



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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Another Bird Quest in the bag

A huge THANK YOU to everyone who made this year's Chagrin River Bird Quest another great success!

A heartfelt shoutout to the amazing planners, volunteers, and sponsors who brought the event to life, and to all the enthusiastic birders, families, and nature lovers who showed up in full force. Your energy, curiosity, and



Questers in Lake County

Photo: M. Wagner

love for the outdoors made the event truly special.

We had a fantastic turnout across all ages, perfect weather, delicious food, and smiles everywhere you looked. It was a Quest filled with discovery, community, and celebration of the natural world — and it wouldn't have been possible without YOU.

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Plant a thicket...

Fall is the time to plant most trees and shrubs. And fall is when we look at our views with a Winter Eye. When the brilliant flowers are gone, what do we see as we sit in our dens or scrub dishes at the kitchen window? It might be the neighbor's RV, the blue-tarped boat in the driveway, the masses of plastic kids' toys across the street. How to change that pesky view....

What about planting a THICKET? Thickets are discreet clusters of shrubs, and perhaps small trees, that harbor wildlife year-round. With the right choice of plants, you could turn your view into a bird paradise, full of berries. Add a birdbath and feeders?

I like to anchor thickets with small trees, and for the sake of keeping smaller birds safe from hawks and marauding cats, I like to include a few prickly menaces in the group. In a mostly sunny spot, our native Washington hawthorn (*Crataegus phaenopyrum*) will do the trick, bloom bountifully in May, and

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We need you! Busting buckthorn in October

Tom Sawyer had a way of convincing his friends that whitewashing a fence was a privilege and even an honor. I'm here to tell you that cutting larger buckthorn trees (pencil size up to four-inch diameter) and treating the cut stumps is satisfying work that helps make our sanctuaries showcases for native plants instead of showcases for non-native invasive species. And those volunteers who help in this effort will know they made a difference for biodiversity.

Please consider joining us on Saturday October 11th from 8:45am to



Buckthorn Busters: Wendy and Keith Kohnke, Rob Swaney and Steve Goodale.

Photo: M. Valencic

noon at the Novak sanctuary to selectively cut stands of buckthorn in areas where we have been working since 2022. Once removed, these areas will

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From the Nest...

Happy October; my favorite month of the year! The weather is excellent and the autumn color is spectacular even though a bit subdued and more yellow this year due to the drought of the last month. But the bird migration is continuing as it always has through the



epochs of time. It is exciting and interesting to see what species turn up.

This year's Bird Quest event has demonstrated that. We have Matt Valencic and his crew of helpers to thank for a fantastic and continuously growing fall migration event. I would also like to thank Geauga County Parks and the Blackbrook Audubon chapter for

their assistance in making Bird Quest possible.

I would like to remind you to fill your bird feeders because the local birds are setting up their winter-feeding routines now! Good luck with your backyard feeder birds.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

Thicket

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provide lots of red berries for migratory and winter birds. Mix it up with some junipers, bayberries and red twig dogwood, underplant with red-berried bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and you have an attractive winter feeding station.

Have a slightly shadier, damper spot? Lucky you – the American hollies (*Ilex opaca*) have followed the warmer climate to NE Ohio, will anchor a glorious thicket, combined with *Aronia arbutifolia* and Pussy Willows, and summer blooming native shrubs like *Spiraea tomentosa* and *Itea virginica*. Don't forget to Leave the Leaves!



American holly

And more—there are shrub dogwoods for thickets, and native viburnums, the serviceberries...so many options! Habitat heaven, and no RV in sight.

—Robin Schachat

Did you know?



White-crowned sparrow songs are among the most studied vocalizations in all animal behavior. The young learn the song from their parents and neighbors. Since they are very faithful to their nesting territory and the young usually return to their natal area, they have developed numerous dialects due to the isolation from more distant populations!

—Jim Tomko

Bird Quest by the numbers

Here are the numbers:

31 teams with 125 people registered
10 teams were NEW this year
13 people registered for the pre-event Birding Workshop (10 attended, two of which were walk ins)
93 new T-shirts given away and several more from our 'vintage rack' (new record)
3 guided walks led by Jim Tomko, Mary Ann Wagner & Matt Valencic
Estimated 90 people attended the Celebration Saturday PLUS 7 ASGC volunteers (a new record)
13 half sheets of pizza, 3 trays of salad, 5 gallons of apple cider, 40 bottles of water and countless homemade goodies consumed!
Leftovers ... 3 half sheets of and 2 gallons of cider
We spent \$500 LESS this year (compared to previous years) on food by going with pizza and salad and asking board members to bake cookies.
6-raffle items (about \$250 in ticket sales) and two tables of door prizes
127 total species reported ... 22 species of warblers

Team Awards:

Most Habitats Visited—Bird Group #5
Youngest Junior Birder—Bird Group #5 (2-year-old)
Most Warbler Species Seen—Just Wingin' It (19)
Most Waterfowl Species Seen (tie)—Just Wingin' It (6), Where's the Darn CONW (6)
Rarest Bird Seen—Casual Corvid's (merlin)
Most Creative Team Name—Phantom of the Osprey (2nd year in a row!)
Most Species by a Family—Counting Crows
Most Species Overall
1st—Where's the Darn CONW (101)
2nd—Just Wingin' It (94)
3rd—Three Strikes You're Out (80)

[2025 – Another year of birding, bonding, and making memories in the beautiful Chagrin River Valley. Mark your calendars for next year's Bird Quest, September 11 and 12, 2026, at The West Woods Nature Center!](#)

Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

White Crowned Sparrow (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*)

This large sparrow is aptly named for its regal appearance with its boldly striped "crown" of black and white. It has a pinkish bill with a tinge of orange or yellow. White-crowned sparrows have a clear gray breast and belly while the back and wings have the classic sparrow hues of browns and grays.

Their song starts with a sweet clear whistled note followed by a captivating jumble of trills with a buzzy ending.

They eat mainly seeds but often include grains, insects, and berries.

These sparrows nest far to the north, usually in shrubs and trees 1.5 to 10 feet above the ground. Those that nest beyond the tree line in the arctic tundra nest on the ground. The female builds a cup nest of twigs, grasses, pine needles, moss, bark and dried leaves lined with fine grasses and hair. She lays two to seven greenish-blue eggs speckled with reddish brown spots and incubates them for 10-14 days. The nestlings fledge in 8-10 days.

When you are looking over the flock of White-throated sparrows at your feeder this fall look closely to be sure they are all white-throated and not white-crowned! White-throated sparrows have a distinctive white throat patch almost outlined in black and a yellow spot behind their bill. White-crowned sparrows and white-throated sparrows are migrating though our area now and will be for the next few weeks.

—Jim Tomko

You are invited...

to join COAC, the Council of Ohio Audubon Chapters. Its mission is to provide a unified platform for chapters to share best practices, brainstorm solutions, and represent the interests of Ohio's bird and nature conservation community. For more information, email info@clevelandaudubon.org.

In case you missed it

“Fringed Gentian Walk”

Fringed Gentians survive best in moist soil. Considering the dry summer that we have endured, I was concerned that we would not find any of those spectacular blooms. Well, they came through to dazzle our view! In numbers there were not many, only about a dozen, but in beauty, they were fabulous.

Six of us enjoyed the wildflower show. One in our group came all the way from Bay Village in search of

fringed gentians as she had never seen them growing in the wild. This event was so special to her because her late mother spent many hours searching for fringed gentians.

In addition, we found other fall favorites such as nodding-ladies tresses, great lobelia, turtlehead, calico aster, blue-stemmed goldenrod, and silver rod.



Fringed gentian



Photos: J. Tomko

—Jim Tomko

Buckthorn

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revert to open fields of native wildflowers and grasses the very next growing season (2026). I will



“Wildlife pile” of buckthorn after 3 hours work.
Photo: M. Valencic



Cut buckthorn stumps.
Photo: M. Valencic

show you examples of recent successes as we walk to the work sites.

You should wear long pants, long-sleeved shirt or jacket, work gloves and sturdy shoes/boots (hiking boots are fine). Bring your favorite loppers or use ours. We will supply work gloves for those who need them, loppers (we have seven) and Buckthorn Blaster herbicide applicators.

We work in teams of three or four, taking turns cutting the trees near the ground, moving the cut trees to create ‘wildlife piles,’ and applying herbicide to the cut stumps. We will have bottled water (or bring your own) and packaged snacks.

If you can join us, please RSVP to info@clevelandaudubon.org so we know how many to expect.

We will meet at 8:45am in the parking lot at 382 Townline Road in Aurora. We will be there for three hours but if you can only help for one or two hours, we appreciate the time you can help.

—Matt Valencic

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Oct 11 10:00am
“Autumn Color Hike”
Hach-Otis Sanctuary

We are fortunate to have John Lillich guide us on a spectacular autumn leaf color hike overlooking the Chagrin River Valley from our own Hach-Otis Sanctuary. Hopefully the trees will have received just enough moisture and cool night temperatures to provide amazing color. Meet at the Hach-Otis parking lot at the end of Skyline Drive off River Road in Willoughby Hills.

Programs

Oct 7 7:00pm
“Migrating Waterfowl”
Sandy Ridge Reservation

Once the pretty summer songbirds have departed for points south, what do birders do? They put on another layer of cloths and go looking for waterfowl – Ducks, Geese, Swans, Loons, Grebes & Gulls. This presentation showcases these hardy visitors along with Hawks, Owls and smaller birds like Snow Buntings, Larkspurs and Kinglets. If you don’t like cold weather, ask about ‘car birding’, a favorite alternative to walking when wind chills plummet! About 1 hour in length.

Oct 15 5:00pm
“Birds of NE Ohio”
Rock Creek 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 backyards! 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. Approximately 1 hour in length.

Programs are free and open to the public. Please visit our website under Events for location addresses and maps.

DATED MAIL

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A Wry Smile



If you boil a funny bone it becomes a laughing stock.

That's humerus.

Migration by the numbers

At least 40 percent of all bird species are migratory. In North America more than 300 bird species migrate. Here are just a few amazing facts about the planet's migratory marvels:

High flyers — Bar-headed geese reach altitudes of nearly 30,000 feet across the Indian Himalayas.

Far flyers — Arctic terns' round-trip amounts to nearly 50,000 miles per year.

Fast flyers — great snipes maintain speeds of 60 mph or more—and that's without tailwinds.

Tireless flyers — the bar-tailed godwit covers 7,000 miles across the central Pacific without food or rest.

Fat flyers — blackpoll warblers nearly double their body weight before embarking on their nonstop 2300-mile trip.

From National Audubon

What about the other 60%?

Our winter hold-overs avoid the hazards of long travel, but in exchange they have to endure the cold. Ever wonder how they do that?

Sparrows seek shelter in dense foliage or cavities. They also huddle together to share warmth, and tuck in their head and feet.

Bigger birds put on another layer of insulation, like we do. A goose may grow an extra set of downy feathers. More than ten percent of winter body weight may be fat in certain species, including chickadees and finches. Chickadees can't put on too much bulk for aerodynamic reasons. Instead, they

are experts in shivering. Birds shiver by activating opposing muscle groups, creating muscle contractions without all of the trembling typical when humans shiver.

Another adaptation is the ability to keep warm blood circulating near vital organs while allowing extremities to cool down. Gulls can stand on ice with feet at near-freezing temperatures while keeping their body's core nice and toasty.

Be sure to hang your feeders when the mercury drops!

Edited from "How Birds Cope with Winter," Daisy Yuhás—NAS