



# The HOUSE WREN

## Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at [www.clevelandaudubon.org](http://www.clevelandaudubon.org)

Dec, 2025—Jan, 2026

### NMB status report

ASGC has much to be proud of. As a member of LEAP (Lake Erie Allegheny Partnership for Biodiversity), we are fully living out the mission of that organization which reads: *"We are dedicated to the identification, protection and restoration of biodiversity in our region and to the increased public awareness of biodiversity..."*.

For years ASGC has protected biodiversity through the ownership and stewardship of almost 600 acres of land in four sanctuaries in NE Ohio. We have increased public awareness of biodiversity through many programs open to the public, guided hikes through



our sanctuaries, in-person Speaker's Bureau talks in the region, and Zoom programs since 2020.

With Nature in My Backyard we have done something unique, bringing the message of restoring biodiversity to individual homeowners and empowering them to make a difference, one garden/yard at a time, with personal consultations by well-trained Master Gardener volunteers and the abundant

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### Preventing bird-window collisions

Every year, millions of birds die after flying into windows. Even if a bird seems only stunned and flies away, it may later die from internal injuries. Researcher Daniel Klem calls glass "an indiscriminate killer" that affects even healthy birds.

Why it happens: birds mistake reflections of trees, sky, or visible indoor plants for real habitat. Collisions can occur year-round, especially when light and reflections are strong at dawn or dusk.

How to spot risky windows: check  
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### Lesson from an old pine tree

In early November some of our trusty Trail Crew removed a large dead pine tree from the trail at the Novak Sanctuary. It was literally wrapped in poison ivy vines! Mark's long-handled chain saw allowed him to trim branches that were out of reach while keeping his distance from the poison ivy chips that were flying. The trunk was so rotten that when it was pushed with the tractor it broke into pieces that could be easily pushed off the trail.

Someone planted that tree, probably more than 75 years ago, when Novak was still a working farm. What were they thinking? Did they want some biodiversity on the farm? After all, pine



Trail Crew members: Steve Goodale, Matt Valencic, Mark Magree and Keith Kohnke  
*Photo: R. Swaney*

warblers use these trees for nesting in the spring, and if tiny sawfly larvae are feeding on its needles, they become food for many species of birds. Did they want

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### Irruption year!

Every year the Finch Research Network (Winter Finch Forecast 2025-2026 - FINCH RESEARCH NETWORK) publishes the winter finch forecast outlining the seed production of trees important for getting many bird species through the winter in Canada.

There are years of great abundance, called MAST years, which may be followed by years of light to extremely poor production as we are experiencing this year. That forces the birds to migrate east, west and south in large numbers (aka, *irrupt*) in search of adequate food, and is an opportunity for us to enjoy birds not usually seen every

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### *From the Nest...*

It is Christmas Bird Count season! This tradition began 126 years ago in New York City by ornithologist, Frank Chapman, as an alternative to a bird hunt and has become a nation-wide phenomenon. For some seasonal birding fun you can get involved with a local group that is participating. There is likely a bird monitoring circle near you.



Regarding another item, our chapter is fortunate to receive your kind and generous donation that keeps us reaching the goals of our mission statement. Because we are stewards of about 600 acres of wildlife sanctuary land and offer numerous programs including the exceedingly popular "Nature in My Backyard," once a year we send out an appeal for donations

above and beyond mere membership dues. I thank you ahead of time for remembering us in your year-end non-profit donations.

I wish you a peaceful and happy holiday season.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

## NMB status

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resources available on our website.

We have invested many dollars in Nature in My Backyard the last three years, but it dwarfs the personal commitment of Jane Ellison, Harvey Webster, Robin Schatat, Wendy Donkin, Kathryn Craig and a small army of Master Gardener volunteers. Continued education of team members is key to the high-quality information homeowners enjoy when they have a NMB team visit their yard. With the help of an article in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, they increased 'garden visits' from 86 in 2024

## Pine Tree

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to provide a good daytime roost for the resident screech, barred or great horned owls that live in the area? Or maybe a



Northern cardinal eating poison ivy berries.  
Photo: M. Valencic

winter roost for a northern saw whet owl! Or did they just want to hear the sound of the wind blowing through its branches as it got taller?

## Window collisions

(Continued from page 1)

for large picture windows, paired corner windows, or windows with feeders nearby. If you see reflections, birds do too.

How to make windows bird-safe: apply markings on the outside of the glass.

Use decals spaced two inches apart or paracord "zen curtains" spaced four inches apart. A few stickers won't work—it has to cover most of the glass.

Proven solutions:

Dot patterns or tape (e.g., Feather Friendly)

Acopian BirdSavers: vertical paracord strands hung outside windows that create a clear visual barrier for birds while preserving your view.

Exterior screens

to 252 in 2025. In the Aug - Oct quarter in 2024 they made contact with about 150 people with their messaging. In that same period in 2025 they impacted 700 individuals with their messaging. This is BIODIVERSITY EDUCATION at the most granular level, and no one else is doing this in NE Ohio.

We will be meeting in the next few weeks to discuss plans for 2026. I hope you will consider sharing some of your time and insights to help us continue the mission of Saving The World: One Garden, One Yard at a Time!

—Matt Valencic

It's pretty certain they were not thinking about the poison ivy that would ultimately grow all the way to its top branches. But even the poison ivy has value in nature. In dense growths like this tree supported, it provides cover for birds, small mammals and insects. Its flowers are a pollen or nectar source for spring insects. Several animals can eat its leaves and stems with no skin reaction, and its berries are enjoyed by many bird species through the winter.

And now this pine tree will continue to contribute as it decays, returning important nutrients to the soil for other plants. Thank you, great pine, for your abundant ecoservices and for a glimpse into the beauty, wonder and awe of nature.

—Matt Valencic

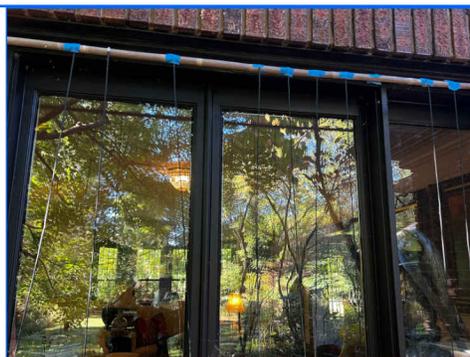


Photo: A. Ellison

One-way transparent film (e.g., Collidescape)

Small changes save lives. Even treating one or two windows can prevent bird deaths and help protect local wildlife.

—Jane Ellison

## Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

## American Bittern

(*Botaurus lentiginosus*)

This very reclusive heron is usually discovered by its distinctive and amusing call from the cattail marsh. The song is best described by its repeated and rhythmic "oonka-choonk" which earned it other colloquial, common names such as: Stake-driver, Thunder-pumper, Water-belcher, and Mire-drum.

American bitterns are medium-sized herons. For comparison in Ohio, it is much smaller than a great blue heron but a bit larger than a green heron.

Because of their amazing cryptic coloration and habits, they blend into the marsh emergent vegetation seamlessly. The striped plumage is a beautiful palette of browns and tans. There are broad brown and beige stripes from the chin through the breast with very dark stripes from the bill through the shoulder. It has yellow legs and yellow eyes.

These carnivores apparently eat about anything small enough to swallow including fish, crayfish, frogs, salamanders, snakes, small mammals, insects and spiders. American bitterns usually forage at twilight (dawn and dusk) near the edge of emergent vegetation or shorelines.

The nest is usually constructed of dry reeds, rushes, and grasses, and lined with fine grasses and fibers in dense stands of cattails, sedges, bulrushes, and grass from three and a half to eight inches above the surface of the water.

Like most herons, they need open water in which to forage, therefore they are migratory.

We can look forward to their return to our area in April. I hope you are able to hear their unique song at twilight next spring.

—Jim Tomko

## In case you missed it

*"Leaf Crunching Walk"*

We crunched leaves and snapped twigs that covered the path as we listened and watched for our avian and other wildlife neighbors under fine autumn weather conditions.

The marsh was holding some water which gave a resting spot for migrating green-winged teal, gadwall, black duck, wood duck, mallards and Canada goose. Through our binoculars we inspected the

two empty great blue heron nests that are the beginning of a new heronry. We enjoyed some beautiful sassafras leaves on the forest floor in lovely shades of red and yellow in all three shapes that the sassafras produces.

Our small group of wonderful people made this an excellent way to spend an autumn afternoon.

—Jim Tomko

## Ornithology Course

Jan 12-May 6, 2026 (BIO 1815)

Mon and Wed 9:00-11:45 AM

CCC—Eastern Campus

Weekly field trips to learn identification of 150+ species, mist netting and banding, point counts, behavior, and ecology. Plus in-person lectures on avian evolution, anatomy, physiology, coloration, flight physics, migration, and reproduction.

**Register by Jan 5 at [tri-c.edu](http://tri-c.edu)**

### Finches

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winter. Feeders should be well supplied with black oil sunflower seed, thistle seed (aka nyger) and suet to attract these winter specialty birds if they are nearby.

Even though seed production was poor there were outbreaks of spruce budworm in parts of

Canada this summer which provided ample food for adult and baby evening grosbeaks, pine siskins, purple finches, red-breasted nuthatches, crossbills, redpolls and many warbler species. By



Common redpoll with sunflower seed.

Photo: M. Valencic

August we saw unusually high numbers of red-breasted nuthatches and purple finches showing up in NE Ohio. We are hoping that's an indication of more species to come once snow covers the meadows and fields in Canada. Besides your feeders, be watching cone-bearing conifers and sweetgums for

crossbills and nuthatches.

Concentrations of European black alder, a non-native tree often found in abundance next to bodies of water, produce small cones whose seeds are

food for redpolls, pine siskins and other finches. Crabapples are also a favorite of many winter birds including evening grosbeaks, purple finches, both waxwings and robins.

So, bundle up this winter and go searching for these winter specialties. If you don't like being cold, consider visiting large, old cemeteries and bird from your car. Cemeteries are often like arboretums and contain a tremendous variety of trees and birds. And watch eBird to see where the birds are being found.

—Matt Valencic (Source: *Winter Finch Forecast for 2025-2026*)

## Upcoming Events

### Field Trips

**Dec 19 7:00pm**

*"Winter Solstice Hike"*

Novak Sanctuary

I love the quiet and peaceful sensations of the winter woods at night. Hopefully there will be a light snow cover to add to the ambiance. If the clouds give way, the stars and moon will shine brightly lighting our path. We will be celebrating one of the longest nights of the year a few days ahead of the actual solstice. Please dress appropriately with winter footwear. 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 on the Aurora/Mantua border.

**Jan 17 9:30am**

*"Winter Track Walk"*

Aurora Sanctuary

Help us read the stories in the snow. The local wildlife use our trails much more than we do but go unnoticed due to their secretive, alert and sometimes nocturnal habits. In the snow is the history of their comings and goings. Do we have fox or coyote? Are otters present? Did the Flying Squirrel land on the ground near that tree? We will meet at the Aurora Sanctuary at 9:30 in the Bretschneider Park parking lot a few hundred yards east of Page Road on the north side of East Pioneer Trail in Aurora (896 East Pioneer Trail)

### Programs

**Dec 10 12:00noon**

*"Wild About Winter"*

via Zoom

This program will explore the lives of select animals and plants in winter, their adaptations and strategies for survival, and focus on the importance of the winter solstice as the key signal and lead-in to spring. We will also explore how we can observe the vibrant life of winter.

There is always much to explore in our own habitats and 'hoods, regardless of season.

Sign up for the zoom presentation at:  
[www.natureinmybackyard.clevelandaudubon.org/programs](http://www.natureinmybackyard.clevelandaudubon.org/programs)

**DATED MAIL**

**AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND (S 70)**  
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*A Wry Smile*



Q: What is on the ground and also a hundred feet in the air?  
A: A centipede on its back!

*From <http://www.funology.com/bug-and-insectjokes/>*

*An Audubon Moment*

Some birds, while not uncommon, are tricky to add to your list. Often you can hear them but you can't get a satisfying look at them. Some of these "skulkers" will pop up out of a brushy spot if you "pish" (make a sound beginning with a "puh" slurring into a long "shshsh").

Last month I was walking the old abandoned road to Cedar Point at Sheldon Marsh in Huron, Ohio, when I caught a shadowy movement at the water's edge off to my left. I turned to get a better look and saw nothing, at least at first.

Yet I was convinced that something was there. I kept studying the area for movement or a faint silhouette but nothing stood out. As I was about to walk on, so did my invisible quarry!

An American bittern stepped into an opening and it became quite easy to discern. Take a look at these

**Stealthy skulker**

pictures. This species will stand with their bill pointing skyward swaying with the reeds, while their striped neck and breast blend into the emergent vegetation.

Now you know why you can have such difficulty finding a stealthy skulker!

—Jim Tomko



Photos: J. Tomko