

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

February 2008



John Koscinski

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Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

## Program

### *The Winter Garden at Schoepfle*

**Matt Kocsis**, Naturalist, Schoepfle Gardens

Tuesday, February 5, 7 PM

Sandy Ridge Perry Johnson Nature Center

**(Note change of location!)**

**M**att Kocsis is a naturalist for the Lorain County Metro Parks and has been the chief naturalist at Schoepfle Gardens for six years. He also is the park Historian.

## Field Trip

Saturday, February 16, 9 AM

**Castalia Pond, Pickerel Creek, Resthaven**

Meet at west end of Castalia Pond (Take Route 2 to 101 Exit. Follow 101 south to Castalia and Castalia Pond).

## Hike of Young Birders Club

Saturday, February 9, 8 AM

**Gulls and Ducks at a Couple of Lake Erie Hotspots**

Meet at French Creek Nature Center parking lot.

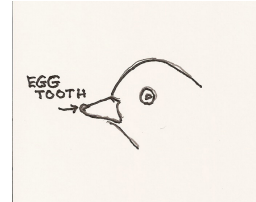
**T**he **Black River Young Birders Club** is a club for young birders between the ages of 12 and 18 and their parents. It is jointly sponsored by the Black River Audubon Society and the Lorain County Metro Parks. The goals are to foster an interest in natural history and encourage young people to spend more time outside.

Bring along a pair of binoculars. If you do not have a pair, the Club will loan you a pair. Dress for cold and windy conditions. For more information contact Senior Naturalist Tim Fairweather at 440-327-3626.

# Birders Alphabet: Y Young birds

By Carol Leininger

In hatching, a typical young bird pips its egg with its egg tooth located on the tip of its bill and breaks out of the shell by struggling and kicking. Young birds usually hatch in the morning, although some may hatch at any hour of the day or night. At their hatching, birds are classified as either altricial or precocial depending on their development. At hatching, the helpless altricial young are incapable of leaving the nest and are completely dependent on parents for food. Precocial young, fully covered with down at hatching with eyes open, are able to run about. Young that are restricted to nests are called nestlings, and those able to leave are called chicks. With some exceptions, most altricial young are hatched in nests located in trees or shrubbery, and precocial birds are hatched in ground nests.



## Bird Identifications 2007

By Harry Spencer

In terms of checklists submitted during 2007 to eBird, our Black River Audubon Society birding survey of hotspots was a success. For seventeen sites, all but one in Lorain County, we submitted 820 checklists (approximately one out of every eleven submitted in the State of Ohio) and identified 212 bird species. As shown in the following table, birders covered a few sites relatively thoroughly, several moderately completely, and some sporadically.

**Sites surveyed and numbers of species and checklists**

Site	Species	Checklists
Sandy Ridge Reservation	171	99
Carlisle Reservation	135	249
Lorain Harbor	113	199
Black River Reservation	106	79
French Creek Reservation	99	52
Bacon Woods	97	20
Columbia Reservation	96	20
Wellington Reservation	92	8
Caley Reservation	70	22
Oberlin Arboretum/Cemetery	64	14
Avon Lake Power Plant	49	32
Wellington Upground Reservoir	47	18
Findley State Park	46	1
Lorain County Community College	45	9
Indian Hollow Reservation	38	2
Oberlin Reservoir	23	4
Spencer Lake	18	1

**Species identified at least once in every month:**

Canada Goose, Mallard, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagle, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning



Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Wren, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Song Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow

*Because of the frequency of encounters with birds identified every month, beginning birders might profitably concentrate on learning to identify these birds primarily by observation of their distinctive markings, calls, and songs. Body shape, general habits of perching and flying, and habitat are noteworthy, also. These species breed in our area.*

**Identified in all seasons but not in some months:** *Many or all of these birds breed in our area.*

American Black Duck, Green-winged Teal, Hooded Merganser, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, American Coot, Bonaparte's Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Great Horned Owl, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Field Sparrow

**Other possible breeding birds:** *These species were recorded frequently during the critical breeding period of May, June, and July.*

Wood Duck, Great Egret, Green Heron, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Lesser Yellowlegs, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Black-billed Cuckoo, Chimney Swift, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Acadian Flycatcher, Willow Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Purple Martin, Tree Swallow, Northern Rough-winged Swallow, Barn Swallow, House Wren, Marsh Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, Blue-winged Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, American Redstart, Prothonotary Warbler, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Hooded Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Towhee, Chipping Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Bobolink, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole

**Mostly Spring and Fall only:** *Some are visitors during the migration seasons: A few may nest locally.*

Common Loon, Dunlin, Wilson's Snipe, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Blue-headed Vireo, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Tennessee Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Palm Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Canada Warbler, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Rusty Blackbird

**Identified in winter but not often in summer:** *Many of these birds are welcome winter residents.*

Tundra Swan, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Redhead, Ring-

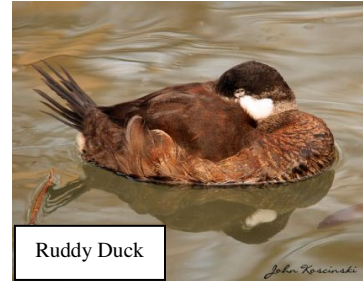
necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Tree Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco

**Only one or two IDs:** *Rare species, secretive birds, low-population and other birds in our region.*

Long-tailed Duck, Northern Bobwhite, Eared Grebe, American Bittern, Glossy Ibis, Broad-winged Hawk, Merlin, Yellow Rail, Virginia Rail, American Avocet, Long-billed Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope, Glaucous Gull, Common Tern, Forster's Tern, Eastern Screech-Owl, Barred Owl, Common Nighthawk, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Cliff Swallow, Gray-cheeked Thrush, American Pipit, Orange-crowned Warbler, Pine Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Yellow-breasted Chat, Summer Tanager, Vesper Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Common Redpoll

**Others:** *Species that do not fit into the above categories.*

Snow Goose, Mute Swan, Trumpeter Swan, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, Harlequin Duck, Common Goldeneye, Ring-necked Pheasant, Wild Turkey, Osprey, Sora, Semipalmated, Plover, Solitary Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Semipalmated Sandpiper Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, American Woodcock, Caspian Tern, Long-eared Owl, Least Flycatcher, Bank Swallow, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Le Conte's Sparrow, Purple Finch



## Christmas Bird Counts

**Elyria, December 22, 2007**

**Wellington, December 29, 2007**

**S**pecies (Species and birds counted: W=Wellington; E=Elyria):

Canada Goose W2422, E8768, Trumpeter Swan W5, Tundra Swan W6, Gadwall W4, American Black Duck E26, Mallard W208, E243, Northern Shoveler E1, Canvasback W6, Redhead W25, E1, Ring-necked Duck W126, Lesser Scaup W2, E10, Bufflehead W15, E14, Common Goldeneye E24, Hooded Merganser W2, E3, Common Merganser W1, Red-breasted Merganser W1, E17, Ruddy Duck W100, E17, Ring-necked Pheasant W1, Wild Turkey W40, Common Loon E1, Pied-billed Grebe W6, E2, Bald Eagle W4, E5, Northern Harrier W21, E4, Sharp-shinned Hawk W1, Cooper's Hawk W7, E9, Red-shouldered Hawk W1, E2, Red-tailed Hawk W48, E12, Rough-legged Hawk W2, E1, American Kestrel W41, E15, Peregrine Falcon W1, American Coot W176, Bonaparte's Gull E125, Ring-billed Gull E9379, Herring Gull E60, Glaucous Gull E1, Great Black-backed Gull E13, Rock Pigeon W163, E75, Mourning Dove W374, E185, Great Horned Owl E2, Short-eared Owl E1, Long-eared Owl W6, Belted Kingfisher E2, Red-headed Woodpecker E3, Red-bellied Woodpecker W34, E35, Downy Woodpecker W47, E47 Hairy Woodpecker W10, E4, Northern Flicker W40, E5, Pileated Woodpecker W3, Blue Jay W76, E152, American Crow W113, E86, Horned Lark W64, Black-capped Chickadee W208, E125, Tufted Titmouse W38, E50, Red-breasted Nuthatch W8, E9, White-breasted Nuthatch W53, E48, Brown Creeper W2, E3, Carolina Wren W3, E6, Winter Wren W1, Golden-crowned Kinglet W2, E2, Eastern Bluebird W84, E13, American Robin W5, E8, European Starling W5473, E783, Cedar Waxwing W5, E41, Yellow-rumped Warbler W6, E1, Eastern Towhee E5, American Tree Sparrow W192, E133, Chipping Sparrow E4, Song



Sparrow W12, E45, Swamp Sparrow E4, White-throated Sparrow W6, E26, White-crowned Sparrow W3, Dark-eyed Junco W136, E165, Snow Bunting W4, E32, Northern Cardinal W104, E123, Red-winged Blackbird W1, Common Grackle W1, Brown-headed Cowbird W8, House Finch W19, E23, Common Redpoll W6, E53, Pine Siskin W9, American Goldfinch W161, E91, House Sparrow W220, E180.

**Total species:** W67, E63

**Total birds:** W10994, E21321

**Participants:** Ackermann, Martin (E); Adams, Dane (W,E); Austin, Jenny (W); Austin, Ken (W,E); Bofinger, William (W,E); Bragg, David (E); Bruder, Erik (W,E); Bruder, Jim (W,E); Cary, Dale (E); Chavez, Steve (W); Cooper, Max (W); Cramer, Jerry (E); Fox, Sally (W); Gobbi, Laura (E); Hoover, Ken (W); Hoover, Sandy (W); Kantola, Jim (W,E); Kraps, Bart (W); Kraps, Norma (W); Lee, Dick (E); MacGillis, Bob (W); Martin, Tammy (W); Martincic, Terri (E); Miller, Nancy (E); Reed, Bradley (W); Reed, Tom (W,E); Rieker, Craig (W); Schickel, Julia (W); Schickel, Madeline (W); Sherwood, Paul (W,E); Shipman, Nancy (W,E); Shipman, Wayne (W,E); Smith, Jack (W,E); Sorton, Jean (W,E); Spencer, Harry (W,E); Strong, Joe (E); Teitelbaum, Mary Ann (E); Vormelker, Joel (W,E); Wagner, Joann (W); Yoo, Dave (W);

## King of Opportunists: Herring Gull

*Larus argentatus*

By Jack Smith

This photo of a mature Herring Gull shows the typical marks of this bird: silver-gray back



Mature Herring Gull

contrasting with white head and breast along with the black and white patterns of the protruding primary wing feathers. The pink-tinged legs and yellow bill with a difficult-to-see red dot at the tip of the lower mandible also aid identification.

The Greek genus name *Larus* means ravenous seabird, and the



Latin species name *argentatus* translates as silver. The word Herring alludes to a fish that is important food for many of the species.

Herring Gull plumage changes appearance appreciably over three or four years until the bird commences breeding. Sibley's *Guide to Birds* displays this changing plumage, which can be confusing for beginning birders.

The Herring Gull at 22- to 25-inches in length is one of the larger North American gulls. Its wingspan ranges from 4- to 5-feet. In this winter season, these gulls can be observed at certain sites, such as Lorain harbor marina, along the Lake Erie shoreline. There the predominant gulls are Ring-billed, but the larger Herring gulls and a few of the even larger (length of twenty-eight- to thirty-one-inches and wingspan of five- to five-and-one-half-feet) Great Black-backed Gulls should be readily identified.

Herring Gulls molt twice a year, a complete molt in August and September and only body feathers in March and April.

The gull can drink either fresh or salt water. A pair of glands above the eyes extracts salt from water and discharges the unwanted concentrated solution through ducts leading into the nasal cavities.

For Herring Gulls, we might paraphrase the Ancient Mariner's line into "Water, water everywhere and all to drink!"

The species is omnivorous, taking advantage of any food easily obtained at little risk. Birders and ornithologists have observed individuals using ingenious methods of food gathering. Some carried hard-shelled crabs and mollusks into the air before dropping them on rocks below. As part of their learning process, first-year Herring Gulls (see back cover photo) on golf courses carried golf balls into the air before dropping them on parked cars. The birds eat rats and other rodents, insects, marine algae, and anything dead. They steal food from other birds, and eat eggs and nestlings of either other sea birds or their own species. Birders and ornithologists have observed Herring Gulls attacking air-borne puffins, throwing the latter to the ground, and eating the killed puffins.

Similar to owls, Herring Gulls regurgitate pellets containing anything indigestible, such as bones, hair, fur, and scales.

Along the Lake Erie coast and Lake Erie islands, Herring Gulls form colonies for breeding during the second half of March. After choosing nesting sites, the birds aggressively defend their claimed territory from other individuals. Precocial chicks hatch by late May and become independent in July.

A few pairs do not nest in colonies, choosing isolated areas instead. If humans or other animals disturb ground nests, the birds may nest in trees.

Both sexes, indistinguishable by usual visual observation, construct the nests that are composed of weeds, grasses, and sticks, and usually sited in slight hollows in sandy or gravelly areas. One of a pair sits in the nest, scraping with its feet while turning about and adding material along the rim. When the nest is complete, the female may sit on the nest some time before she lays the first egg. Generally she lays three eggs, with pauses of up to three days between egg laying. During this process, her mate remains nearby and defends the nest against any marauding gull that might puncture and eat one or more eggs.

The pair shares incubation of the eggs once the last egg is laid. Occasionally the pair push and tussle if one adult is reluctant to leave the nest. The eggs hatch after 25- to 27-days, and an adult broods them during the first days.

Even on the first day, the chicks may wander outside the nest when no adult is brooding. Becoming extremely vocal with their so-called "gaga alarm calls" (Stokes, *A Guide to Bird Behavior*, Volume I), the adults aggressively defend the chicks against any marauding birds.

The precocious chicks are vocal, also, with their feed-me and alarm calls (Stokes). They peck at the red spot on the parent's bill, and the parent regurgitates food while the chick's head is inside the parent's bill. This feeding method continues for about five weeks, at which time the

chicks have grown to full size.

At this stage, the adults become increasingly aggressive toward the chicks and stop feeding them. In turn the juveniles leave the colony and begin independent feeding.

Herring Gulls are found in widespread areas of the northern hemisphere. Those breeding in the far north tend to migrate south. If food becomes scarce in North America, the migrators may travel all the way to Mexico and the West Indies.

In the nineteenth century, the species population diminished dramatically as the birds were hunted for their feathers and for sport, and their eggs were gathered by humans.

In the twentieth century their population increased, however. Imposition of protection laws and creation of large municipal dump sites contributed to this increase.

In 1945 the first Ohio nesting sites were discovered. In 1981 on a small island in Sandusky Bay, a colony of 1000 pairs produced 2000 young. The new breeding-bird atlas in preparation may record increased Ohio breeding of Herring Gulls.

**References:** *The Encyclopedia of Birds*, Vol. 1, by Kenny Clements; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds*, John K. Terres; *Lives of North American Birds*, Kenn Kaufman; *A Guide to Bird Behavior*, Volume I, Donald W. Stokes; *The Sibley Guide to the Birds*, David Allen Sibley; *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior*, David Allen Sibley; *The Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas*, Bruce G. Peterjohn and Daniel L. Rice

## Homing Pigeons

### Rock Pigeons

*Columbia livia*

By **Jack Smith**

A January 2008 article in *Discover* magazine brought back memories of racing homing pigeons. During 1942 through 45 my brother Tom and I raised and raced homing pigeons while we were high school students. We and about a dozen others were members of the Elyria Pigeon Club.

Our club cooperated with clubs in Buffalo, Chicago, St. Louis, New York City, and perhaps others. Members of the Elyria Pigeon Club competed with each other in any given race, the objective of which was to determine the pigeon that arrived home first. If the Chicago club was cooperating with us on a race, we shipped our birds by railroad to Chicago. There members of the Chicago club met the train bearing our birds, took the birds to the starting point, and released them.

Before we had shipped our birds from Elyria, we had placed a small rubber band on one leg of each bird. As the first of our birds arrived back in Elyria after its long flight home, we removed its leg band and quickly placed it in a special timing clock. The clock was special because the insertion of the band started the clock.

All the members of our club followed the same procedure, and at a mutually agreed time we gathered and compared clock times. The member with the most time on his or her clock won the race.

When the Chicago club shipped their birds to us, we retrieved their birds at the train station on Depot Street in Elyria. We aligned the bird cages across the railroad tracks about thirty feet above the road in a manner that would allow us to release the birds as simultaneously as possible.

I remember watching hundreds of birds circling above the tracks and heading west en masse.

As I watched the birds, I had two burning questions in my mind. How did the birds get their bearings? How could they orient themselves so quickly?

In good weather on 250- to 400-mile races, many of the birds would be home in one day. And even in a 500-mile race a few birds might arrive home in one day.

We thought that memory of landmarks played some role. To train the birds for the races, Dad willingly participated. By coupling business with training sessions, Dad drove Tom and me with a cage full of pigeons to various spots 50- to 100-miles away from Elyria. After release from the cage, the birds would often arrive home before we did. We supposed that this process taught the birds landmarks that in future races would aid homeward flights.

The tantalizingly sketchy *Discover* article outlines some recent research results made with Garden Warblers at the University of Oldenburg in Germany. Previously the researchers discovered that molecules called cryptochromes, part of the birds' retinas, respond to light and to magnetic fields. Their new research has established that the cryptochrome molecules, through a circuit of neurons, connect to a region of the brain that is activated during navigation.

To explain how cryptochrome molecules aid navigation, one researcher, Dominik Heyers, hypothesized that a bird looking north or south, perceives a light spot or a dark spot.

Bits of magnetite contained in birds' beaks may aid also in sensing the Earth's magnetic field. Because that field is stronger near the poles, the birds may obtain information about latitude.

Clearly more research is needed for full understanding of avian navigation.

## Audubon Volunteer Opportunities

By **Harriet Alger**

**I**n addition to the birding hikes and other opportunities for outdoor fun and learning, Black River Audubon sponsors many interesting and valuable community education and environmental projects. As a non-profit organization, we depend upon volunteers for these projects which include:

- install and monitor bluebird boxes around the county to try to increase the once-decimated numbers of these beautiful birds;
- contact teachers, including homeschoolers, to inform them of the Audubon Adventures program, which places Audubon materials in 3rd-6th grade classrooms to introduce children to the wonders of birds and natural environments;
- promote scholarships to the Audubon summer camp educational programs for naturalists, teachers or other community members involved in nature related programs;
- present programs and kiosk displays to community groups in our campaign to “Create Healthier Environments for Birds, Butterflies, Bees and People Like Us”;
- advocate to and work with local, state and national legislators and elected officials concerning conservation and preservation issues.

Volunteers can offer regular or occasional help, as beginning or experienced birders, educators or advocates. If you would like to participate in any of these activities, please email Harriet Alger, President, [algerha@centurytel.net](mailto:algerha@centurytel.net) or call her at 440-246-2853.



# Endangered Species and Extinction

Adapted from a message forwarded by **Harriet Alger**

**L**ydia Millet's *How the Dead Dream* (Counterpoint, 2008) tells the story of an ambitious young real estate developer in L.A. who becomes obsessed with rare and vanishing animals and starts breaking into zoos at night to be close to the animals. It is one of the first American novels to approach the emotional and aesthetic implications of the extinction tragedy. *How the Dead Dream* is notable for its thoughtful engagement with the social and personal effects of massive species loss.

As the story's protagonist struggles by night with ideas of human aloneness and what it might mean to be a "last" animal, he builds sprawling subdivisions by day, grapples with his suicidal mother, whose husband has left her and works in a gay bar in Key West, and fends off attacks by his brutal and jealous business partner, Fulton.

National Book Critics' Circle and the American Library Association's Booklist rate the novel as one of the year's best.