



# The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

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## Spring ephemerals ... and bugs!

I love discovering the relationships between living things. Take for example spring ephemerals, aka spring wildflowers. They emerge in woodlands as the ground accumulates heat in March, April and May, before tree leaves steal the sunlight for themselves, then quickly disappear into dormancy. Their whole life is a matter of just a few weeks.

At the same time, many species of solitary bees and other insects are 'waking up' from their long winter naps. Many overwintered as pupae and emerge from their ground nests as adults, looking for pollen, nectar and mates. The wildflowers and early flowering trees like maples gladly oblige in



Nomad bee on trout lily.

Photo: M. Valencic

return for pollination services. Several species of flies are also active.

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## ASGC Annual Dinner

On June 14th, we will celebrate our members and volunteers at our Annual Dinner and Meeting at the beautiful Veteran's Legacy Woods in Geauga County (14085 Ravenna Road in Newbury).

We will enjoy a wonderful walk in woods starting at 3pm, followed by fellowship and a short business meeting. Dinner will be served at about 5:30pm. The evening will be topped off with renowned naturalist and fabulous speaker, Judy Semroc! She will entertain us with tales of the amazing chimney swifts and other fascinating observations through an expert naturalist's eye.



Please make your reservations today! Mail a check and the names of everyone in your party to our Solon address. \$35 per person. Looking forward to seeing everyone there!

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## Hach-Otis hours

Most Ohio State Nature Preserves' hours are dawn to dusk. ASGC owns and manages Hach-Otis and sets the hours from 8:00am to 4:00pm. This is primarily due to vandalization and general trashing of the preserve by students after school hours.

## Nestle Earth Day

"Helping to care for the planet, protect natural resources and serve local communities is in all of our interests," said Paul Grimwood, Chairman and CEO of Nestlé USA. To that end, 30 Nestle employees from the Solon operations volunteered at the Novak Sanctuary on April 22<sup>nd</sup> to help fight invasive buckthorn and to beautify the grounds around the



Cutting buckthorn.

Photo: S. Cleery

Education Center and our pollinator gardens.

With the guidance of six ASGC trail crew volunteers (Keith & Wendy Kohnke, Lee and Rick Deininger, Rob Swaney and Steve Kurbitz), 24 of the Nestle folks split into two large teams to

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## From the Nest...

We were very fortunate to receive the help of about 30 Nestle' employees on their annual Earth Day community service project. Under the supervision of our Education Committee Chair, Matt Valencic, and his crew of chapter members Rob Swaney, Steve Kurbitz, Rick and Lee Deininger, and Keith and Wendy Kohnke, they and removed huge stands of invasive species,



spread leaf humus, and cleaned up our native plant pollinator garden. All of us are grateful for them working that arduous job. As I approached the parking lot to meet them a brown thrasher was singing his heart out as a thank you to the work troop for helping to restore the fields to their native state! A big thank you to all involved.

Please consider joining us for a fun filled afternoon at Legacy Woods Vet-

eran's Park in Geauga County on Saturday June 14th. We will begin with a walk in the woods followed by a social hour, a short meeting, dinner and a fantastic presentation by local naturalist extraordinaire, Judy Semroc.

Migration is upon us! I hope you take the time now to witness Mother Nature's splendor!

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

## Nestle

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cut buckthorn and treat the stumps with herbicide to prevent re-growth. They learned firsthand about the impact of non-native invasive plants on the environment. They removed a huge amount of buckthorn during their three hours of service.



Pollinator gardens after cleaning and thinning.  
Photo: M. Valencic

The other six volunteers worked to do 'spring cleaning' around the Education Center. One employee, Cassie, knew a lot about perennial flowers and took charge of the group. This involved cleaning up all five pollinator gardens, thinning plants which had spread, moving some of those plants to the beds around the Ed Center, pulling weeds and adding leaf mulch up to the top of each box. Two of the stronger men dug out two large invasive shrubs and helped spread mulch all around the Ed Center beds. A final member removed a lot of stinging nettles from between the buildings and cleaned up debris from the last growing season.

At noon everyone met back at the Ed Center for box lunches from Honey Baked Ham Company and to visit with fellow employees they only met that day.

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## Spring ephemerals

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By mid-April, some species of insect-eating birds are arriving in NE Ohio. Their arrival times were set thousands of years ago to coincide with the flush of wildflowers and insects. By May, serviceberry, crabapple, oaks, willows and many other trees are in full bloom and insects are actively feeding and pollinating. This is also when most of the neotropical birds arrive, many flying all night and arriving tired and hungry for insects. It's an amazing match!

Occasionally the timing is off. Like too much warm weather in April, pushing the trees to flower early. By the time the birds arrive in May, the peak bloom is over and so are the huge numbers of insects. If April is too cold for too long, the opposite happens. The birds are on different clocks and don't get the weather forecast before responding to the urge to head north. Let's hope that as

spring arrives earlier the birds are able to somehow adjust their biological clocks to be able to enjoy the abundance of insects when they get here.

If you want to help insect-eating migrating birds, plant native trees and shrubs that flower in April and May. Get some ideas on our Nature in my Backyard website at ClevelandAudubon.com.

—Matt Valencic



Sweat bees on dandelion.

Photo: M. Valencic



*Want to make a real difference?  
Start in your own backyard!*

Helping the planet begins right at home. With the resources on the **Nature in My Backyard** website —

and a **free consultation** — you'll know exactly how to support local wildlife, plant native species, and create a thriving ecosystem in your yard or even on your balcony. Check us out! We've got a handy list of where to buy native plants locally. Let's grow something great together!

## Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

### Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*)

This is an exciting time for birders with the annual arrival of neotropical migrants. Among the favorites are the colorful little gems we call wood warblers. By now they have started arriving to startle and astonish you with their colors and busy flitting and darting after insects, spiders and other invertebrates.

An abundant and brightly colored nester here is the yellow warbler. In fact, if you live near a pond or stream that has brushy willow or alder thickets you may have some nesting right in your own backyard.

It is almost impossible not to see the male with its bright yellow head, throat and belly, yellow wings with a faint olive wash, thick black bill, and large dark eyes. The male's belly has chestnut stripes. Listen for a high-pitched "sweet, sweet, sweet, I am so sweet!" repeatedly, often from the top of a small tree.

We enjoy these birds each late spring through summer as they nest here. The female constructs a sturdy cup of woven grasses, plant fiber and fine bark strips lined with cattail down, dandelion and cottonwood parachutes, and animal fur. The nest is usually located in the vertical fork of a small tree two to ten feet above the ground. She incubates one to seven pale brown-spotted, faintly olive-colored eggs for about 10 days.

The male is busy defending their territory from other yellow warblers and other species that could be predators such as red-winged blackbirds and eastern kingbirds.

Yellow warblers primarily eat invertebrates they glean from leaves and stems sometimes briefly hovering near a leaf to nab its prey. Occasionally they will sortie out flycatcher-style and capture an insect in mid-air.

If you look and listen, I know you will be able to find these beauties from now until autumn at which time they will migrate back south of our border to spend the winter.

—Jim Tomko

## In case you missed it

*“Annual Series of Spring Bird Walks”*

We’ve completed the first two of the six in the series of Sunday morning bird walks. I cannot report on the other locations but the Aurora Sanctuary has produced some great finds. On the first walk we noted 40 species including an American pipit which we saw and heard with the Merlin app verifying the song.

The Merlin app also picked up an osprey and an American loon call which we did not see or hear. Now “Merlin” can be wrong so if something unusual is recorded I always make sure that I actually see the bird. Birders Kim Pease and Barb Philbrik reported they saw and heard two loons over the Novak Sanctuary (about two miles north of the Aurora Sanctuary) flying toward our location. My “Merlin” likely heard those. But we

did not hear or see them so they did not get recorded our list.

On the second of the Sunday morning walks at Aurora we saw 43 species. Each week we see more and more species peaking around Mother’s Day because at that time our non-migratory birds are here, our summer migrants are here and the migrants bound for Canada are here too!

Specialties on this walk were rusty blackbirds, broad-winged hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, pine warbler and yellow-rumped warbler. While not unusual, blue-gray gnatcatchers, golden-crowned kinglets, ruby-crowned kinglets, and brown creepers were seen and heard.

I used to be able to hear those last three species singing in the tree-tops.

But thanks to the keen hearing abilities of Marty Sickinger, Kenny Kressina and “Merlin” we were able to detect and see them.

These are fun walks where novices and seasoned veterans share techniques and advice on birding (my advice is to wear mud boots!). I hope you can join in on one of the many walks this spring in the Cleveland/Akron area. The last one in this series is Sunday May 18<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 am.

—Jim Tomko

*(Visit our website at*

[www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org)

*for a full list of bird walk locations.)*

## Nestle

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We are grateful to Nestle USA, and especially Sean McCleery, for being chosen as one of only 150 communities across the country for a service project. Sean is the incoming President of Kirtland Bird Club of NE Ohio and a Nestle employee. A generous grant from the Nestle’ Foundation paid for lunch and extra equipment for the day’s projects.

—Matt Valencic



Nestle volunteers on April 22 at the Novak Sanctuary.

Photo: S. Cleery

—Jim Tomko

## Did you know?

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active nest and lay an egg causing the host bird to expend energy and time raising the cowbird chick as if it were its own. Yellow warblers detect the egg and then build a new floor to the nest right on top of it at the expense of losing their own eggs. But the yellow warbler lays fresh eggs. Sometimes the cowbird comes back and lays an egg again and the yellow warbler then builds a new floor on top of that one. The record so far for yellow warblers is six layers!

# Upcoming Events

## Field Trips

**June (TBA) 5:45am**  
*“Breeding Bird Survey”*  
Aurora and Novak Sanctuaries

We are on the trail early for this morning survey to take advantage of hearing the songs of male birds proclaiming their territory confirming they are breeding birds. This event was organized by long-time board member Mary Salomon more than 20 years ago to help us study and understand what species of birds use our sanctuaries. This important, ongoing census adds information regarding the bird populations in our sanctuaries and the Chagrin River IBA. The dates will be forthcoming and will be announced on our website as soon as possible.

**July 25 7:30pm**  
*“Twilight Hike”*  
Aurora Sanctuary

As the summer heat wanes the evening creatures begin to stir and make their appearance. Day-time creatures seek a place to roost or spend the night. Owls may call, Raccoons my argue, fox may bark and coyotes may howl. Let’s see what we can turn up! Meet at the Aurora Sanctuary/Brettschneider Park parking lot located on the north side of Pioneer trail few hundred yards east of Page Road in Aurora. (896 East Pioneer Trail Aurora, OH 44202)

*See the Spring Series of Bird Walks for May field trips (info above)*

## Programs

**May 15 7:00pm**  
*“Save the World!”*  
Via Zoom

If you’ve ever felt there is nothing you can do to help solve some of our world’s environmental realities, this talk is for you. Harvey Webster shows us how beautifying our personal landscapes with more native trees, shrubs, grasses and flowering plants helps restore habitat for the multitude of creatures that live there and contribute to increasing biological biodiversity in our communities and ultimately the world.

**Register for Zoom programs at**  
[www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org).

**DATED MAIL**

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*Audubon Moment*

Mother Nature has always astounded me in ways too numerous to count. As many of you know, my early fascination with the natural world was with the hopping, creeping and slithering creatures of the cold-blooded ilk. In college I earned some of my keep by being the teaching assistant for Miami University’s upper-level Vertebrate Zoology course taught by Dr. Paul Daniel which was heavy in identification of mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish.

The following is a true tale which I had seen on video but never witnessed in person. On a warm, sunny day in early April, I was sauntering slowly and quietly along a path at Tinker’s Creek State Nature Preserve, I could hear leaves on the forest floor moving and vibrating even though there was very little wind. That sound always puts me on alert for my “Herp” friends! Soon I noticed a large female garter snake beginning to cross the trail. I zipped over to her, and because she was still

**Garter snakes in love**

cold, I was able to capture her before she knew what was happening. It was my first catch and release snake of the year. As I was admiring her beauty, I was suddenly aware of a second, smaller garter snake, closely following her trail. He was aggressively coming onto the path too but he became quite tentative when he saw me and he froze, partially hidden by leaves.

Then to my surprise I saw that a third snake was following the same path. The two males began retreating. But the one that was closest to me could not control his enthusiasm for this gal that I was holding. I slowly and stealthily squatted down, allowing the female in my hands to rest her belly on the path, but keeping a firm grip on her forward section. That male continued to move towards her until they had their flicking tongues almost touching. At this point I knew it was a match made in heaven and I released her to be with her long-awaited partner.

I was very pleased to be the Garter Snake Matchmaker Of Tinkers Creek!

—Jim Tomko

**Did you know?**

Yellow warblers are known to build a multi-story nest! As you know, brown-headed cowbirds are brood parasites. They never stick around to raise their young. They find another species’

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