

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

April 2010



*Yellow-rumped Warbler*  
*John Koscinski*

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## Program

### **The Hole Thing: the Amazing Adaptability of the Eastern Bluebird**

**Dean Sheldon**

Conservationist and Birder  
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Tuesday, April 6, 7:00 p.m.

**Dean Sheldon** is a lifelong birder and conservationist who has maintained extensive bluebird trails in Ohio since 1982. He is a founding member of the Ohio Bluebird Society in which he has held various positions. He also is a member of the North American Bluebird Society, The Birdhouse Network, and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. He and his family provided 25 years of wildlife and forestry stewardship of property that now is part of what is Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve.



## Outstanding Speakers Series

Jointly sponsored by

Black River Audubon and Lorain County Metro Parks

Saturday, April 10, 2 p.m., Carlisle Visitor Center

**Roger Tory Peterson: Yesterday and Today**

**James M. Berry**, President

Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History

Jamestown, NY

Roger Tory Peterson was perhaps the greatest birder/naturalist of all time. His Field Guide to Birds, first published in 1934, is credited with launching the modern environmental movement and with moving bird study out of the shotgun era. Today Peterson's work and message are still as vibrant as they were in the mid-20th century. Jim Berry traces the influence of this great American and demonstrates Peterson's impact on today's thoroughly modern birder.

Jim Berry is a lifelong naturalist who grew up in the fields and forests of Southern Ohio. Jim has a particular interest in birds, but is knowledgeable in many facets of natural history. A field naturalist who doubles as the president of a national nature education organization is the best way to describe Jim.



## Board Meeting

Tuesday, March 30, 6:30 p.m.

304 West Avenue, Elyria

## Field Trip

Saturday, April 17, 8:00 a.m.

Grant Thompson's land at 6020 Oberlin Road, Amherst. Directions: The entrance driveway, between North Ridge and Middle Ridge Roads, west side of Oberlin Road., just south of the Route 2 overpass, is a gravel road

between two red fences. Bear left at the split. Parking: open field on right just past gate on top of hill.

## Birding by Tram

By **Harriet Alger**

Lorain County Metro Parks and Black River Audubon will again offer birding by tram this spring at Sandy Ridge from 9-11 am on the following dates: April 15, May 6 and 20, and June 3 and 17.

These trips are designed for experienced and beginning birders who are not able to walk the entire trail. This includes birders who are able to leave the tram at stops to find and ID birds and those who must remain seated and bird only from the tram. Unlike regular tram rides, the tram moves slowly and stops whenever birds are heard or seen to allow use of binoculars and scopes. Other birders are welcome to accompany the tram on foot to help find and ID birds for those on the tram.

LCMP is limiting the number of riders to 6 per trip. A waiting list will be kept for each program in case people cancel. To register for April 15th trip only call SRR at 440-327-3626. For trips in May and June, you may call either CVC (1-800-LCM-PARK) or SRR (440-327-3626) to register.



## Camp Scholarship Awarded

By **Dick Lee**

After a one year hiatus the Hog Island camp is back. Once again Black River Audubon is providing a scholarship to a camper who will gain knowledge and skills that will be used to educate the young people of our community. The chapter is pleased to award the scholarship to David Krasovic, an Elyria High School ecology teacher and LCCC oceanography instructor. David will be working with Dr. Stephen Kress, Project Puffin biologist, restoring Maine's seabirds, conducting a census of eiders and gulls, and participating in a banding program.

David participated in the Field Ornithology camp in 2008 and is thrilled to be returning to Hog Island to work with some of the world's top bird experts.

Congratulations David!



## Field Trip Report

By **Marty Ackermann**

A hardy group of six birders (Marty Ackermann, Ken Austin, Gary Hawke, Dick Lee, Jack Smith, and Jean Sorton) met at Castalia Pond the morning of February 13. The day was cold, but the sun shone brightly in a clear blue sky. The Pond was teeming with birds, but the number of species was small. There were hundreds of Canada geese and mallards, and only a half dozen or so each of bufflehead, northern shoveler, American black duck, and ruddy duck. The caravan of five vehicles then drove north toward Sandusky and Lake Erie, but the only open water found was a small patch at Cold Springs with several mute swans and herring gulls. Most of the group then returned to Castalia for a late breakfast. Due to low interest, the original plan for an overnight stay with a trip to Killdeer Plains was canceled.

Although the BRAS trip to Killdeer Plains was canceled, Sally Fox, Tammy Martin, Marty Ackermann, and Paul Sherwood took a day trip there on Sunday, February 14. This was the first trip to Killdeer for Sally, Tammy, and Marty, with Paul generously providing his experience and expertise. The group left Sandusky at 8:30 a.m. and drove so as to take advantage of Paul's knowledge of good spots to see birds along the way. This included a stop at Castalia where the observations were similar to those of the previous day. Undoubtedly the most numerous birds in the fields along the back roads were horned larks, such that the group mantra soon became, "Oh, just another bunch of horned larks." Fortunately, there also were some snow buntings and a few



Lapland longspurs.

The birding at Killdeer was almost entirely by van with Sally doing the skillful driving. We emerged twice; once for waterfowl at the only open water we saw and the second to walk through a large grove of evergreens to look for owls, unsuccessfully. Fortunately there was one long-eared owl in a pine next to the road, which we originally missed but to which other birders alerted us. Eagles were abundant and a variety of hawks were seen, including two dark-morph rough-legged hawks. Two surprise species were an eastern towhee and a northern mockingbird. There were many "wow" moments during the trip, including four male ring-necked pheasants in a tree providing a colorful sight in the bright sunshine.

We lingered until dusk to see the short-eared owls that Paul promised and delivered. After getting decent looks at several birds as darkness closed in, we decided it was time to go home. Sally pulled into a small parking area to turn around and there sitting on a six-foot post about three car lengths ahead was a short-eared owl fully illuminated by the van's headlights. It sat there for several minutes, turning its head alternately from side to front to side, while we watched in awe and Sally took pictures. What an end to a glorious day! Sally, Tammy, and Marty have Killdeer Plains on their lists of future must-do sites.

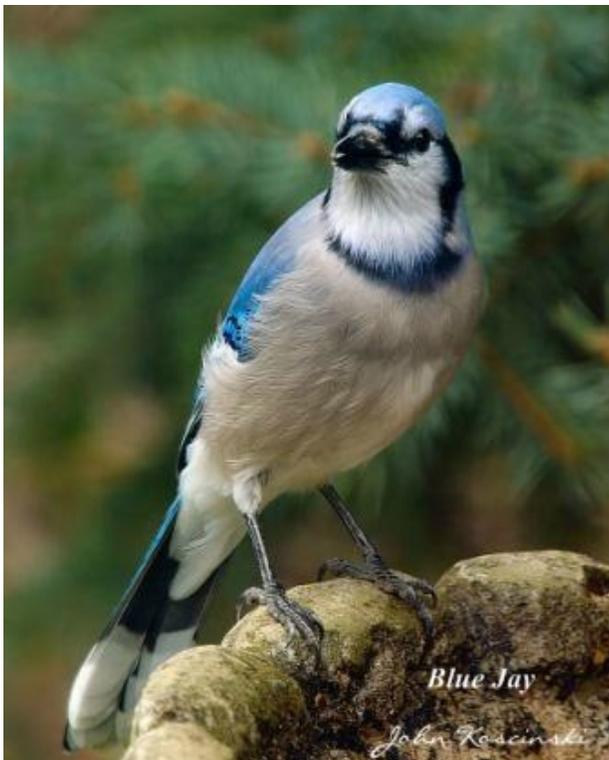
The full 39 species seen for the day were:

Canada goose, tundra swan, American black duck, mallard, northern shoveler, northern pintail, lesser scaup, bufflehead, ring-necked pheasant, bald eagle, northern harrier, rough-legged hawk, Cooper's hawk, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel, rock pigeon, mourning dove, long-eared owl, short-eared owl, red-bellied woodpecker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, blue jay, American crow, horned lark, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, American robin, northern mockingbird, European starling, eastern towhee, snow bunting, American tree sparrow, dark-eyed junco, Lapland longspur, northern cardinal, and house sparrow.

## A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

How would you describe a blue jay? I don't believe one word would be adequate. My description would have to include bold, beautiful, mean, noisy, and noteworthy.



Blue jays are bold. I will never forget the summer evening when I sat in my living room reading. There was a knock at the front door, but when I went to see who it was, there was no one. I sat down, and the knock, knock came again. Again I went to the door, and no one was there. The third time I heard the knock, I went out the back door and around to the front of the house. A few baby blue jays were hopping around in the grass and suddenly a parent blue jay flew into my front door with a bang as the jay attacked a neighbor's cat that had jumped up on my front step and was preparing to pounce on a baby bird. It takes a mighty bold bird to attack a cat.

Blue jays are beautiful. Many years ago at the Midway Mall, Black River Audubon displayed pictures of many beautiful birds, including Ohio's state bird, northern cardinal. We asked the public to vote on their favorite, if cardinals were absent. To my surprise the blue jay won by a landslide.

Blue jays are beautiful but mean. People who are not bird watchers are often surprised to learn that blue jays will attack and eat baby birds (not their own birds, but other species). Jays even feed on bird eggs. They are truly predacious.

Blue jays are noisy. They chase other birds away from bird feeders so they can hog the food. Jays are often the first birds in the forest to alert other birds of danger and predators. They are even noisy as they fly overhead in large flocks during spring migration.

Blue jays are noteworthy. After the last glaciers receded, the oak forest that populated Ohio was here thanks to blue jays. Jays love acorns and bury many more than they eat. Of the many tree species that moved into Ohio at the end of the ice age, oaks were the most successful because they could dominate the area with the help of blue jays. Ohio's history could have been very different if not for blue jays.

## American White Pelican

*(Pelecanus erythrorhynchos)*

(pel-eh-KAY-nus er-ith-roh-RING-koss)

By **Jack Smith**

Many aspects of this fascinating species deserve mentioning. First its name: The person who assigned the tongue-twister scientific name to this bird must have been in a bad mood. The genus name is Latin for pelican and the species name in Latin means red beak. When the breeding season begins, a knob or culmen about two inches high develops on the upper bill about 1/3 of the bill length from its tip. The lower beak consists of two long flexible bones that support a relatively large gular sac made of skin. When a bird thrusts its bill into water in search of prey, the pouch expands like a balloon while bending the flexible bone outward until the pouch contains three to four gallons of water. Then the pouch is slowly emptied of water leaving only prey. The prey is immediately swallowed. It proceeds to the crop where digestion begins. The pouch is lined with a sensitive neural system enabling the bird to find prey in darkness.



Also at the beginning of the breeding season pale yellowish plumes develop both as a crest and on the breast, and the characteristic yellow bill and yellow feet begin to change gradually to red-orange.



This species is one of the largest water birds in the world with a length of 50-70 inches and wing span of 8-9 1/2 feet. Its normal weight is between 10 and 17 pounds. One specimen was reported to weigh 30 pounds.

An American white pelican becomes air borne with difficulty. It moves a long way on the water surface with feet

moving like mad and wings fluttering until building enough air speed to become airborne. Once in the air, however, it is a spectacular flier, soaring as well as any bird. Flocks of the birds characteristically follow a leader in either a line of birds or a V formation. The below photographs illustrates the black flight feathers and the tucked-head position of flying birds.

The principle food of pelicans is fish, usually of little commercial value. American white pelicans forage on water surfaces, often at night, sometimes alone, and sometimes with others that cooperate in driving fish into shallower water. In contrast, brown pelicans soar above ocean waters at altitudes of 50 feet and more, suddenly plunging with straight-out necks into the water.

American white pelicans nest in colonies mainly near inland lakes in western United States and Canada. An estimate of populations is 20,000 pairs in the US and 50,000 in Canada. In early fall the birds migrate to the coast of California and Mexico as well as the Gulf of Mexico coast of Texas through Florida. In addition, along the Texas coast, some birds are year-around residents.

Some birds migrate southeast into Ohio, where I have seen them on a few occasions during fall visits to Ottawa Wildlife and Metzger Marsh areas.

Migrating birds arrive at nesting areas during March, April, and May. The largest colony forms at Chase Lake National Wildlife Refuge in North Dakota. The knob on the bill may advertise readiness for breeding. As soon as the last egg is laid a bird begins to lose their knobs, as well as begin a partial molt from which black head feathers emerge.

Usually a small island in a lake is chosen as a nest site. It can be on level ground, a slight depression, or on mounds of dirt and debris. The nests are usually 24-36 inches in diameter and 15-20 inches high.

Usually two dull-white eggs are laid. Incubation begins immediately, and both sexes incubate with their feet (They have no brooding patch.). The young hatch asynchronously with the second egg hatching two or more days after the first. Only if an abundant food supply is available will the second nestling survive. The nestlings are altricial—born naked and completely dependent on parents. Both parents feed the young by



opening their beaks wide so that the young can retrieve partly digested food from the adult's crop. This process appears almost as if the adult is swallowing the young. For the first several days the parents brood their young, particularly at night, until the nestlings develop insulating feathers. The young leave the nest after 17-25 days to form groups or pods with other young birds. For a while, the adults continue feeding. At 9-10 weeks the young begin to fly after which southern migrations begin. American white pelicans are seasonally monogamous.

White pelicans suffered less than brown pelicans from chlorinated hydrocarbons such as DDT. Population numbers are stable. However American white pelicans are sometimes mistaken for snow geese, with their similar black wings. Fishermen and fish farmers also shoot the birds because they mistakenly believe that the

birds catch inordinate numbers of valuable fish.

**References:** *Sibley Guide to Birds* and *Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior* by David Allen Sibley, *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman, *Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn, *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America* by Jonathan Alderfer. *Smithsonian Birds of North America* by Fred J. Alsop, *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres

## Rite of Spring

By **Gary E. Hawke**

The farm is long gone now. All that remains is brick, mortar, and asphalt. My mind wanders and I envision walking down the cow path. I hear echoes of my past: the clear, mellow “See You” of the meadowlark calling from the fence post. I see a flash of red along the cattails and hear the raucous utterances of the male blackbirds playing out their aggressive territorial imperatives. I see the bobbing and weaving of the bobolink among the pasture grasses. I see myself on the tractor turning over fresh earth, furrow upon furrow, I again experience the sweet smell of spring. Suddenly a mother killdeer is in trouble with what appears to be a broken wing. Her orchestrated act works, and I swerve from her nest. I’ve created a temporary island of protection. Later I walk the field with my father. He silently discovers the sanctuaries that I created. I still remember his smile.

As I continue to turn over the precious earth, I see a flash of flint. I stop to pick up a relic of the ancient past. I realize that there were others that passed this way. I reflect briefly about what my ancestors might have felt when they migrated from points east and established themselves in the great frontier called Western Reserve. What were their expectations, dreams, and fears? How would they survive? I try to imagine the great virgin stands of forests that stood between mountains and plains. Would this daunting vision have given pause to their ambitions?

Many years have passed since this dreaming. Recently I discovered parks called Caley, Carlisle, Black River, Indian Hollow, French Creek, Sandy Ridge, and Vermilion. I heard the echoing of my avian friends from the past, and it reestablished my interrelatedness with nature. I observed the intricate dances of nature and the pleasant sounds of spring. My spirit soared!

I wanted to share my experiences with my children. I dragged them away for a short time from the mighty “Wii”. I made them stop to watch and listen. We observed that killdeers have a lot of broken wings. I considered it to be a rite of passage for my children. I’m afraid it was but a short respite from the frenetic pace of text messaging and Facebook.

How do I explain the eternal interconnectedness that we share with our past, each other, and Mother Earth? Will the children hear and remember? Will places to stop and listen remain? Will the children heed this primordial call?

## Pelicans. They never learn!

By **Peg Spencer**

It was 1938, after the worst of the depression, but before WWII. Any late afternoon the tuna fleet would be pulling into their anchorage on San Diego harbor near the canneries. As the small boats moved leisurely across the water the crews did some preliminary cleaning of the fish, tossing the waste (referred to as “chum”) overboard. The opportunistic brown pelicans followed attentively, happy to have a free meal.

Apparently they lost sight of their aerodynamics, however. Their clumsily shaped bodies required a long runway in order to take off. When their bodies were overloaded with chum there wasn’t an area of the bay long enough for them to take off successfully despite repeated tries. They were stranded among the



tuna fleet until the normal processes of digestion lightened their load adequately to effect rescue.

It really was pathetic, but it never failed to delight watching children. No doubt modern methods and regulations have changed the scene, perhaps for the better. Hopefully the children have found something else to make them laugh.

