

# Wingtips



2017 Debbie Parker

Dec 2017

# **December Program**

Tuesday, December 5, 2017

Sandy Ridge Reservation Nature Center

**Tim Fairweather**

**“Wildlife of Sandy Ridge”**



**Tim Fairweather with his Happy Dog**

Tim Fairweather will provide a “birding potpourri,” Tuesday, December 5 at 7 pm at Sandy Ridge Reservation, 6195 Otten Road in North Ridgeville. (Note the change of location in December.) We will look at some of Tim’s favorite sightings and delve into birding games with lots of audience participation and suitable for all ages and birding experience.

Tim has been the senior naturalist at Sandy Ridge since it opened in 1999. His Wednesday morning birding walks in the fall and spring continue to grow in popularity and turnout. His 2018 “Big Sit” bird count during migration season next spring will be his twelfth in a row. Be sure to attend and hear him relate how he was almost arrested while merely taking it easy and counting birds!!!

## December Field Trips 2017 Christmas Bird Counts

**Saturday, December 16**

**Elyria Bird Count**

Marty Ackermann to lead

**Saturday, December 30**

**Wellington Bird Count**

Diane Devereaux to lead

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

This year's **Elyria-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 16, 2017** 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, 2017**. The leader is Diane Devereaux whose number is 440-458-2440.

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

## October Field Trip Report Lake Erie Bluffs, Lake County Metro Parks

By **Tammy Martin**



Lovely fall weather greeted us in Lake County at Lake Erie Bluffs Metropark. Four brave souls made the drive to join biologist John Pogacnik, who introduced us to this fairly new 600+ acre park, offering woods, brushy 'old' meadows, and shoreline habitat.

First, we climbed the 50-foot observation 'bird' tower, on Clark Road, and scanned Lake Erie. Due to the balmy weather, the lake was extremely calm, so only gulls were visible. However, the views were stunning! Being above the low tree canopy allowed us a 360-degree view, looking miles over the lake surface. Before descending, a flock of cedar waxwings flew by. Nice!

Next, we followed John to the Lane Road shelter site and walked the nearby trail system. Bird activity remained low because of the nice weather, but we did tally 27 species, including 4 woodpeckers (thanks, Mr. pileated—a group favorite), and flushed a sharp-shinned

hawk. So glad John called the sharpie, as I tend to stumble on this species. Alas, guess I need more practice (wink, wink).

With the low bird numbers, John shared plenty of other natural history knowledge/issues: he identified many of the singing tree crickets (Forbes, snowy, narrow-winged, and handsome trig...John DOES know crickets!!); he pointed out a new, yet unnamed, maple species that somewhat resembles our common silver maple; he explained the problem with introduced earthworms and their effect on our declining understory (think Sandy Ridge); and, he showed us the local beech trees that have beech leaf disease, a localized (NE Ohio/NW Pennsylvania/Ontario) problem which he'd initially discovered several years ago in Lake County. Apparently, botanical researchers are still trying to determine the cause, as it's not insect or fungal based. Yikes! Guess we need to start inspecting the beech trees in Lorain County for this disease.

After exploring Lake Erie Bluffs, Bonnie and I made a quick stop at Headlands Beach State Park for additional, 'on-the-way-home' birding. We picked up a few more sparrows in the grassy beach habitat, scoped a couple of shorebirds along the beach, and then photographed the rare (for Ohio) white-winged dove in the parking lot. This dove, a southern U.S. species, was sighted earlier in the week by some intrepid Ohio birder. Good spotting!

## **“Outer Limits “Walks at Sandy Ridge**

The Wednesday morning hikes at Sandy Ridge will continue into December. The dates for the ones coming up are **November 22** and **December 6, 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.** According to senior naturalist Tim Fairweather, the hikes will go into areas normally off-limits to the public.

## **Applications for Hog Island Scholarships**

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 that cover tuition, room, board, and travel expenses. Our goal is that the recipients will follow the examples of those who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors for conservation and education in our communities.

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

Past scholarship winters have loved the camp's natural surroundings and rustic 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings. Delicious meals are served in a communal dining room.

Reservations have been made for two lucky BRAS Hog Island scholarship winners: one for *Field Ornithology* will be presented June 18 to 23<sup>rd</sup> and one for *Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week* will run from July 15 to 20<sup>th</sup>.

For more details and description of the camping experience, go to [hogisland.audubon.org](http://hogisland.audubon.org). Individuals interested in applying for the BRAS scholarships should contact Jim Jablonski at [jjjablon@aol.com](mailto:jjjablon@aol.com) or 440-365-6465. *JJ*

## A Birder's Diary: Gulls, Terns and Christmas Bird Counts

By Carol Leininger



Many beginning birders find identifying gulls and terns a real challenge. They are all big gray and white birds with a few black markings flying over large bodies of water. Some prefer fresh water, some salt water, and some like both.

Immatures can be even more difficult – brown streaked birds that take a few years in acquiring adult plumage.

Checking the colors of the bills and legs can help in identification if you can really distinguish those colors. Using maps in field guides can help for location at various seasons of the year. It takes an experienced birder to identify one unusual bird flying amongst a flock of one hundred.

A few helpful hints on identifying the differences between a gull and a tern: All terns have black heads, crowns or crests while only a few gulls have black heads; gulls fly looking forward while terns fly looking down at the water; and gulls have wedge-shaped tails while terns have forked tails.

Gulls can be seen on Lake Erie the entire year, unless of course the lake is completely frozen. Also a bad storm on the lake could

convince them to flock farther inland in a field or parking lot (they especially like to feed in dumpsters at McDonald's).

Terns are commonly seen during migration and the breeding season here in Lorain County. Frequently seen terns in our area include the common, Caspian, Forster's, least, and black. The most common gulls seen here are ring-billed, herring, Bonaparte's and black-black.

Black River Audubon Society participates in two Christmas bird counts (the Elyria count in northern Lorain County and the Wellington count in the southern half) in December every year. We carpool in small groups to assigned areas and count every bird seen. It's amazing how much birders can contribute to citizen science in this way. Counts all over North America help professional ornithologists know where birds are outside the breeding season. Maps in bird guides change over the years due to this information.

Lorain County has been known as the ring-billed gull capital of the world! Come out and help – drivers, record keepers, counters and identifiers are needed. Expertise is not necessary. It's a great way to get out and celebrate the winter holiday season!

## FEMALE NORTHERN CARDINAL

*Cardinalis cardinalis*

By **Barbara Baudot**



Lady cardinal resembles a glowing Christmas ornament with her feathers of many colors: tannish gold, silver grey, black and shades of red. Her chest and undersides and many facial feathers are a golden hue. *Silver grey feathers cover her back from shoulders to her wing, while her tail feathers are red, silver and black.* Her crest is red and her bright red beak is outlined by short black or gray feathers. Her eyes are coal black.

But this description is not what authors of many bird guides write. Compared to her brilliant red mate, the lady cardinal is commonly characterized as quite dull, covered in buff brown or olive green feathers with some red accents. This description belies reality, understating the lady cardinal's variegated exquisiteness. In brief, she

is clearly not dull. And, perched on a pine branch dusted with snow, she shines for me like a star.

Being nonmigratory within a broad geographic range extending from Southern Canada, throughout the Eastern half of the US, and down through Mexico, these permanent residents are dependable bird friends whether one resides in New England or the Midwest. One pair in spring, and up to three or four cardinal couples in fall and winter (they are highly territorial only when breeding), regularly visit feeders and decks supplied with berries, peanuts, suet and black oil sunflower seeds.

Cardinals are dimorphic, meaning males and females differ markedly in appearance. The coloring of their plumage is attributed to different pigments. Two biochrome pigments—melanin and carotenoids—are important for cardinals. Melanin is responsible for feathers reflecting earth tones. Carotenoids produce red, yellow and orange coloring. Pigments accumulate in birds' bodies and are modified in different ways. The colors of cardinal feathers are attributed to their diets of seeds and berries. Although they molt once a year, their plume dress remains the same.

Since both male and female cardinals feed on the same seeds and berries, the differences in their feather pigmentation has other explanations. Perhaps by nature's design, lady cardinal's variegated plumage provides camouflaging when she is in the tangles of vines and bushes building a nest, incubating eggs, and caring for hatchlings.

Lady cardinal is a dutiful and faithful housewife. She is wed for life and throughout the year is never seen perched far from her mate. She builds the family nest in bushes on the edges of open fields or lawns. Shaping it as an open cup made of twigs, weeds, bark and rootlets, she carefully lines it with fine grass or hair. During the nesting season from March through August the male feeds her while she incubates their 3-4 bluish white and brown speckled eggs. Together they give food to the hatchlings and fledglings until they chase them off as they prepare for a second or third brood. If she begins another nest before they are ready for independence, the male will feed the young.

Male and female cardinals have a poetic relationship. In courtship, the mates raise their heads high, and sway back and forth while singing softly together. The male feeds his mate beak to beak as another gesture of courtship. Both cardinals are known for their singing throughout the year. Lady cardinal, unlike many female

songbirds, is known for more complex and longer songs than her mate. She even sings from her nest.

Let us listen to lady cardinals' familiar *cheer, cheer, cheer* sung to her mate this month and be reminded of the blessings these holidays bring now and for the year to come.

**References:** "Learn about wildlife/northern cardinal facts-information in americanexpedition.us.; "Northern Cardinal" in Wikipedia, Cornell Laboratory, Audubon Society, Birds of Ohio

## WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

*Sitta carolinensis*

By **Cathy Priebe**



“Yenk, yenk, yenk!!!” It has been my experience that you will generally hear a white-breasted nuthatch before you see one. This small vocal bird likes to talk, even while they are eating. Nuthatches are interesting birds to observe as they forage face down on tree trunks and and eat on the ground.

They also absolutely love to eat at feeders. Peanuts, sunflower seeds and suet are their top three backyard bird treats.

Both the male and the female are very similarly marked, with a white breast, dark cap and gunmetal blue back, which sometimes makes it difficult to tell them apart when they are not together. The male has a darker black cap and bluer back while the female has a gray cap and paler blue back. The white-breasted nuthatch is a permanent resident in Ohio and very rarely migrates. They prefer mature deciduous trees for their habitat, especially favoring oaks.

Their name, nuthatch, came from their particular behavior of caching a seed in the cracks of tree trunks and then pecking at it until it splits open. The white-breasted nuthatch nests in abandoned cavity nests or other natural holes in large trees. The female will lay 5 to 8 white eggs, with some spotting, and incubate for about two weeks. While nesting, white-breasted nuthatches will capture foul smelling insects and brush them around the hole of their nest to keep predators away.

I have been lucky to have two breeding pairs of white-breasted nuthatches in or near my yard for the past several years. Every winter

I tend to listen a bit more carefully to see if a red-breasted nuthatch has come to visit. It is not always easy at first to hear the differences in their calls. I usually listen to my bird compact disks to become more familiar with their songs and tones. The white-breasted has a much sweeter and less nasally song while the red-breasted is in “your face loud,” which is surprising for such a little bird.

Here are some other facts about white-breasted nuthatches:

- Both male and female are monogamous and will stay close to each other throughout the year.
- They use their feet and do not use their short tail as a prop when climbing.
- In the winter they do not flock but will mix with tufted titmice and chickadees
- They feed on invertebrates (insects) in tree crevices.
- This dapper bird is generally friendly to others, especially at feeders.

**References:** The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior, David Allen Sibley; Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion, Pete Dunne; Birds of Ohio, Jim McCormac.

## **Take the Laziness Pledge!**

I have always claimed the world would be much better off with more lazy people in it. Now there’s proof and even a movement to persuade more to fall in line with their natural instinct.

Delaying garden cleanup up until spring provides refuge for spiders, reptiles, amphibians and a great habitat for insects that provide meals for birds while leaving full-grown brushy plants to provide food for over-wintering seed eaters.

The Habitat Network, with support from Cornell University, The Nature Conservancy, and others is asking homeowners to “Take the Pledge to Be a Lazy Gardener” and to follow these seven steps, which seemed like a lot of work to me, until I realized they involve doing nothing.

- Allow the leaves to remain on the property
- Allow dried flower heads to stay standing
- Let the grass grow tall and seed
- Build a brush pile with fallen branches
- Forget lawn chemicals
- Leave tree snags on your property
- Delay garden clean up until spring

Now, December is a bit late to get started with the program, but if you are like me, a guy whose laziness is stronger than his fear of the neighbors' scorn, you're way ahead of the game. If you already have performed the obsessive American homeowners' lawn "cleaning" routine this year, remember these points for next fall.

And about taking that pledge to fill out a page on the Habitat Network's website? I'll get around to it one of these days. **JJ**

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(but including Wingtips) is \$15 /Year**

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**Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon  
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is to promote conservation and restoration of  
ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife  
through advocacy, education, stewardship, field  
trips, and programs for the benefit of all people  
of today and tomorrow."**

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**Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8**

**Send your check to: National Audubon Society,  
225 Varick Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor**

**New York, NY 10014**

**Attention: Chance Mueleck**



**Rufous hummingbird female**  
**October 14, 2017, Knox County, Ohio**  
(photo by Dave Priebe)

The hummingbird pictured above is surprising for two reasons: the late date of its appearance at an Ohio feeder and that it is not a ruby-throated.

Perhaps the September and October storms that plagued the south account for both issues. Rarely seen in Ohio, the rufous has been turning up occasionally east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio in recent years. The remnants of a fall hurricane might have blown this one off its usual migration course from the northwest to the south and southwest, its usual winter-feeding grounds, delaying its arrival along the Gulf Coast where they are starting to spend the winter.

