

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

April 2011



Kirtland's Warbler/Greg Pasek



Editors: Jack Smith and Harry Spencer

Photographer: John Koscinski

Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

Program

Tuesday, April 5, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Musical Ear Training Technique as a Tool for Bird Song Identification

Lisa Rainsong

Professor of Music Theory, Cleveland Institute of Music

Lisa Rainsong is a composer who writes for voices and instruments and is a soprano who performs as a soloist and as a choral musician. In addition to composition and performance, she is also a naturalist who especially enjoys teaching about the earth's first music: bird song, insect song, and the songs of amphibians and mammals. She completed her Naturalist Certificate at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and now teaches classes on bird song identification and leads educational hikes for the Holden Arboretum, the Geauga Park District, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes, and the Twinsburg Parks. She has been awarded a grant by the Geauga Park District to survey two of their newest preserves for crickets and katydids--survey work that includes a great deal of insect song identification. For more on her musical and nature interests see <http://lisarainsong.com/index.html>.

Bring a friend to a meeting!

By **Bernie Pluchinsky**

Share with others our splendid programs and activities featuring not only birds but conservation and the ecosystem. Join in spreading the news.



Field Trip

Charlemont Reservation, Saturday, April 16, 8 a.m.

Meet at parking lot, New London Eastern Road

Wilson snipe and other species

Special Field Trip

Indian Hollow Reservation

Saturday, April 2, 9 a.m.

Meet at the big pavilion by the playground

Paul Justy, historian of the abandoned Indian Hollow quarries, will guide us through the quarry site. If the weather is very bad, the hike will be postponed until Saturday, April 9.

A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

Bald Eagles: You gotta love them! When I saw my first bald eagles in Pennsylvania, I was a young birder, and every bird I saw was special. Much later I realized that these birds were in serious trouble and seeing one was not just special, but extra special!

Shortly after starting my teaching career, I took a trip to Alaska with the National Wildlife Federation. As we drove along the coast, the leader told us to look at the beach for a bald eagle. Uh huh! Did I



see it? No, but I did see a stick stuck in the sand with some white paint on the tip end! I didn't know that bald eagles sat on the ground, much less on a beach! All the eagles that I had seen previously perched high in a tree or were in flight.

For many years bald eagles were on the endangered species list for Ohio, and during that period I began to notice them. Whenever I drove along Lake Erie and saw a parked van with Ohio Division of Wildlife printed on the door, I stopped nearby and tried to spot an eagle nest. In those days bald eagle nests were monitored all over the state. State naturalists were trying to discover why some nesting birds succeeded and some failed. During the breeding season, the public was cautioned to stay far enough from the nests to prevent disturbing the birds.

As time passed, I began to see more and more bald eagles. Their nests are huge, and I thrill to watch an adult return with fish for the young birds.

Now there are enough bald eagles in Ohio to be classified as threatened instead of endangered. Nevertheless, it is still a good idea to give nesting eagles privacy. I have seen eagles change nesting sites almost every year. I presume this frequent change results from the constant commotion at nearby housing developments. Then again, some eagles nest at the edge of an active artillery range without seeming to mind all the noise!

I will never forget my visit to Pickerel Creek several years ago. On a cool, misty autumn morning, I stopped the car on Route 6 and walked along the dike to view the area. Wow! Looking like utility poles, many dead trees stood in the distant mist. On each one sat a bald eagle! What a panorama – I counted over twenty birds. Perhaps they were meditating where to go next as the days grew colder and shorter.

I dream that some day I will return to Alaska and visit the Chilkat River Valley where fifty birds can be seen in one big tree during a snow storm. Several years ago, a photo of that scene graced a magazine cover.

If I lived in the 1700s, I would have agreed with Benjamin Franklin that the national bird should be the wild turkey. It was a special bird at the time, but today, I would vote for the **bald eagle!**



Bald Eagle/John Koscinski

Candidates for Board Wanted

The Nominating Committee seeks nominations for new members to the Board for three-year terms beginning in June. Our Bylaws limit consecutive terms to two. Election for new Board members takes place in May. Any member of BRAS is eligible. We welcome nominations of those new to our group as well as those who have been part of it for many years. The main duty of Board members is to guide Chapter policy by attending Board meetings held on the last Tuesday of odd-numbered months. The evening meetings last about two hours.

Please send your nominations (can be self-nomination) to one of the following members of the Nominating Committee, or call if you have questions:

Harriet Alger: algerha@roadrunner.com; 440-246-2853.
 Tammy Martin: Tammy.Martin@oberlin.edu; 440-308-5857.
 Joe Strong: sjstrong@oh.rr.com; 440-365-6401.

Passerine Migration in the Lake Erie Marshes

Mark Shieldcastle's talk March 1, 2011, Carlisle Visitor Center

By **Cathy Priebe**

Despite the snow, rain, flooding and cold temps, spring is just around the corner according to Mark Shieldcastle, whose encouraging talk on passerine migration gave hope to an appreciative audience of fifty BRAS members and guests.

Shieldcastle, Research Director of the Black Swamp Observatory, educated avid listeners on bird banding, migratory hot spots, land conservation, and the hazards of wind turbines, especially in the Lake Erie marshes, a crucial migratory stopover.

The importance of bird banding was discussed in detail, stressing how data collected from banded birds directly impact a species health and survival. Migration, according to Shieldcastle, is a dangerous journey, with an 80% mortality rate each year. He also added that the possible addition of wind turbines anywhere near the Lake Erie marsh region could have a detrimental effect on migrating birds. Shieldcastle encouraged the audience to educate themselves and others on the dangerous consequences of this additional hazard migrating birds may be forced to face.

His lecture also included approximate timelines and dates for birders to anticipate the arrival of migrating birds. The first wave of migrants (song birds) are expected around April 25 and continue in two more waves about a week apart depending on the weather. The most anticipated fallout (second wave) is usually near Mother's Day and this year is the week of May 5 through the 15th and coincides with the Biggest Week In American Birding event. The third wave is around Memorial Day and generally winds down in the first part of June.

BRAS members and guests are invited to this year's field trip to Magee Marsh on May 7 at 9 a.m. Log onto www.blackriveraudubon.org for more information. The Lake Erie marsh region is the epitome of warbler migration and the only

WARBLERS ARE COMING!

The chart shows identifications of spring warblers in 2010 recorded on Black River Audubon's eBird site. Our sites are local to Lorain County and vicinity and do not include Magee Marsh.

	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN
BLUE-WINGED WARBLER			X	X
TENNESEE WARBLER			X	
NASHVILLE WARBLER		X	X	
NORTHERN PARULA		X	X	
YELLOW WARBLER		X	X	X
CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER			X	X
MAGNOLIA WARBLER			X	
BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER			X	X
YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER	X	X	X	
BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER		X	X	
BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER			X	
YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER		X	X	
PINE WARBLER		X		
PRAIRIE WARBLER		X		
PALM WARBLER		X	X	
BLACKPOLL WARBLER			X	
CERULEAN WARBLER			X	X
BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER		X	X	
AMERICAN REDSTART			X	X
PROTHONOTARY WARBLER			X	X
OVENBIRD			X	X
NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH		X	X	
LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH		X	X	
KENTUCKY WARBLER			X	
COMMON YELLOWTHROAT		X	X	X
HOODED WARBLER		X	X	X
WILSON'S WARBLER			X	
CANADA WARBLER			X	
YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT			X	X

place nearby where you can almost guarantee seeing at best 37 of the 38 eastern wood warblers and plenty of other favorite and sought-after species!!!

For more information on bird banding, wind turbines, migration and other events at the Black Swamp Bird Observatory, log onto www.bsbobird.org or call 1-419-898-4070.

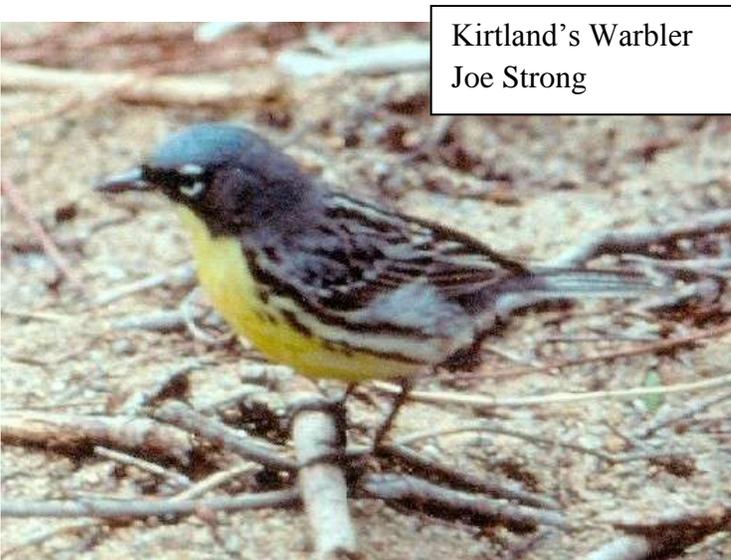
Kirtland's Warbler

Dendroica kirtlandii

By **Jack Smith**

Forty years ago this beautiful bird, gracing the first page, almost faced extinction. Today it is a rare May-privilege for a birder to observe a Kirtland's warbler as the birds pass through Ohio migrating northward to their breeding grounds in Lower Michigan.

In May 1997 Joe Strong and I were fortunate to encounter a Kirtland's warbler while on a Black-River-Audubon field-trip to Magee Marsh. By word-of-mouth we learned that a bird was spotted on the ground near the beach. With cameras in tow, Joe and I ran to the described area. The bird was walking along the ground



feeding on whatever it could find and appeared oblivious of us. We both had cameras, but we decided quickly that one of us should follow the bird. I felt Joe might be a little more agile and steadier than I, so I gave Joe my camera with the correct 300-mm lens. I became a spectator only. The bird walked towards us and to our disbelief it hopped on top of Joe's boot and kept on walking while searching for food. May I ask: How many people have had a Kirtland's warbler walk over their foot?

The warbler's life history helps to understand its problems. This bird spends eight months of the year in scrub habitat of the Bahamas, Turks and Caicos

Islands, and Hispaniola. In mid-spring the birds start their northern migration, flying north at night, as most small passerines do. Their destination is the small area of jack pine barrens in Lower Michigan, just a few miles east of Grayling Michigan.

The areas the birds select for their breeding grounds are not just random jack pine groves. The trees generally must be between 4 and 20 years old, 2 to 4 meters high, with most of the lower limbs intact. The trees must occupy an area of 160 or more acres. In the lower parts of this young growth, the birds find food for themselves and their nestlings. The food is mostly insects in all stages of development, captured in flight or on the ground. Adults also feed blueberries to both themselves and their young.

The warbler is loosely colonial with each nesting-pair claiming two or three acres as their territory. For a nesting site, a female selects a region near a pine tree among grasses, ferns, sedges, and other vegetation. The soil, called Grayling sands, is ideal for a nesting site because of its excellent water-drainage. From grass, sedge, pine needles, and oak leaves, the female builds its nest and lines it with rootlets, hair, moss, and fibers. She lays 3 to 6 buff or pinkish-white eggs spotted with brown. The male brings food during both the egg-laying and incubation periods.

She incubates the eggs for 13 to 15 days. Both parents feed the young. After nine days the young leave the nest, but remain in its vicinity. The parents continue feeding the young for another six weeks. One brood

(rarely two) is raised per year.

Between August and October, parents and young fly to their wintering grounds where they feed on wild sage, black torch, and snowberry.

In mid-spring 1990 Joe Strong and I took a vacation starting at Magee Marsh, progressing through Michigan to the Upper Peninsula. Included was Mio, Michigan, at the junction of M-72 and M-33 situated on the Au Sable River. This is the heart of Kirtland's-warbler country, east of Grayling, Michigan. There we joined a tour excursion with a Michigan ranger as guide. He explained how the jack pine forest was managed to maximize the numbers of 2 to 4-m young jack pine. Prescribed burnings and cutting of old trees was followed by seeding on rotating portions of 150,000 acres set aside for the warblers. As we hiked trails we saw a cage to trap cowbirds. Our guide explained that they keep a few cowbirds in the baited cage to attract other cowbirds. Kirtland's warblers are especially susceptible to cowbird parasitism. Apparently the warblers have not evolved ways of foiling the cowbirds as have yellow warblers.

Yellow warblers have developed a unique strategy. When a warbler discovers a foreign egg in its nest, the warbler simply builds a new nest over the top of the old. Once I discovered a yellow-warbler nest with three layers.

Cowbirds can comprise 70% of fledglings. By removing as many cowbirds as possible, Michigan naturalists have reduced the average number of cowbirds to 7% of fledged Kirtland's warblers. On average, 4,000 cowbirds are removed each year.

Have the extensive efforts have met with success? The warbler population has risen from less than 500 Kirtland's warblers to well over 5000 in 2007, and the answer is yes. Also the species has expanded minimally into Michigan's Upper Peninsula, to an area in Wisconsin, and into Ontario. But continuous management and expense will be needed in the future. It is questionable that the species will ever be on its own. Provision of the resources required for independent survival will require continuous effort to educate the public to the value of saving the species. Monitoring on both the breeding grounds and the wintering habitat will remain a necessity. Management of the many thousands of acres of the breeding grounds is vital! An ongoing effort to involve the public is absolutely essential because the public will be supplying necessary volunteers and financial resources through taxes and donations.

I hope that future generations will be able to watch and hear the great songs that Joe and I enjoyed in 1990 as a male sang from his perch on top of a small jack pine.

References: *Life of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *American Warblers* by Douglass H. Morse; Internet; *Department of Natural Resources and Environment of the State of Michigan*; *Kirtland's Warbler* from Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

Black River Audubon Society's Bluebird Conservation Program 2010

By **Jack Smith**

The objective of this program is to maintain and increase the population of Eastern bluebirds in the areas served by the Chapter, i.e. most of the watersheds of Black River and Beaver Creek, and lesser portions of those of Rocky and Vermilion Rivers.

More than twenty monitors covered 18 separate bluebird trails recorded 241 fledged bluebirds during the 2010 breeding season. Additionally 426 American tree swallows, 19 black-capped chickadees, and 74 house wrens were fledged. Unfortunately, many of these newly fledged birds will not survive into the next breeding season. Inexperienced birds sometimes have a mortality rate of 50% or more during the first year. Those that

survive should appreciably increase the population of bluebirds and others in our area.

I thank especially all the monitors who participated.

Anyone desiring to participate in this bird-conservation project should call me at 440-322-0820.



Cedar Waxwing/Diane Devereaux

BLUEBIRD CONSERVATION PROGRAM 2010

SITE	BOXES	FLEDGED BIRDS				BLOW FLY
		EABL	ATSW	BCCH	HOWR	INFESTATION
KO	32	4	53	7	4	1
TL	1	8				
EQ	20	17	22			
MH	28	17	83			2
SR	28	10	65		4	1
BO	10	10	10		6	9
ML, DP	29	28	43		5	
HM	23	20	17			
WR	30	52	54			
OWC	22	27	10	12	27	
FSP	20	24	42			
CR	10					
FH	6	6				
CS	13		7			
IH	16	5	13		5	
LCCC	12	4				
ONP	6	0				
DD	14	9	7		23	
TOTAL	320	241	426	19	74	

SYMBOLS

EABL: EASTERN BLUEBIRD; ATSP: AMERICAN TREE SPARROW
 BCCH: BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE; HOWR: HOUSE WREN

KO: KENDAL AT OBERLIN; TL: TERRA LANE, AMHERST
 EQ: EQUESTRIAN CENTER, CARLISLE RESERVATION
 MH: MILL HOLLOW; SR: SANDY RIDGE; BO: BURR OAK
 ML, DP: MEADOW LOOP AND DUCK POND, CARLISLE RES.
 HM: HIGH MEADOWS; WR: WELLINGTON RESERVATION
 OWC: OBERLIN WOODLAWN CEMETARY; FSP: FINDLEY STATE PARK
 CR: CALEY RESERVATION; FH: FOREST HILLS
 CS: COLUMBIA STATION; IH: INDIAN HOLLOW
 LCCC: LORAIN CO. COM. COL.; ONP: OLSEN NATURE PRESERVE
 DD: DAY'S DAM