



The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Visit our website at www.clevelandaudubon.org

September, 2026

Party 'til the birds come home!

The 12th Annual Chagrin River Bird Quest is once again headquartered at The West Woods Nature Center, 9465 Kinsman Road (Rt. 87), Novelty, OH from 4pm September 11 through 4pm September 12, followed immediately by the Quest Celebration.

This FREE 24-hour team birding challenge is open to families, friends, and co-workers with all levels of birding knowledge and experience. Share the day with your favorite people (or at least your favorite birders)!

Explore the Chagrin River Valley from Lake Erie south to Audubon's bird sanctuaries in Aurora.

Compete for prizes for the most

Chagrin River BIRD QUEST

warblers seen, the most species overall, the most creative team name and more! Got kids? We have a new 'challenge' and award just for them!

Most importantly, have fun!

All Bird Quest events are free and open to the public with registration. You can register your team on our website, www.clevelandaudubon.org

As always, pick up your FREE t-shirt and checklist during Check-in from 4pm – 6pm at The West Woods Nature Center. Twenty-four hours later our Quest Celebration will feature delicious

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Citizen Science at Novak Sanctuary

I love science! For me, science explains how and why things work in nature. But “doing science” requires a lot of work, a lot of people, and usually a lot of money.

In recent years the scientific community has opened its doors to what is called Citizen Science. Simply put, it is research done with the help of the general public and overseen by professionals in whatever field the research is being conducted. A lot of data can be collected relatively quickly with the help of hundreds, or even

thousands of people contributing.

If you use eBird, iNaturalist, or participate in the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas or Ohio Dragonfly Survey, you are ‘doing’ Citizen Science. In return for your participation, these

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Kim Pease entering an observation.

Photo: J. Tomko

From the Nest...

September is here and for us autumn lovers it is eagerly anticipated! Yes, the fall migration is on. Migration is such a fascinating time because unusual species may show up anywhere and also, we can enjoy those species nesting up north passing through on their way back to winter in warmer climates.

Our Bird Quest event is an excellent



way to have some fun tallying the variety moving through our area at this time. Please consider joining us. Details of this event and information on how to register appear later in this newsletter.

I know all who attended our annual meeting in June were very pleased. If you were not able to attend, you missed a great gathering. A huge thank you goes out to our vice president Tracy Engle for

Novak Sanctuary benefits from Eagle Scout project

Education is at the heart of most things we do at Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland. So when Dashiell Miller-Rao, a Boy Scout from Troop 309 in Pepper Pike contacted me last summer about a potential Eagle project involving nature and education, I was all ears! After hearing his story, we decided on a project that involved creation of two informational signs about wetlands that would be installed at the Beaver Pond in our Novak Wildlife Sanctuary.



Eagle Scout candidate Dashiell Miller-Rao

Photo: A. Miller-Rao

One sign describes the importance of wetlands and the other is specific about wetland plants and animals. He began his research in August 2025 after receiving approval from the ASGC Sanctuary Committee, our ODNr representative, and his Eagle advisor.

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the months of planning, organizing, reserving a venue, arranging for food and drink, and making sure all the audio/visual equipment was ready for our excellent keynote speaker, Jamey Emmert, whom he secured for our annual meeting. Give Tracy a pat on the back and a big thank you next time you see him.

See you on the trails,

—Jim Tomko, President ASGC

Bird Quest

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food and our special raffle items and table of door prizes.

First time participant? Check the Bird Quest page on our website for complete information and schedule of events. If you still have questions, email info@clevelandaudubon.org.

We would love for you to use eBird to record your sightings as well as on the



Some 'Quester' high jinks!

Photo: M. Valencic

September 'snapshot' of birds in the IBA and levels the playing field for awards.

Don't wait, register today!

yellow checklist provided at check-in.

And please confine your birding to the Chagrin River Watershed (a list of locations can be found on the CRBQ page or at check-in). This gives us a more accurate

Critter Corner

Photo: M. Valencic



Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)

It is easy to see why some birds were named by a person holding the bird in their hand. The red eye of a red-eyed vireo is one of the least helpful field marks unless you have a good binocular view of one that is unusually perched at rest.

These active, mid to upper-level canopy dwellers visit us every late spring through autumn. They are about the size of a junco with a very different insectivorous style bill.

The plumage is olive green with no wing bars, a white breast, a gray cap, a white eyebrow, and a black line through its eye.

Red-eyed vireos are enthusiastic, relentless singers. When other species quiet down after their breakfasts, red-eyed vireos continue singing into the afternoon and sometimes longer. They are often difficult to see because of their affinity for the canopy where their greenish plumage and small size allow them to easily hide behind a leaf. But because of their distinctive song they are an easy bird to document in the forest. The males can sing up to 40 phrases a minute which could add up to more than 20,000 phrases a day.

At one time they may have been the most abundant breeding bird in Ohio except for the passenger pigeon. In a resource rich forest, they only need about an acre for their territory. They nest in a branch fork 10 to 15 feet high with a 360-degree view where they lay one to five sepia speckled eggs. The female alone incubates the eggs where she quivers her wings and opens her bill to beg the male to feed her.

There is an excellent chance for you to hear and maybe see one if you take a walk in your local woodland before late autumn arrives.

—Jim Tomko

Citizen Science

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apps will keep track of your 'life list' or allow you to use the app for research of your own.

Recently I created a project in iNaturalist to help us identify as many living things as possible in the Audubon Novak Sanctuary in Aurora. To contribute, all you have to do is use iNaturalist to identify any living thing in the sanctuary, and your sightings become part of the project. Check out the current standings at <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/asgc-novak>

-sanctuary-inventory.

You can get the free iNaturalist through the App Store on your phone. Create an account and start getting answers to questions like "what flower is that?" or "what's that bug?". It can become addictive, but in a good way.

And you will be contributing to the knowledge base about the sanctuary. If you don't know where to start, there are lots of videos online to help you.

HAVE FUN! And thank you for helping us inventory life in the sanctuary.

—Matt Valencic

Annual Meeting 2026

About 50 people converged on Veterans Legacy Woods in Geauga County on June 6, 2026, for our Annual Meeting and Dinner. Jim Tomko led a nature walk for a few adventurers, and then all enjoyed an hour of beverages, appetizers and good company.

At approximately 5:00pm, President Jim Tomko's "barred owl" call could be heard, and the short business meeting was called to order. Jim thanked those present, then offered recognition to each board member for their service to the organization.

The election of officers followed. Jim Tomko remains president, Tracy Engle is vice president, Stephanie Demyan is treasurer and Alison DeBroux continues as acting secretary.

Jim presented two annual awards. The Sealy Award recognizes service above and beyond in support of the organization's mission. This went to Bill Rucki for his work on the Bluebird Trail and bluebird boxes, electrical work in the barn, sanctuary repairs and his long support of Audubon and Black Swamp Bird Observatory.



The Award of Merit is presented to a person outside the active chapter membership who has made exceptional contributions to conservation and environmental education and this year went to Renee Boronka. Her efforts with the CMNH, LEAP, Nature Everywhere and others closely reflect the ASGC mission of promoting conservation and appreciation of birds and other wildlife.

With the business portion concluded, Jim invited everyone to enjoy a delicious dinner, catered by Vinny's.

Jamey Emmert of the Ohio Division of Wildlife was our evening's speaker. She gave a presentation on the Lake Erie Birding Trail and other additions to the Ohio network of birding trails. The evening ended with all participants eager to get back to birding!

—Alison DeBroux

In case you missed it "Bioblitz"

On August 15th eight of us used the iNaturalist app on our phones to help identify as many living things as we could find at the Novak Sanctuary. After three hours we made over 400 observations and added 104 species to the list of known living things in this sanctuary!

We now know that there are at least 383 species of plants, animals, fungi and insects in the fields, forests and wetlands of the sanctuary. We also know there is more to be discovered and documented.

For example, we have been



Bioblitz participants from left: Keith, Tracy, Kim, Rick, Matt, Emily and Wendy.

Photo: J. Tomko

collecting bird data at Novak since 1992 and have documented 197 species that use the sanctuary at some time during the year. We also know that about 50 species are breeding birds, having their

babies here every year. However, only 21 bird species are listed in iNaturalist because pictures are required to confirm most observations. The potential to find more insect species is even greater.

Why does this matter? Because healthy ecosystems have a lot of diversity of plant and animal life. As the current stewards of ASGC sanctuaries, knowing what is present and what is absent helps inform our land management strategies as well as potential educational programs in the field.

—Matt Valencic

Scout project

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The project involved researching information for both signs, finding a company to produce high-quality weatherproof signs, fundraising to purchase the signs, and finally bringing his fellow Scouts together to install the signs at the Beaver Pond. He was an excellent communicator throughout the winter as we discussed his progress, sought the input of others within ASGC, and worked through logistics of getting the project installed. Installation took place on June 7, 2026, a process that took about 5 hours and involved seven Scouts. Dashiell's Scout Master and four other adults were there for advice if needed. Much learning took place

throughout the process, and he showed good leadership as he guided his fellow Scouts through the installation. He can be very proud of an excellent project that will educate visitors for years to come.

This is a great time of year to take a walk at the Novak Sanctuary and enjoy the many flowering plants and pollinators on your way to the Beaver Pond to see this wonderful project.

—Matt Valencic



Troop 309
Photo: A. Miller-Rao

Did You Know?

Red-eyed vireos are one of the most common victims of brown-headed cowbird nest parasitism. They are among other species such as yellow warblers, Kirtland warblers, song sparrows and chipping sparrows that brown-headed cowbirds take advantage of. These species and others do not recognize the cowbird egg in the nest nor do they neglect the cowbird nestling even though it is bigger than their own nestling. The cowbird nestling ejects the parent's eggs and nestlings from the nest while the nest-owning parent continues feeding the nestling cowbird.

—Jim Tomko

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Sept 20 1:00pm

"Fringed Gentian Walk"

Aurora Sanctuary

Come and visit our treasured fringed gentian patch. Fringed gentian are an uncommon native plant with delicately toothed petals showing an amazing hue of blue. Fringed gentian are among the last flowers to bloom in our area. Mother Nature may add the more common closed or bottle Gentian and ladies tresses (which belong to the orchid family), to our autumn jaunt. Full sunshine will create an unforgettable display! Meet at the Brettschneider/Audubon parking lot on the north side of Pioneer Trail a few hundred yards east of Page Rd. in Aurora.

Sept 9 12:00 noon

"Reap What you Sow"

Via Zoom

Saving seeds is an economical and joyful way to renew the beauty of your backyard garden. Participants will learn how to identify various types of seeds, learn when seeds are ready for harvest, and how they can be stored for the following growing season. Join Seed Bank Manager, Kim Lessman, to learn about seed saving best practices in your own backyard.

To register for the zoom program:
www.natureinmybackyard.ohionativeplants.org/programs

Programs

Sept 11, 4pm to Sept 12, 6:30pm

"Chagrin River Bird Quest"

West Woods Nature Center

Get your team together for our 12th annual, 24-hour birding challenge. Open to all. Check-in starts at 4pm on Friday. Pick up your bird checklists, birding information, and FREE t-shirt.

Return your filled (!) checklist at 4pm on Saturday for judging, then stay for fellowship, pizza, desserts and awards. Don't miss our special raffle items and door prize table!

CRBQ is free with team registration.

Register on our website:
www.clevelandaudubon.org

DATED MAIL

**AUDUBON SOCIETY OF GREATER
CLEVELAND (S 70)
Board of Trustees 2026-2027
Jim Tomko, President**

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To contact an individual trustee, send an email
to info@clevelandaudubon.org



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newsletter

A Wry Smile

I know I got a lot of exercise
the last few years
just getting over the hill.

Do you have an "Audubon Moment" to
share? Send photos and short text to
info@clevelandaudubon.org.



Audubon Moment

It pays to have a birding buddy with
exquisite hearing! My birding buddy is
Kim Pease.

While we were hiking 7 Ponds Trail
at Tinker's Creek State Nature preserve
Kim heard a high-pitched bird call that
was out of my range of hearing. We
were confused because we also heard the
calls intermingled with those of an
agitated red-eyed vireo.

Like most of us do when we are not
confident on the identity of a call, we
turn on our phone's "Merlin" app. This
free app from Cornell Lab of
Ornithology identifies birds by sound
and it is surprisingly accurate.

Well, "Merlin" does not hear as well
as Kim, and did not pick up the
unknown call. We began our search for
the source mid-way up through the
forest canopy with thick leaf cover.

Soon we discovered the red-eyed
vireo. It was busy doing something on a
branch and we wondered if the vireo
was harassing a young predator.

After the birds were jostling around
for a few minutes the picture became

Mystery Call

clear. There on the branch the red-eyed
vireo was feeding a monster-sized
fledgling that was truly bigger than the
parent. The vireo was working diligently
to satiate the fledgling's hunger.

It turned out to be a fledgling brown-
headed cowbird. As you may know,
cowbirds do not build their own nests to
raise their young. The female cowbird
lays her egg in another bird's nest and
that parent is then tricked into raising the
cowbird as its own.

To you young couples out there
considering your own "nestlings", don't
try this at home (no matter how good an
idea it may seem)!

—Jim Tomko

Brown-headed cowbird
fledgling
Photo: AllAboutBirds

