlands, forest, riparian corridor and lots of edge – and a good place to bird just before you hand in your checklist at 4:00pm Saturday. The lodge is rustic and has seating capacity for more than 100 people.

A New(er) Birders Workshop will be held Saturday August 24th at the Novak Sanctuary and Education Center. Like last year, we will have just over an hour of discussion then go into the sanctuary to look for birds and practice our binocular skills.

A special Constant Contact email will be sent when registration for both events is available. If you are not receiving these emails, send your name and email address to info@clevelandaudubon.org and we will add you to the list. This also gets you access to the online color edition of the newsletter.

—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

May 17 7:30pm
“Rush for Thrush!”
Novak Sanctuary

I can guarantee that you will see at least two species of thrush. They all have wonderful songs and like to sing at twilight. Help me find more with the crown jewel of the veery! Please wear mud boots as the trails can be mired in places.

We will meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road almost a mile north of State Rt. 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.



Programs

May 18 3:00pm
“Wetland Birds of the Eastern U.S.”
Gates Mills 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.

June 3 7:00pm
“Birds of NE Ohio”
Brecksville Library

Over 200 species of birds can be found in NE Ohio in a typical year. Some are year-round residents and others just pass through on their way to the Boreal Forests of Canada. Others fly across the Gulf of Mexico non-stop to have their babies in our back yards! Get a close up look at 100 of the most common residents, migrants and breeding birds of NE Ohio and learn where and when to find them.

DATED MAIL

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Nature journaling at the Novak Education Center

On April 21, the eve of Earth Day, ASGC hosted a hands-on nature journaling workshop led by local artist, naturalist, and educator, Carol Agnew. Participants ranged from a complete novice (yours truly!) to a published illustrator. Everyone was there to try something new and discover a new way to engage intentionally with the natural world.

Tying together curiosity, observation, description, and art, the group explored and sketched outdoors until the cold made controlling a pencil impossible. Indoors, amid vibrant conversation, we practiced and shared techniques such as applying color to sketches and drawing natural objects from Carol's collection of stones, cones, bones, and taxidermy.

Nature journaling is about 'process not production' as one participant noted. It is the process of slowing down to notice the world around us, wondering about details or zooming out for the big picture, and describing what we see,



Workshop participants Kerry Cumpstone, Janet Fenn, and Sue Palchesko share ideas.

Photo: S. Mabey

hear, and experience in pictures, words, and numbers. It is part of the long tradition of natural history, a practice that unifies science and art, curiosity and creativity.

We are looking forward to offering more natural history events in the fall.

—Sarah Mabey

A Wry Smile



Karl Marx is a historically famous philosopher, but no one ever mentions his sister Onya, the inventor of the starting pistol...