

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

DECEMBER 2013



Male northern cardinal photo by Dane Adams

Female northern cardinal photo by Dane Adams



Editors: Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe
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Program

Courtney Brennan

Graduate student, Cleveland State University,

Geographic variation in the song of the Veery in the Appalachian Mountains

Tuesday, December 3, 2013, 7 p.m.

Sandy Ridge Reservation

(Note location!)

A few years ago, Courtney attended a Black River Audubon Field Trip at Sandy Ridge and volunteered to participate in the not-yet-established Purple Martin Project. She soon became a Board member. Her talk will cover her Master's Thesis project, investigating the song structure of the veery, as well as investigating geographic variation in the veery song across the Appalachian Mountains.



Courtney wearing bugsuit

Songs of Veeries

By Courtney Brennan

The veery is a common, widely distributed, yet poorly understood Neotropical migrant thrush. The available literature disagrees about the basic structure of its enchanting song, and there is little information concerning song variation.

My fieldwork during the summer of 2012 was done in the southern portion of the veery breeding range, the higher elevations of the Appalachian Mountains in NC, WV, PA, and VT. To provide an updated description of veery song structure and delivery behavior, I analyzed spectrogram song-images of 50+ individual veeries. I measured various frequency and temporal features of the typical three-part veery song to investigate variations both within each state and among the states.



Understanding both the basic structure of a bird's song and its delivery behavior is the foundation for understanding behavioral and motivational contexts of song communication. Song variation among bird populations is recognized as a potential mechanism of pre-mating isolation and may be a step towards speciation. Geographic song variation may give insight into the development and learning associated with song production.

VEERY photo by Laura Ericson

Elyria Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 21, 2013

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 28, 2013

For more information call 440-225-7601

October Field Trip Report

By **Tammy Martin**

Twelve hearty souls joined Grant Thompson for an early morning hike around his family's 65-acre property, an abandoned sandstone quarry, on Oberlin Road in Amherst. As a gentle rain fell, Grant explained and pointed out the quarry history from hand- to steam-chiseling. Removal of the sandstone left deep, spring-fed pools for natural (birds, salamanders, fish) and human (swimming, diving) use. Overall, the natural features were great. Few birds were tallied (about 15 species) due to the rain, but we glimpsed a red fox and several white-tailed deer. In addition, the vegetation (trees, ferns, flowers) got high marks.



The site warrants a return visit, particularly on a nicer day!

A Birder's Diary: NORTHERN FLICKER

By **Carol Leininger**

I love to watch the activity of all kinds of woodpeckers, but my favorite is the northern flicker. Most woodpecker species are black and white with a bit of red on their heads and spend most of the time climbing slowly up tree trunks searching for foods such as insects, grubs, etc. Northern flickers are different. They are not black and white and they mostly feed on the ground.



Northern flickers were once thought to be two species, yellow-shafted flickers in the east and red-shafted in the west. Since these two former-species interbreed, they are now defined as one species, the northern flicker.

The yellow-shafted birds in our area are beautiful with brown back and wings with black bars, a black crescent across the upper breast, black spots on the sides of the breast and belly, a white rump, and a red crescent on the nape. A male can be distinguished from a female by his black malar stripe, better known as a mustache.

Flickers can be recognized by their loud drumming and their call, wicka, wicka, wicka. They spend most of their time on the ground using their curved bill to probe for ants. Because their bill is not as strong as that of other woodpeckers, flickers tend to nest in cavities of soft or rotten wood.

While attending a woodpecker symposium, I met Dr. Jerome Jackson, an expert on woodpeckers and author of numerous articles about the species, who told a story about how flickers were responsible for the cancellation



NORTHERN FLICKER photo by John Koscinski

of a shuttle flight at the Kennedy Space Center many years ago. NASA officials consulted him after flickers had excavated hundreds of holes in the insulation covering the shuttle's fuel tank causing damage and delays at an estimated cost of more than a million dollars

Starlings, abundant in the area, claimed many nesting sites in nearby palm trees, thus preventing flickers from nesting in the same trees and encouraging the flickers to try the foam, which had the consistency and color of rotten wood seemingly suitable for nest sites. Because the foam was not thick enough for nest cavities, the flickers kept trying different areas.

NASA considered several tricks to scare away the birds, but none were completely successful. For example, taller grass surrounding the launch site would discourage flicker-feeding in the area, but introduce a fire hazard.

Today flickers are declining in significant numbers. As ground feeders, the birds are exposed to pesticides used in agriculture and on golf courses and lawns. Also their low flight makes them vulnerable to collision with highway traffic. The species faces both starling competition and loss of old trees.

Northern Cardinal

Cardinalis, cardinalis

By Cathy Priebe

The northern cardinal, often called “the red bird” due to its flashy red plumage, is the most popular and recognizable bird in almost everyone’s backyard. Six states, including Ohio, claim the cardinal as their state bird. Its handsome face is also a favorite logo for many sports teams.

Slightly smaller than the American robin, the male cardinal is a vibrant red with a black border on the face, conspicuous crest, and a big reddish conical bill. The female is a buffy brown tinged with red.



This showy bird can be found in almost all of the eastern United States in suburban backyards, small woodlands, city parks and, of course, bird feeders.

Cardinals generally nest in thickets, dense shrubs, vine tangles and in the lower branches of small coniferous trees. The nest, built by the female, is an open cup of bark, twigs, leaves and other plant materials, lined with hair and fine grass. The female incubates 3 to 4 brown spotted whitish green eggs for about 2 weeks.

“What cheer! What cheer! Purdy, purdy, purdy. What cheer!” is just one of the phonetic descriptions of the cardinal’s vocal repertoire. Males sing from exposed perches during mating season, but both sexes sing all year.

Sunflower seeds are the cardinal’s favorite backyard feeder food. Mated pairs often feed each other. They also glean seeds, berries and insects from low shrubs or on the ground. Cardinals are generally the first birds you see at your feeder at dawn and the last at dusk.

My favorite winter backyard scene is a snow-covered tree decorated with a dozen or more cardinals glistening in the sunlight. Happy Holidays!

References: *Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America* edited by Jonathan Alderfer.

December birds in Angie Adkins’ yard

- Cooper’s hawk, sharp-shinned hawk, red-shouldered hawk, red-tailed hawk, mourning dove, barred owl, hairy woodpecker, downy woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, pileated woodpecker,
- blue jay, American crow, tufted titmouse, black-capped chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, white-breasted nuthatch, Carolina wren, American robin, European starling,
- northern cardinal, dark-eyed junco, fox sparrow, brown-headed cowbird, house sparrow, pine siskin, American goldfinch, house finch.