

**Black River Audubon Society**

# **WINGTIPS**

February 2013



AMERICAN TREE SPARROW photo by DANE ADAMS

Editors: Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe  
Photographer: John Koscinski  
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

## **Program**

Tuesday, February 5  
Carlisle Visitor Center

**Chuck Jakubchak**

Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

### **Sensational Birds, Sensational Observations**

You know the birds when you see them and can probably identify many by their songs, but what do you really know about the lives of common birds? This beautifully illustrated presentation will provide educational facts and give insights that will enlighten even the most experienced birders in the group!



**Chuck Jakubchak** is a manager for General Electric by trade, but a naturalist at heart. A graduate of the Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist program, Chuck has presented bird and nature themed programs throughout the state. He has also written articles for numerous publications, including Bird Watcher's Digest and Amish Heartland magazine. In 2011 he received the Continuing Excellence Award by the Ohio Volunteer Naturalists and was most recently appointed as an advisor to the Ohio Bluebird Society. He is a graduate of Wake Forest University and has a graduate degree in public speaking. He and his wife Jeanne reside in Strongsville.

### **Board Meeting**

Tuesday, January 29, 6:30 p.m.  
304 West Ave., Elyria  
The Jack Smith House

### **Field Trip**

**February 16, 2013 (Saturday)**  
Castalia Pond and Pickerel Creek,  
meet at Castalia Pond 9:00 a.m.

## **A Tribute to Jack Smith**

By **Carol Leininger**

All I ever wanted to know about mushrooms, and then some, I learned from Jack Smith. I knew Jack and valued his friendship for about 35 years. I spent many hours traveling and working with him – going to Audubon Council meetings and Wildlife Diversity meetings all over Ohio, attending Wing Watch events, participating in science fairs at various schools, and working together on the Black River Audubon Society Board in various positions

Field Trips were one of his favorite activities. He was always eager to impart his abundant knowledge to others, young and old. I will never forget the time we found an unfamiliar shrub. He walked back to his van,

opened the back trunk, and pulled out a big cardboard box full of field guides so we could identify it. He never went anywhere without his library – guide books to wildflowers, trees, shrubs, non-vascular plants, mushrooms, birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, insects (butterflies and caterpillars), bird eggs and nests, and pond life.

He was very interested in doing all he could to make a difference in the world today by preserving the environment and passing on an appreciation of all life forms to future generations. He set an excellent example, and I hope that others will follow in his footsteps.

## **Long-eared owls discovered in Oberlin pines**

**By Robert MacGillis, Jr,**

On a cold, overcast, windy morning, I met Debbie Mohr, Patty McKelvey, and Tom Reed at the Oberlin McDonald's. Our task was to count birds in the Oberlin section of the circular area covered during the 2012

Elyria Christmas Bird Count. After a short discussion about our plans for the day ahead, the four of us headed out.

Our first stop was a nice wooded ravine adjacent to Professor St. We felt we could keep out of the bitter wind if we stayed in the lower riparian habitat before we ventured out into the open areas. We had a good hike through the wooded area, identifying some of the expected winter resident birds.

Next, we drove to Pyle-South Amherst Rd. and parked in the Oberlin Golf course parking lot. Our aim was to survey the groves of pine trees on the north side of old Pyle-Road Reservoir where Tom Reed and I had seen great horned and barred owls during past Christmas Bird Counts. Patty and Debbie were more than willing to go in search of owls. Like all birders, we were hoping to see some special species to make our day worthwhile. From the parking lot we followed the path towards the reservoir and pine groves.



We enjoyed seeing a flock of bluebirds nearby, a red-tailed hawk, and ducks flying overhead. In the woods beside the path we identified many common woodland birds.

In the hope of seeing some ducks or geese on the open water, we approached the top of the reservoir very quietly. The reservoir was void of any waterfowl.

As we hiked the path into the pine groves, I cautioned our team to be quiet and avoid disturbing any roosting owls.

I led the way into the grove of tall pines while visually searching for any shape that resembled an owl. Tom was right behind with Patty and Debbie following. Within a minute or so, Tom quietly said that he thought he could see an owl high in the pines. I had just walked by that same place and missed it completely. We looked through our binoculars and saw an owl looking down at us. I think we both said at the same time, "That's a long-eared owl!"

Since long-eared owls usually roost in groups, we looked for more birds. Sure enough, we found three more in nearby trees. We were thrilled, especially Debbie and Patty. Patty reported the long-eared owl represented a life bird.

We watched the owls for several minutes before quietly leaving them in peace. Their sighting energized us, and we realized that probably we had achieved the high point of our birding for the day.

Yet we experienced a slightly lesser highlight later in the afternoon when Tom, Debbie, and I covered some areas by car. We stopped on the north side of Kendal of Oberlin to count swans and ducks on the small ponds and spotted two hawks. Both were red-tails. We repositioned our car for a better look and spotted another hawk. It was larger and not another red-tail. When I jumped out of the car for a better look, I realized it was an immature bald eagle. We had been lucky to be in the right place at the right time.

As we finished the day driving more roads in our area, snow flurries began to make visibility difficult. But we had enjoyed both the thrill of discovery and a productive winter day observing nature with birding friends.

## **Wellington Christmas Bird Count 2012**

**Participants 14; Total birds 5654; Total species 55**

CANADA GOOSE 1860; MUTE SWAN 3; TRUMPETER SWAN 10; AMERICAN BLACK DUCK 4; MALLARD 71; AMERICAN COOT 406; NORTHERN SHOVELER 2; REDHEAD 3; RING-NECKED DUCK 5; LESSER SCAUP 25; BUFFELHEAD 20; HOODED MERGANSER 4; RUDDY DUCK 25; PIED-BILLED GREBE 12; DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT 1; RED-SHOULDERED HAWK 4; COOPER'S HAWK 6; RED-TAILED HAWK 20; AMERICAN KESTREL 13; BARRED OWL 1; ROCK PIGEON 80; MOURNING DOVE 617; RING-BILLED GULL 2; PILEATED WOODPECKER 2; HAIRY WOODPECKER 6; RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER 23; DOWNEY WOODPECKER 17; RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH 9; WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH 31; TUFTED TITMOUSE 12; BLUE JAY 72; AMERICAN CROW 28; HORNED LARK 172; EASTERN BLUEBIRD 24; NORTHERN FLICKER 1; RING-NECKED PHEASANT 5; WILD TURKEY 90; EUROPEAN STARLING 476; YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER 2; AMERICAN TREE SPARROW 107; SONG SPARROW 13; SAVANNAH SPARROW 3; WHITE-THROATED SPARROW 2; BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE 31; DARK-EYED JUNCO 479; NORTHERN CARDINAL 189; RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD 4; COMMON GRACKLE 5; BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD 2; RUSTY BLACKBIRD 1; LAPLAND LONGSPUR 2; AMERICAN GOLDFINCH 81; HOUSE FINCH 75; HOUSE SPARROW 466.

# Backyard-feeder Adventures: American Tree Sparrow

*Spizella arborea*

By **Cathy Priebe**

I have not spent a lot of time studying sparrows. I like the vibrant colors of warblers, especially in the spring. At least I am able to identify many of them, mostly because of their distinctive plumage.



Sparrows can be tricky to identify, and it does not help that they are usually brown and like to hide in bushes or grasses. But when winter arrives in Ohio, so does the American tree sparrow. This little bird has a personality and attractive appearance.

Several years ago I saw a flock of sparrows eating below a thistle feeder. At first quick glance, I thought they were house sparrows. They resembled adult chipping sparrows, but chippies had long departed. I had American tree sparrows as a new backyard species.

This species, often called the “Winter Chippy,” is a common and widespread spring breeder across arctic and subarctic regions, nesting at the edge of the arctic tundra. In the fall when these little sparrows arrive in northern Ohio, they favor bird feeders and weedy areas with grasses, golden rod, ironweed and various other plants. Generally, they stay in small flocks and remain in one area until it is time to migrate north or they need to find more food.

Sporting a rusty brown cap, a bi-colored small pointy bill, and a light grey chest with a charcoal smudge in the middle, these little guys are readily easy to identify.

This winter of 2013, I have been fortunate to host these little visitors again! Not only are they eating thistle, they also frequent suet feeders and regular-seed stations. And, of course, they are all over the ground doing their frantic feeding dance, shuffling back and forth so fast that I often lose sight of them!

These sparrows vocalize with a very pleasing trill that becomes more noticeable before northern migration begins in March and April.

So, pay closer attention to your little brown birds this winter, especially on the ground below your feeders. You may find that you have a “different sparrow” and I guarantee you will enjoy their visit!

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

# Northern Saw-Whet Owl

*Aegolius acadicus*

By **Harry Spencer**

At Caley Reservation in December 2012, Dane Adams took the photo of the northern saw-whet owl shown on the back cover of this issue of WINGTIPS. Mike Smith, who originally spotted the bird, guided Dane to the pine grove just east of the parking lot to observe the owl.



Northern saw-whet owls are small, uncommon, owls about the size of an American robin.

They are smaller than eastern screech-owls and without ear-tufts. Northern saw-whet owls make clear, repetitive calls (too, too, too ...) that reminded early observers of the sound of a saw being sharpened on a whetstone, hence its common name. Its round head sits on its chunky body. In the back-cover photo, the yellow eyes catch my attention because they appear to be so large relative to head size. The dark bill, lack of black border of facial disk, and large white and brown spots of the underside are distinctive.

During the twenty-first century, only five identifications of northern saw-whet owls have been reported for Lorain County in eBird, twice at Caley Reservation by Mike Smith in 2010 and 2012. Other birders reported identifications at Caley Reservation in 2010 and 2012 and at Carlisle Reservation in 2010. All identifications were made during December, January, or April.

## **Bluebird Conference**

### **Mysteries of Nature and How They Relate to Bluebirds**

Saturday, February 23, 8a.m. to 4 p.m.  
Shisler Conference Center, Wooster, Ohio

By **Penny Brandau**

If you are a bluebird lover and are interested in learning more about them, this conference is for you. It is sponsored by the Ohio Bluebird Society and is free if you pre-register (and only \$5 if you don't). For more information: [info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org](mailto:info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org) or 330-465-6987.

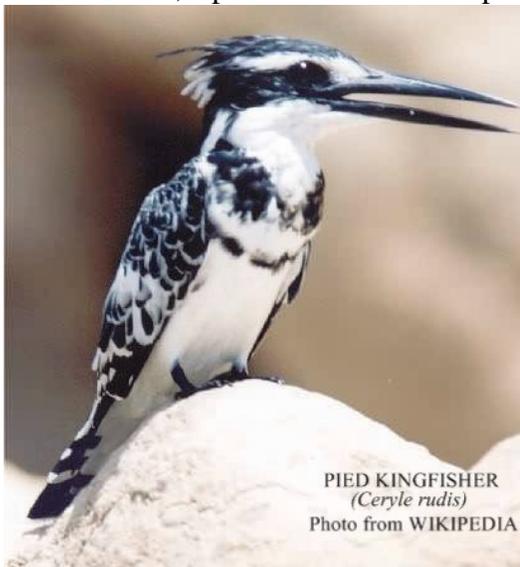


## **A Birder's Diary: African Species**

By **Carol Leininger**

When I visited Ghana every bird I saw was a new one on my life list. I was not there to see birds but to teach biology at an intermediate school in a small fishing village. I had not been to the African continent before, and each bird that I saw on weekends or after school was exciting.

Once after school I followed the villagers down to the beach to greet the fishermen coming in with their catch of the day. On the way back to my lodgings, I decided to walk along the beach. As I turned inland, I passed several small ponds or lagoons, where birding became interesting. I can still picture two



of my sightings. A lovely black-and-white bird, a pied kingfisher, sat by one pond. The distance from the tip of its bill to the back of its crest was nearly equal to the length of its entire body. It sure looked top heavy. At another pond I found two African lapwings. They were visually striking with their long yellow legs, black-tipped yellow beaks and pale brown bodies. Their hard, white shields on their foreheads and long yellow wattles hanging down from their eyes were even more interesting. Lapwings, in the plover family, seemed to be much larger than any plovers in the US.

One weekend I visited a provincial park with a lovely visitor center as well as several miles of swinging canopy walks. I was disappointed, however, because the walkway was crowded with people and without birds. I returned to the van and saw a pin-tailed

whydah sitting in the middle of the parking lot. The bird was coal-black with snow-white breast and belly and scarlet bill. Its outstanding feature was its tail consisting of several long, black tail streamers, three times its body length. What a lucky find!

Birding days are not quite what you expect them to be. Even trying to decipher a new type of field guide can be challenging.

## **Birding in Ohio Counties Bordering Lake Erie: Species recorded in 2012 on eBird**

By **Harry Spencer**

Birding in these lakeside counties was active and thriving during 2012 according to compilations of identifications listed in eBird. The number of species for each of the eight counties was: Lucas 281, Ottawa 259, Sandusky 200, Erie 243, Lorain 247, Cuyahoga 273, Lake 242, Ashtabula 220.

### **Species identified in Lorain County 2012:**

SNOW GOOSE, ROSS'S GOOSE, BRANT, CACKLING GOOSE, CANADA GOOSE, MUTE SWAN, TRUMPETER SWAN, TUNDRA SWAN, WOOD DUCK, GADWALL, AMERICAN WIGEON, AMERICAN BLACK DUCK, MALLARD, BLUE-WINGED TEAL, NORTHERN SHOVELER, NORTHERN PINTAIL, GREEN-WINGED TEAL, CANVASBACK, REDHEAD, RING-NECKED DUCK, GREATER SCAUP, LESSER SCAUP, SURF SCOTER, WHITE-WINGED SCOTER, BLACK SCOTER, LONG-TAILED DUCK, BUFFLEHEAD, COMMON GOLDENEYE, HOODED MERGANSER, COMMON MERGANSER, RED-BREASTED MERGANSER, RUDDY DUCK.

NORTHERN BOBWHITE, RING-NECKED PHEASANT, WILD TURKEY, RED-THROATED LOON, COMMON LOON, PIED-BILLED GREBE, DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT, AMERICAN BITTERN, GREAT BLUE HERON, GREAT EGRET, CATTLE EGRET, GREEN HERON, BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON, TURKEY VULTURE, OSPREY, GOLDEN EAGLE, NORTHERN HARRIER, SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, COOPER'S HAWK, BALD EAGLE, RED-SHOULDERED HAWK, BROAD-WINGED HAWK, RED-TAILED HAWK, ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK VIRGINIA RAIL, SORA, COMMON GALLINULE, AMERICAN COOT, SANDHILL CRANE, BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER, SEMIPALMATED PLOVER, KILLDEER, AMERICAN AVOCET, SPOTTED SANDPIPER, SOLITARY SANDPIPER, GREATER YELLOWLEGS, WILLET, LESSER YELLOWLEGS, MARBLED GODWIT, RED KNOT, SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER, LEAST SANDPIPER, WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER, PECTORAL SANDPIPER, DUNLIN.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER, WILSON'S SNIBE, AMERICAN WOODCOCK, WILSON'S PHALAROPE, BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE, BONAPARTE'S GULL, LAUGHING

GULL, RING-BILLED GULL, CALIFORNIA GULL, HERRING GULL, THAYER'S GULL, ICELAND GULL, LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL, GLAUCOUS GULL, GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL, CASPIAN TERN, COMMON TERN, FORSTER'S TERN, PARASITIC JAEGER, ROCK PIGEON, MOURNING DOVE, YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO, EASTERN SCREECH-OWL, GREAT HORNED OWL, SNOWY OWL, BARRED OWL, LONG-EARED OWL, NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL, COMMON NIGHTHAWK, CHIMNEY SWIFT, RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD, BELTED KINGFISHER, RED-HEADED WOODPECKER, RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER, DOWNY WOODPECKER, HAIRY WOODPECKER, NORTHERN FLICKER, PILEATED WOODPECKER, AMERICAN KESTRAL, MERLIN, PEREGRINE FALCON.

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER, EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE, YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER, ACADIAN FLYCATCHER, ALDER FLYCATCHER, WILLOW FLYCATCHER, LEAST FLYCATCHER, EASTERN PHOEBE, GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER, EASTERN KINGBIRD, NORTHERN SHRIKE, WHITE-EYED VIREO, YELLOW-THROATED VIREO, BLUE-HEADED VIREO, WARBLING VIREO, PHILADELPHIA VIREO, RED-EYED VIREO, BLUE JAY, AMERICAN CROW, HORNED LARK, NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW, PURPLE MARTIN, TREE SWALLOW, BANK SWALLOW, BARN SWALLOW, CLIFF SWALLOW, BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE, TUFTED TITMOUSE, RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH, BROWN CREEPER, HOUSE WREN, WINTER WREN, SEDGE WREN, MARSH WREN, CAROLINA WREN, BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER, GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET, RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET, EASTERN BLUEBIRD, VEERY, GRAY-CHEEKED THRUSH, SWAINSON'S THRUSH, HERMIT THRUSH, WOOD THRUSH, AMERICAN ROBIN, VARIED THRUSH.

GRAY CATBIRD, NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD, BROWN THRASHER, EUROPEAN STARLING, AMERICAN PIPIT, CEDAR WAXWING, LAPLAND LONGSPUR, SNOW BUNTING, OVENBIRD, LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH, NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH, BLUE-WINGED WARBLER, BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER, PROTHONOTARY WARBLER, TENNESSEE WARBLER, ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER, NASHVILLE WARBLER, MOURNING WARBLER, COMMON YELLOWTHROAT, HOODED WARBLER, AMERICAN REDSTART, CAPE MAY WARBLER, CERULEAN WARBLER, NORTHERN PARULA, MAGNOLIA WARBLER, BAY-BREASTED WARBLER, BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER, YELLOW WARBLER, CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER, BLACKPOLL WARBLER, BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER, PALM WARBLER, PINE WARBLER, YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER, BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER, CANADA WARBLER, WILSON'S WARBLER, YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT, EASTERN TOWHEE, AMERICAN TREE SPARROW, CHIPPING SPARROW, CLAY-COLORED SPARROW, FIELD SPARROW, VESPER SPARROW, LARK SPARROW, SAVANNAH SPARROW.

LE CONTE'S SPARROW, NELSON'S SPARROW, FOX SPARROW, SONG SPARROW, LINCOLN'S SPARROW, SWAMP SPARROW, WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW, DARK-EYED JUNCO, SCARLET Tanager, NORTHERN CARDINAL, ROSE-BREASTED

GROSBEAK, BLUE GROSBEAK, INDIGO BUNTING, DICKCISSEL, BOBOLINK, RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD, EASTERN MEADOWLARK, RUSTY BLACKBIRD, COMMON GRACKLE, BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD, ORCHARD ORIOLE, BALTIMORE ORIOLE, PURPLE FINCH, HOUSE FINCH, RED CROSSBILL, WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL, COMMON REDPOLL, PINE SISKIN, AMERICAN GOLDFINCH, HOUSE SPARROW.



NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL discovered by MIKE SMITH and photographed by DANE ADAMS