



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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November, 2025

“In between” birding

How did November get here so fast? I barely had enough time to search for migrating fall warblers and now it’s time for ducks. But as I write this on October 19th, the ducks are not yet here in Geauga County. So, what do we do when we are “in between” warblers and ducks? We get out there early, visit a variety of habitats and enjoy what’s there.

I generally start with a target bird in mind, and lately it has been the orange-crowned warbler. My friends have seen them but not me! During the pursuit I have enjoyed an abundance of yellow-rumped warblers, red-breasted nuthatches and ruby-crowned kinglets



Long-billed dowitcher

Photo: M. Valencic

that seem to be everywhere. They will all remain through the winter. I also watched three long-billed dowitchers at LaDue Reservoir as they kept foraging toward me until they were only about

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Leave the leaves...

...for the BIRDS!!

We have all read about “leaving the leaves”—leaf litter breaks down into compost, enriching the soil; fireflies overwinter in leaf litter; salamanders and toads and other living beasties make winter homes in brush and leaf piles. But leave the leaves for the BIRDS?

You bet.

In our area, about 97% of songbirds feed their nestlings soft-bodied insects, even if the adults are seed-eaters themselves. The parent birds stay in constant motion, foraging from dawn to dusk to satisfy their hungry chicks. In

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Join the Buckthorn Blasters

Six intrepid warriors (Kay, Keith, Paul, Wendy, Rick and myself) entered a field at the Novak Sanctuary on October 11th to battle buckthorn, the reviled, non-native shrub that threatens natural areas all over the country. Their weapons were simple—loppers and a Buckthorn Blaster, the handy herbicide applicator that spells doom for the plant if used immediately on the cut stump.

They did battle for three hours, cutting and treating stumps of plants that were trying to reinvade a field that was cleared of the nasty stuff in 2022. They succeeded in clearing about half the field, and now it’s time for you to enter the battle on **November 15th** to finish

the job.

If you would like to volunteer, please RSVP to info@clevelandaudubon.org. We will meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot (382 Townline Road, Aurora) at 8:45 am on November 15th and work until noon. If you can only help for part of that time, your participation will be appreciated.

Buckthorn and other non-native plants compete for limited soil resources and give back nothing! If allowed to spread, they eventually cover an area and shade-out native plants that are important resources for beneficial insects and wildlife. By removing them we allow native plants to flourish which



The Blasters: Kay, Keith, Paul, and Wendy (not pictured: Rick and Matt)

Photo: M. Valencic

helps restore biodiversity. Please consider being part of this important work.

—Matt Valencic

From the Nest...

I’m giving thanks for the amazing autumn weather which allowed an astounding amount of work to be accomplished by our trail crew and by our invasive species battle group (which is often a one-man show). Keith Konke guided the trail crew through some fatiguing and arduous tasks making our trails safer and more passable. Matt



Valencic, our “field marshal” for invasive species control has improved acres and acres of our fields and forest giving native plants a chance to thrive.

These activities are on-going and never-ending tasks. The fields and forests are greatly enriched, encouraging wildlife to call the Audubon sanctuaries home. Please consider joining their crews. The more hands we have the

better we will do in the shortest amount of time. No experience is necessary!

The autumn migration continues! I always look forward to the November arrival of northern nesting waterfowl. They are not quite as bright and shiny as they are during spring migration but they are spectacular just the same. I hope you are able to enjoy these autumn visitors.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President

In-between birding
(Continued from page 1)

100 feet away. With a 400mm lens, that's almost point-blank range! Later that week my friends found eight of them elsewhere along the reservoir. Very unusual for that location.

While watching some white-throated sparrows in a crab apple tree, three cedar waxwings grew to 33 in about 10 minutes. They were feasting on the small crab apples along with over 20 robins while the sparrows sang "Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody". Further along the trail I saw my first rusty blackbird of the season. We have seen a lot of them in recent years. I hope their numbers are



Cedar waxwing

Photo: M. Valencic

rebounding. And as I walked out of the house today, about 20 dark-eyed juncos flew out of my vegetable garden, a sure sign winter is right around the corner. I hope they were eating weed seeds!

I'm learning to be happy where I am with the birds that are there and I hope you are too. The year-round birds are as beautiful and interesting as the migrants. Pretty soon we will be adding layers of clothes before searching for ducks, geese, snow buntings and Lapland longspurs, and wishing the weather was as nice as it was during the "in between" days.

—Matt Valencic

Leave the leaves
(Continued from page 1)

just a few short weeks, those tiny, helpless hatchlings must grow into fully feathered, self-feeding young birds, and that takes a lot of food! Busy parents collect between 7,000 and 9,000 caterpillars to raise a single brood. A diet rich in protein, fats, and moisture is essential for such rapid development, and nothing is more important than caterpillars and spiders.

Caterpillars are the larval stage of Lepidoptera (moths and butterflies). Adult birds will gather them wherever they can find them; in the canopies of oak trees, within bark crevices, beneath leaves where caterpillars hide, or in leaf litter on the ground. Many of our Lepidoptera overwinter as pupae, hidden among fallen leaves or attached to plant stems. Others overwinter as adults that shelter in the leaf litter or other protected spots,



where they later emerge and begin the cycle again.

Removing the leaves reduces Lepidoptera concentrations by up to 47%, per research from the University of Maryland. Piling leaves into large, compact heaps reduces oxygen levels inside, which can harm the insects

overwintering there. Mulching or shredding the leaves with a mower clearly kills the lepidoptera hiding within.

Try leaving your leaves wherever they won't interfere with your daily routine. If you prefer a tidier look, rake them into small piles around trees or in your garden beds. You can even surround these areas with short "bunny fencing," if you like, to help keep the leaves neatly in place.

But leave your leaves and save your birds—come spring, they will need every caterpillar they can find!!!

—The Nature in My Backyard Team

Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

American Coot (*Fulica Americana*)

This water-bird is an oddity because it seems to have been designed by a committee. It has a chicken-like bill, grebe-like feet, gallinule-like face shield, duck-like habits, occasionally goose-like grazing, rail-like walking and is in the same scientific order as cranes!

Their plumage is completely dark gray/black with a blacker head. The bill is white with a black ring at the tip. Instead of webbed feet, they have lobed toes allowing them to efficiently kick through the water. The lobes fold together when the foot is drawn forward and flare out when they push back against the water. Coots can swim, dive, and walk (not waddle).

Coots are primarily vegetarian, consuming algae, duckweed, sedges, eel grass, cattails, waterlily, and wild celery. They also eat many insects, crustaceans, snails, and small vertebrates such as salamanders and tadpoles.

A coot nest is an engineering marvel in that it is a floating platform nest woven of reeds, sedges, cattails, bulrushes and grasses tethered and concealed in dense emergent aquatic vegetation. A cup is formed several inches above the water surface to keep the 8-12 brown speckled, buff-colored eggs warm and dry. The chicks are ready to leave the nest six hours after hatching.

Coots rarely nest in Ohio with most nests occurring in the western Lake Erie marshes. Generally, coots are migratory but they are quite hardy and may stay all winter if they can find open water.

November is an excellent time to spot these common but unusual water-birds.

—Jim Tomko

Did you know?

The label "old coot" to describe an eccentric old man and the idiom "crazy as a coot" both likely were derived from observing the erratic antics and aggressive swimming behavior of coots in breeding season. They vigorously defend their territory by lowering their heads while frantically running across the water's surface, arching their wings, raising their tails, and splashing water with their wings and feet at the interloper.

—Jim Tomko
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In case you missed it

“Autumn Leaf Walk”

It was a near perfect autumn day for “leaf peeping” although the vivid reds, scarlets, and oranges were missing. It appears as though we are having more yellowish leaf color this year. The lack of vivid hues may be due to the late summer and autumn warmer than normal temperatures and the drought that we experienced this year.

I was not able to attend this walk but expert, interpretive naturalist, John Lillich, and his small group were able to enjoy a different trail this year, allowing longer views of the spectacular Chagrin

River valley. Sometimes a smaller group is better as it allows a more personalized interpretation, the opportunity to ask questions of the naturalist and exploring less traveled trails.

Since John grew up hiking this woodland, he could point out historic landmarks, subtleties and interesting changes over the years. Thank you, John, for hosting such an excellent afternoon in the fabulous Hach-Otis Sanctuary.

—Jim Tomko



Ban Twaddell (top), Keith Kohnke and Bill Riucki on bridge crew.

Photos: K. Kohnke & B. Twaddell



Old bridge

Photo: K. Kohnke

Replacing the footbridge

The trail crew recently replaced the footbridge along the east side of Fulton Pond in the Aurora Sanctuary.

After many years of service, one of the planks of the old one was missing and another had been damaged by beaver activity. The new bridge was designed by Hal Goodwin and utilized previously purchased

lumber.

The materials were pre-cut at the Novak Education Center and transported by car along the First Energy right-of-way (now the new Aurora Rail-to-Trail) to the north side of the Pond. Then they were hand

carried along with several tools to the site of the old bridge. Assembly was done on-site by Keith Kohnke, Bill Rucki and Ban Twaddell.

In addition to improving the trail, the widened and strengthened bridge is a necessary step in preparation to refurbish the old pallet stairway at the far eastern edge of the trail around Fulton Pond.



New bridge on east side of Fulton Pond in the Aurora Sanctuary.

Photo: B. Twaddell

—Ban Twaddell

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Nov 8 9:30am
“Leaf Cruncher Hike”
Novak Sanctuary

The enjoyable sound and feel of wading through a carpet of fallen leaves awaits you! The forest without leaves obscuring the view gives a new and different perspective. Slopes and gullies just off the trail become visible. Ancient trees hidden by the leaves of their offspring appear clearly. And you can actually see the birds you could only hear when the leaves were there. Waterproof footwear is recommended. 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.

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.

Programs

Nov 12 12:00noon
“At Home with Native Nut Trees”
via Zoom

Hickories, oaks, hazelnuts—these are some of your favorite things—if you happen to be a native lepidopteran, bird or mammal. But also, the human relationship and history with these native nut-bearing megaflores runs deep as well. For many good reasons.

Join Nathan Johnson from the Ohio Environmental Council on a multi-layered exploration of some of the best native nut trees a backyard could have.

Sign up for the zoom presentation at:
www.natureinmybackyard.clevelandaudubon.org/programs



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An Audubon Moment

In September I was working my way along a trail overlooking a swamp while taking in how quiet and motionless everything was. I was reveling in the beauty of jewelweed and lizard-tail in full bloom accented by turtlehead and great lobelia.

Usually, on this trail, there is lots of songbird activity. Often, I hear red-winged blackbirds, belted kingfishers, white-throated sparrows, gray catbirds, red-headed woodpeckers, white-breasted nuthatches and house wrens. Today there was not a single bird-song.

I began concentrating on the leaf-free snags and branches. At the very tip-top of a tall snag, I discovered the reason for the quiet-time. A juvenile Cooper's hawk was perched to survey all breakfast possibilities. As I was studying it to confirm the identification (juvenile hawks are confusing), a toy-sized flying creature came rising from the swamp blooms toward the hawk. I wondered if the hawk was hungry enough to grab a dragonfly.

Suddenly, the creature began to

Mighty Mite

attack the hawk. I had never heard of dragonflies attacking a hawk. As soon as I got my trusty binoculars trained on the attacker, I could easily see that it was not a dragonfly, but an intrepid ruby-throated hummingbird!

I do know they are feisty and will defend their territory against all comers, high risk or not. After several minutes of hummingbird antagonism, the hawk reluctantly moved on.

Score one for the mighty mites!

—Jim Tomko

Cooper's Hawk
Photo: M. Valencic



A Wry Smile



A mandate isn't a law.
It's when two men go to dinner.