

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

DECEMBER 2016



SPOTTED REDSHANK photo by Barbara Baudot

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe
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Program
Tuesday, December 6 at 7 p.m.
Sandy Ridge Reservation
Tim Fairweather
Birding Game Night at the Ridge



Birding is supposed to be FUN! This program is designed for birders of all experience levels. We'll have interactive games with lots of audience participation. And like any good Hollywood game show, everyone receives a parting gifts!!!

Tim Fairweather describes himself as an all-around naturalist until he started birding as Senior Naturalist and Park Manager at Sandy Ridge in 1999. He enjoys sharing birding and nature knowledge at both the Wednesday-Morning-Birding and Birding-by-Tram programs. His favorite summer programs are the summer camps: Birding Camps, Wetlands Camps, and Fishing Camps are the latest versions. He is an inveterate bird-list keeper:

Sandy Ridge Reservation, yard-at-home, driving-down-the-highway, and my-office-window. The latter is his personal favorite and currently lists 85 species. His family includes wife, Jessica, daughter, Maddie, and husky, Skittles.

Field Trips
Christmas Bird Counts

Saturday, December 17, 2016,
Elyria Christmas Bird Count
Marty Ackermann to lead

Friday, December 30, 2016
Wellington Christmas Bird Count
Diane Devereaux to lead

2016 Christmas Bird Counts

The longest running citizen science project will take place again this December as local birders take part in the BRAS-organized Christmas Bird Counts.

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC), which began in 1900 on Christmas day, was originally intended to draw people away from traditional bird shootings. It has been continued around the country ever since and plays an important part in tracking bird populations.

This year's **Elyria-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 17, 2015** and will be organized by Marty Ackermann. He may be reached at 440-774-3220 if you wish to take part.

The **Wellington-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 30, 2016**. The leader is Diane Devereaux whose number is 440-458-2440.

Please call the leader of the count you wish to take part in. You do not have to be an experienced birder to take part in the event. **JJ**

Augusta-Anne Olsen State Nature Preserve

October 2016 Field Trip

By Marty Ackermann



On a beautiful early fall day nine birders gathered at Augusta-Anne Olsen State Nature Preserve in Wakeman for an outing led by Tammy Martin! As we walked in the cool air and bright sunlight from the parking area to the woodland trails, there was good bird activity in the adjacent high grasses and scrub bushes although the backlighting and distance made identification challenging. Most of the walk was on forest trails that took us down to the river. The recent dry weather made the trails easily negotiable and left the river very low.

Overall, bird activity was modest with 26 species identified: turkey vulture, belted kingfisher, red-bellied, downy, hairy, northern flicker, and pileated woodpeckers, blue jay, American crow, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, golden-crowned and ruby-crowned kinglets, eastern bluebird, hermit thrush, American robin, yellow-rumped warbler, eastern towhee, field, song and white-throated sparrows, northern cardinal, red-winged blackbird, American goldfinch, and house sparrow.

Along our walk, Tammy also took time to point out some non-avian items of interest including giant puffball, beech drops (under beech trees), wild ginger, partridge berry, and pawpaw trees. Now if this writer can recall how to identify them on a future outing.

Hog Island Birding Camp Scholarships Available Again

For the past three decades BRAS has offered educators, naturalists and community leaders the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills at Hog Island to educate our community about bird conservation, wildlife in general, and the environment.

This year we offer two scholarships to adults. Each scholarship covers tuition, room and board, and travel expenses. Our goal is that the recipients will follow the examples of those who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors of conservation and education in our community.

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine learning from accomplished naturalists, birders and educators.

Hog Island campers love its natural surroundings and rustic 19th-century buildings. Delicious meals are served in a communal dining room.

The following camps have been particularly valuable to past participants: *Joy of Birding* (June 4-9), *Field Ornithology* (June 18-23), and *Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week* (July 16-21). For details and registration go to hogisland.audubon.org. Individuals interested in applying for the BRAS scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at jjjablon@aol.com or 440-365-6465. **JJ**

BLUE JAY *Cyanocitta cristata*

By Cathy Priebe

The blue jay is one of Ohio's most recognizable birds due to its stunning blue and white feathers and it's bold and sometimes aggressive behavior at feeders. I have not always paid very close attention to blue jays, often dismissing them as common backyard birds that could be noisy and messy, throwing seed every which way when eating. Until one summer afternoon ...

I was surreptitiously observing my house wrens in a nest box outside my back door. Mom and dad wren were vigorously feeding the babies and I smiled, happy to experience nature up close and personal. And then it happened. A blue jay suddenly descended at the nest box opening, reached in and plucked out a nestling that screamed as the jay flew away with dinner for its own babies. Needless to say, I was stunned and upset having





witnessed such a terrible tragedy. I know, circle of life and all of that, still it was a wake-up call for me. I did not know this aspect of the blue jay's behavior. Since that episode, my wren boxes are fitted with extra protection after the young hatch. It has not happened again.

Soon after, I started to pay more attention to the comings and goings of my backyard blue jays. They are fascinating birds, often mimicking other birds, such as our local red-shouldered hawks. One loud hawk call usually clears the way for them at the feeder. They also like to gang up on our resident barred owl family. They help me keep tabs on where my owls are roosting, even though they thoroughly annoy the owl(s) and I generally watch them fly away with a half dozen jays in tow.

The male and female blue jay look alike, with white breast, blue crest, blue upper parts, black necklace and bill. Blue and white feathers with black flecking add to the effect. Ohio jays live and nest almost anywhere but they prefer deciduous woodlands with mature growth trees like oaks that provide nuts and acorns for food. They also eat berries, insects and birdseed along with eggs, baby birds and carrion. They nest in the crotch of

a tree or large shrub, laying 4 to 5 eggs. During the breeding season they are very secretive and quiet. So, if you are used to hearing your jays yelling every day and suddenly you don't, now you know why!!

Some blue jays will migrate and it is a spectacle to see along Lake Erie in mid to late May. Others will migrate based on food availability. If their primary seed source fails, they will migrate in search of better seed crops. Jays will often gather several thousand seeds in the fall and store them away. Often, many of these seeds are left forgotten, hence all of the baby oak trees in my yard each spring!

There is also speculation that the jay's caching behavior of hiding various nuts and seeds in soil, may have been instrumental in helping the oaks and other trees expand northward following the last of the glaciers. So, blue jays are also important ecologically!!

I have learned my lesson and I do not take the blue jay or any backyard bird for granted. They all have a place in the circle of life and I am glad that I took the time to investigate the lifestyle of the blue jay.

References: *Birds of Ohio*, by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion*, by Pete Dunne; **Personal Observations**, the Priebe Nature Preserve.

A Birder's Diary: Yesterday's Birders

By Carol Leininger

I have been a birdwatcher for most of my life and there are many birders whom I admire even though they are long gone. Here are a few of them. No doubt you could add others.

Alexander Wilson – Wilson is considered the father of American ornithology. In the 1800's he traveled on foot, on horseback and by boat observing and recording the natural history of birds. He founded the Wilson Ornithological Society, which published The Wilson Bulletin containing many scientific articles on birds. Wilson himself was the author and illustrator of a seven-volume work, American Ornithology. He was admired by many birders, which explains why so many birds are named after him, e.g., the Wilson's storm petrel, phalarope, snipe, plover, and warbler.



John James Audubon – As settlers were exploring the North American continent Audubon was doing his own exploring – finding new birds everywhere, killing them, mounting them with the help of wires, and then painting them. His portfolio of really large paintings is truly a work of art.

Frank Chapman – He walked about the streets of New York City observing and recording all the feathers in women's hats – over thirty-five different species were popular, including cardinals, blue jays, owls, grebes, flickers, swallows, waxwings, terns, gulls, egrets, herons and so on. His research helped to stop the plume hunters with the passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty in 1918.

Margaret Nice – She proved that you don't need to be a scientist to make a contribution to ornithology. Her detailed study of the song sparrow was the first complete natural history of the bird and is considered a classic today.

Arthur Allen – while a professor of ornithology at Cornell University he founded The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology in 1915. He was the first to study ecosystems and bird populations long before ecology became a popular field of study in biology.

Glen Woolfenden – I actually met Glen in Archibold, Florida where he studied the Florida scrub jay community. He knew the names of each member of this small community and discovered some very interesting facts about their natural history, which led to further protection of this challenging species.

Ted Panker – Ted traveled all over Central and South America recording bird songs for The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. He had a fantastic ear for recognition of every species he heard. He was killed in a plane crash in South America doing what he loved.

Perry Johnson, Norma Kraps and Jack Smith These longtime members of Black River Audubon Society imparted so much knowledge and interest in birds to me, and many others, that they will be hard to forget.

SPOTTED REDSHANK

Tringa erythropus

By Barbara Baudot



The cover picture of the spotted redshank was taken in the Parc Ornithologique du Pont de Gau, a vast reserve of ponds, swamps, and marshlands in the Camargue- the largest wetland in France. Situated on a crossroad of Africa, Europe and the Mediterranean, the Camargue is the major stopover for thousands of migrating birds and about two thirds of all species found in Europe. UNESCO classified the Camargue as a Biosphere Reserve in 1977.

Scanning these extensive wetlands with my camera's 600 mm eye in September 2016, I was drawn to an elegant shore bird with prominent orange-red legs and feet. Later literature consultation indicated that it was a spotted redshank, *Tringa erythropus* (*Erythropus* is ancient Greek for "red foot.").

A large wader, the spotted redshank measures 11–12" long, has a wingspan of 24–26," and weighs 4.3 to 7.2 oz. Its familiar call is a creaking whistle *teu-it*; its familiar alarm cry is *kyip-kyip-kyip*. Spotted redshanks are diurnal and nocturnal feeders that devour aquatic insects, larvae, terrestrial insects, small crustaceans, mollusks,

small fish and amphibians. The birds thrive in many wetland habitats, whether salt-water marshes, brackish lagoons or muddy swamplands, even fresh water lakes and ponds.

Male and female plumages are similar. The cover photo illustrates the winter plumage, much different from the breeding plumage illustrated on this page. In this breeding plumage, the birds have dark sooty black heads, sometimes slightly mottled, but black bellies, mantles, and wings. Distinctive white rings frame their eyes; and white spots edge their shoulder and lower wing feathers. Their legs are usually dark gray. In their winter homes adult birds typically exhibit the nonbreeding dress exhibited by the cover bird.

Juveniles are grey-brown, finely speckled white above, and have pale thinly barred under parts.

A striking bird, indeed, as its French name appropriately suggests—*Chevalier Arlequin* (One translation: *Sir Harlequin*)

Spotted redshank (breeding plumage) in Audubon.org

The spotted redshank breeds from Lapland in the west to Far Eastern Siberia. It lays four eggs in shallow ground scrapes in bogs of the marshy tundra and open taiga above the Arctic Circle. Nests are often near suitable lookout perches. The species breeds in dispersed pairs, often seen singly, sometimes in parties of 20 pairs— more or less, and exceptionally in flocks of over one hundred.

Spotted redshanks are long distant migrants— breeding in the arctic zones of Scandinavia and Eurasia, and flying south to the Mediterranean, the southern British Isles, France, and even to sub Saharan Africa, and South East Asia for the winter, where they remain from October to April,. They return to their arctic breeding grounds between late-April and mid-May. The spotted redshank occasionally alights in North America. Reports of sightings indicate that it has made several appearances in the US including Huron, Ohio. Most sightings have been on the Atlantic Coast.

Given its huge range, adaptability, and large population, it is of Least Concern on the IUCN List of Endangered Species, despite serious losses in habitat in several wintering grounds. The spotted redshank is nevertheless protected by Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Water birds, in effect since 1999.

References: **Spotted redshank** in birdlife.org; **Spotted redshank** in Wikipedia; **Scolopacidae family** in oiseaux-birds.com; Hume, Robert. *Birds*. Mlodinow, Steven “**Spotted Redshank and Common Greenshank in North America**”.



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