The HOUSE WREN

Bulletin of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

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Clean-up time!

It's fall clean-up time! Or is it?

If you visit the Novak Sanctuary this month you will find the flower gardens and fields looking 'messy' by some standards. The native plants in the demonstration beds are leaning over, their seed heads closer to the ground and tangled with their 'neighbor', just as it is in the fields behind them. Those tangles provide shelter from winter winds for birds like American tree sparrows and dark-eyed juncos while they eat the seeds remaining on the flower stems.



Dark-eyed junco on goldenrod.

Photo: M. Valencic

Some of the flower stems contain insect eggs or larvae that will hatch next year. And the dried leaves on the ground are habitat for many beneficial insects and larvae to safely overwinter. So, it is intentional that we 'leave the leaves' and other plant structures in place until next spring. We hope you will consider doing the same.

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New chimney swift tower

John Lillich and some dedicated neighbors started erecting a new chimney swift tower in the Hach-Otis Sanctuary in October. Anthony Moses supplied a cement mixer and helped with mixing concrete for the base. Mike Johnson, owner of MJ Tree Service, offered his 110 foot crane and lifted the final piece into place. John, Ban Twaddell, and Dave Schaper completed the siding and trim. The tower is now ready for a rental come spring!



Hach-Otis chimney swift tower

Photo: J. Lillich

Leave the leaves!

All together now, one more time…

LEAVE the LEAVES!!

It's such a catchy phrase, and you've heard it a thousand times… But WHY?

Well, because leaves are part of a natural cycle.

Trees draw water and nutrients up through their roots and use them to grow leaves in the spring. Then, in autumn, those leaves fall back to the earth where they slowly break down over the next couple of years, replenishing the soil with nutrients that will eventually be taken back up to the treetops and used again to grow leaves.

So there's reason number one: healthy soil, naturally. Fallen leaves return nutrients to the soil, helping trees thrive without the need for extra fertilizers or mulch. Cost-effective!

Reason number two: You want birds and butterflies in your garden!

Leaf litter provides shelter for overwintering caterpillars and other beneficial insects….the juicy little packets of protein and moisture that songbirds feed their young in the spring.

In fact, research has shown that it can take 6,000 to 9,000 caterpillars to raise a single clutch of chickadees!

Caterpillars munch on leaves in the treetops all summer, and then spend the winter in the leaf litter, or in the soil beneath it, in their pupal or other life stages.

Bag those leaves up and send them away, and your chickadees will not have enough food available when their hungry little ones hatch in the spring.

And here's just one more reason for you: nature's fireworks …..

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From the Nest...



On a woodland trail, the autumn leaf fall delightfully crunches under our feet. Anyone who experiences this immediately gets transported to a carefree time of childhood eagerly awaiting the change of season and the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday.

It puts me in a thankful frame of mind for the beauty and majesty of our natural world.

In addition to that, I want to express how extremely thankful I am for all the assistance I have received in conducting the activities of our chapter. There are too many names to mention but each of you who contributed time, talent, expertise, and funds have made our chapter an extreme success. We could not accomplish our goals without each and every one of you no matter how small or large your contribution.

I wish you a peaceful and warm-hearted Thanksgiving.

—Jim Tomko, President ASGC

Fall clean-up?

(Continued from page 1)

HOWEVER, if you have a vegetable garden, it's a good idea to remove all plant debris and dispose of it because it can harbor insect pests and plant diseases. If you don't have a cover crop already growing, consider adding some organic mulch or compost on top of the soil to protect it and reduce winter weed growth (yes, some weeds, like hairy bittercress, grow all winter long).



American tree sparrow eating tickseed.

Photo: M. Valencic

Your yard is HABITAT for birds, insects and lots of other creatures, and just like we must manage the habitats of our sanctuaries, you can manage your personal habitat with these simple strategies. In doing so, you are helping nature and improving biodiversity in the world, one yard at a time.

—Matt Valencic

From the archives...

Although the Cleveland Bird Club (ASGC's forerunner) is one of the oldest of its kind in the country, its birth was coincident with similar interest and activity in Washington, Boston, New York, and elsewhere. This awakening interest which motivated the key members of the young Bird Club was a broad concern with the problems of conservation, which went far beyond an interest in our feathered friends. Conservation became a primary concern of the group, although no formal committee of that name existed.

The formation of the Memorial Association constituted a sort of Sanctuary Committee. Of the specific projects which later on were to engage the attention of the definitive Sanctuary Committee, the first to appear in the annals was the affair of Starve Island. Mr. C.M. Shipman, a Board of Trustees member and early president, gave a lecture at the 2025 Annual Meeting, and solicited the concern of the Club on behalf of the tern colony nesting on the tiny island in the lee of Put-in-Bay.

The first official action of the group concerning Starve Island occurred on October 30, 1929, when Mr. Shipman was appointed chairman of a committee to get further information . . . "and given power to act, if it be deemed advisable."

—Excerpted from the archives by Jim DeBroux

Starve Island is known as the second smallest of the Lake Erie Islands, is mostly barren, serves as a resting spot for migratory birds, and presents a nighttime hazard for boaters due to a lack of lights. Local lore suggests the name comes from a sailor who starved after being shipwrecked there.

It was once a highly significant, bustling sanctuary for the Common Tern, hosting a massive breeding colony during the early-to-mid 20th century. A model of the island and its terns was gifted to and exhibited at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, and caught the attention of the *New York Times*, which reported on November 7, 1928: "About 2,000 birds live [on Starve Island] during the mating season ... and in these months the activity of the island is intense."

Subsequent scientific studies (such as research published in *The Wilson Bulletin*) noted pressures on the colony, including mass night desertion of nests and environmental changes impacting nesting success in the western Lake Erie island chain.

—Excerpted from USF Digital Commons, Wikipedia, & NYT.



Starve Island, nine years ago.

Photo: E. Large

Critter Corner



Photo: M. Valencic

Golden Crowned Kinglet
(Regulus satrapa)

One of our smallest and hardiest songbirds is here now!

Measuring just four inches long with a seven-inch wingspan, the golden-crowned kinglet is smaller than both the black-capped chickadee and the blue-gray gnatcatcher. Only the winter wren is similarly small. (The ruby-throated hummingbird is the smallest bird, but it is not a songbird.)

These tiny kinglets have an astounding ability to withstand the harsh conditions of the boreal forest.

They have olive-green backs, darker wings with two white wing bars, and white underparts. The male's striking scarlet crown is flanked by golden-yellow stripes bordered in black.

Always on the move, kinglets flick their wings as they flit between branches, searching for insects, spiders, and their eggs. They favor conifers and nest almost exclusively in them, frequenting pines, spruces, and hemlocks even during migration.

Golden-crowned kinglets are not known to nest locally, but they breed as close as northern Michigan and northern New York. They become common here in mid-October. A few occasionally overwinter in Ohio, while most continue farther south.

Now is the time to head outdoors and marvel at these beautiful, mighty mites!

—Jim Tomko



Did you know?

Golden-crowned kinglets are toughies! They often winter in regions where nighttime temperatures fall below minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Sometimes they gather together to share body heat in harsh cold.

—Jim Tomko

In case you missed it

"Autumn Color Walk"



John Lillich holding forth in Hach-Otis Sanctary
Photos: J. Tomko



The morning of our Autumn leaf-color walk began with foreboding clouds and intermittent drizzle. By the time we gathered at 1:00 on the Hach-Otis trailhead the precipitation stopped and the overcast sky had brightened.

Nine of us were very fortunate to have John Lillich take the lead as interpretive naturalist and regale us with historic natural history facts and stories about the area where he grew up. There were enormous tulip trees, ancient hemlocks, mature wild black cherries and massive oaks. A witch hazel was in bloom with its odd blossoms.

Across the astounding vista of the Chagrin River gorge, we could see deep-red black gum, bright red and orange sugar maples, and rich yellow hickories.

The afternoon involved perfect autumn weather, excellent camaraderie and the brilliance of John's tales educating us without us even knowing he was teaching us about our natural world. Thank you John and thank you to all who joined us.

—Jim Tomko

Leave the...

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LIGHTNING BUGS!

Lightning bugs, or fireflies if you will, spend much of their lives as larvae, two to three years in fact, living in moist leaf litter before they emerge as adults and add sparkle and joy to our summer evenings.

The reasons to leave the leaves go on and on, but those three ought to be good enough to inspire you to try it under just ONE tree.

I know you don't want leaves blowing all over your yard, so put up one of those little wire fences… or make a rustic little wattle fence out of sticks… and create a generous circle of leaf litter around the base of your tree.

You'll be amazed at the little ecosystem you can create just by letting nature do its thing.

Altogether now… **LEAVE the LEAVES!!**

—Jane Ellison

Volunteer Open House returns!

When: March 21, 2027 2 – 4 pm
Where: Novak Education Center
Why: Because we love a party!

No, really, we'd like to recognize and get to know our volunteers. If you are a volunteer with ASGC, or think you might like to become one, this is for you! Refreshments, information, meet and greet…did I mention refreshments? More information will be coming.

Please put it on your calendar!

Upcoming Events

Field Trips

Nov 7 9:30am
"Autumn Leaf Crunch"
Novak Sanctuary

Join us for a saunter through the less traveled section of the Novak Sanctuary on the east side of Townline Road. We will pass through fields in transition returning to native species then into the forest which has been undisturbed since the mid-1900s. We will end at the site of our newly constructed Chimney Swift tower which is awaiting the spring migration. Meet at the Novak Sanctuary parking lot on the east side of Townline Road about a mile north of State Route 82 on the Aurora/Mantua border.

Programs

Nov 9 7:00pm
"Owls of Ohio"
Brookpark Library

Twelve species of owls have been spotted in Ohio. Several are residents, some are migrants and a few are accidental visitors. Interesting owl trivia will be revealed. Some tips on how, when and where to spot owls will be shared. This is a power point presentation and no live owls will be exhibited. Presented by Jim Tomko.



Nov 11 12:00 noon
"Meadows of NE Ohio"
Via Zoom

When European settlers first arrived in Ohio, they found a land that was 98% forested and rich in wetlands. Gardeners of today know, however, that a number of our native flowers and grasses prefer sunny, drier conditions. These include meadow species like little bluestem and nodding wild onion. This presentation examines meadow communities of northeast Ohio, with an emphasis on their origin, characteristic plant species, and ecological significance.

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

Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland
P.O. Box 391037, Solon, OH 44139

The Newsletter of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland

DATED MAIL

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A Wry Smile

I don't call it getting old;
I call it outliving the warranty.

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

Audubon Moment

Witness at the water's edge

The great blue heron often appears motionless in shallow water—focused, poised between patience and movement. To encounter a heron in this state is to feel the pace of solitude: space to breathe, to reflect, and to attend to what might otherwise pass unnoticed. For a moment, the world slows, as if attention itself has been quietly invited.

The life of the great blue heron is inseparable from water. It depends on healthy wetlands—quiet shorelines, floodplains, estuaries, and shallow rivers where fish and amphibians remain abundant and waters remain in balance. Because of this reliance, the heron is often regarded as an indicator of environmental health. Where herons thrive, wetlands are generally functioning well. Where they disappear, the loss often signals deeper disruption long before it becomes visible elsewhere.

Today, science has given us a far clearer understanding of ecosystems and the conditions that sustain species like the great blue heron. What science cannot compel, however, is care. No law or dataset can require us to notice a bird standing at the water's edge, or to feel responsibility for the habitat that sustains it. Regulations may protect wetlands, but their effectiveness ultimately depends on human awareness—on attention, restraint, and a willingness to coexist thoughtfully with other forms of life.

To watch a heron fish is to observe patience as a form of survival. Nothing distracts its attention from the present moment. In that quiet discipline lies a lesson. When we learn to notice the heron clearly, we may also begin to recognize the condition of our wetlands—and our own responsibilities—more honestly.

Care, like balance, begins with attention.

—Sepala Weliwitigoda

