

# WINGTIPS



MOURNING DOVES photo by Tom Mahl

FEBRUARY 2019

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**Tuesday, February 5, 7 pm**  
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

**Andy McDowell**  
**Evolution of a Land Conservation Project**



**Western Reserve**  
**Land Conservancy**

land • people • community

Have you ever wondered how land conservation projects work? What's the process like? What is a conservation easement? Are there benefits for the land owner? Is the land really protected forever?

Join us at our February 5 meeting for an informational presentation by Western Reserve Land Conservancy's (WRLC) Andy McDowell to hear the answers to these questions and more!

Andy, an environmental education graduate of Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, also worked as a Bureau of State Parks naturalist in that state. He later became vice president of exhibits and building operations for the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland before joining WRLC in 2006.

Now, as the Conservancy's Vice President of Western Field Operations, he provides direction and leadership of WRLC efforts in ten counties. Andy lives in North Ridgeville with his wife Jennifer and children Ashley and Duncan. He is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys hunting, fishing, canoeing, camping, backpacking, and maintaining old tractors!

In 2018, nearly 1,900 acres were conserved in the western region from the Oberlin field office. These acres include the preservation of natural lands, including miles of rivers and stream corridors, Kelleys Island rare alvar, biodiverse fen wetlands as well as a historic mill and rich farmland.

Attend this program to learn more about the Western Reserve Land Conservancy accomplishes the important work of land preservation.

## Upcoming Field Trip

**Saturday, February 16, 2019, 9:00 a.m.**

Meet at Castalia Pond, Castalia

Paul Sherwood to lead.

### **The 22<sup>nd</sup> Great Backyard Bird Count is Coming!**

The biggest, and easiest, citizen science bird count is well into its third decade and is growing larger than ever. The Great Backyard Bird Count has grown every year, especially since it went worldwide a number of years ago. This year's four-day event, February 15-18, 2019, will undoubtedly include more participants than ever.

Yet, it seems to be an increasingly individual experience as continually improved registration, reporting, maps, and data presentation enable those taking part to see their own reports presented geographically in a number of intriguing ways.

All it takes is a minimum 15-minute commitment, over the four days, to watch, count, and report all the birds in your backyard, or another environment, counting, and then reporting them.

To learn more, go to “birdcount.org,” and explore the website! **JJ**

### **Mourning Dove**

*Zenaida macroura*

By **Cathy Priebe**

How can one not love the mourning dove? It has such a sweet face and a very lovely, almost eerie but recognizable song. Every year, mourning doves nest in and around my backyard, so I have grown quite familiar and fond of this very common, pigeon-like bird.

Both sexes are a soft, demure gray brown, with rosy blush underparts, long trim tail, and black spots on the upper wing. Their head is relatively small in comparison to their body which is about the size of a grackle.

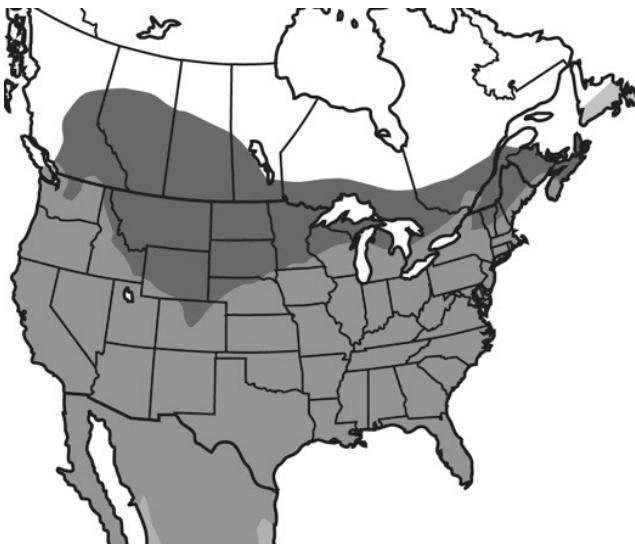
Mourning doves are currently one of the most abundant species in North America and the second most recorded bird in breeding bird surveys, according to Jim McCormac, author of **Birds of Ohio**. They

are also the leading game bird, with over 70 million birds hunted annually. Luckily, they are very prolific breeders and are able to repopulate despite being hunted by man and other predators.

One of the reasons they have reproduced so well over the years is due to the change of habitat brought on by farming and land developments. Doves prefer open pastures and urban settings and generally stay away from heavily forested areas.

The female and male build their simple stick nest together, usually in bushes, small trees or sometimes in man-made objects such as hanging baskets or window ledges. Nests are often reused or built on top of other nests. They also take turns incubating the clutch, usually two white eggs, and both feed the young. The nestlings are fed “crop milk” which is generated inside the adult’s crop after the young hatch. Later the young are fed regurgitated seeds, berries and insects.

Doves do migrate in the fall and spring but are primarily found in Ohio all year. They are seed eaters and love to graze on the ground underneath backyard feeders.



Mourning doves range map (from Audubon.org)

Despite the doves’ ability to release their feathers when predators attack, I have noticed that Cooper’s and sharp-shinned hawks prefer to hunt them and are generally successful. In the winter I often find small piles of dove feathers scattered on top of the snow near my backyard feeders.

Here are some more facts about mourning doves:

\*The male will often stand on the female's back (while nest building) and give her sticks for the nest.

\*They generally mate for life and can breed up to five clutches a year, often starting in late winter if the winter is mild.

\*Many are very tame and approachable except in areas where hunted.

\*They are often the first bird heard or seen at sunrise and the last at dusk.

\*Doves hunker down when a predator flies in and will often erupt in a flurry of feathers as they fly to escape.

\*Doves will often sit on telephone wires in pairs but will also flock in very large numbers in fields.

\*They are very swift and agile fliers, but have trouble landing on branches, sometimes making several attempts before safely perching.

\*Those not familiar with the dove's song often mistake its cooing for an owl.

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

## **A National Audubon 2018 Highlight!**

In mid-December, National Audubon Society looked back over 2018 and selected eight major success categories. Black River Audubon Park was listed within one of them. Here are excerpts from the article **Highlights and Wins from 2018** in National's website.

*"In many ways 2018 was a challenging year for birds, but despite that we have a lot to celebrate. . . Together we helped protect birds and the places they need while making progress on Audubon's five core conservation priorities: Coasts, Working Lands, Water, Bird-Friendly Communities, and Climate. Here is a short list of some of the most important ways we worked together to protect birds this year."*

The article later pointed out that

*"Audubon chapters across the country are leading innovative native plant programs . . . such as: Black River Audubon Society in Elyria, Ohio, which transformed a formerly*

*blighted riverside site into a park that supports birds and provides welcome green space to the community. . .”*

While it is exciting to receive continuing recognition for our work in 2018, more still needs to be done at the park that was donated by BRAS founder Jack Smith. Situated on a road leading from fast food establishments, it requires continuous cleaning. In addition, the trees and other plants will still need maintenance in the future. Nonetheless, it should continue to flourish, reminding Elyrians and Lorain Countians of Black River Audubon Society and its legacy. **JJ**



**Elyria Mayor Holly Brinda addresses volunteers at Black River Audubon Park, 5/1**

## **Applications for Hog Island Scholarships**

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

This year we will offer one adult scholarship that covers tuition, room and board, and travel expenses to the camp. Our goal is for the

recipient to follow the example of others who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors for conservation and education.

Campers spend one week on Hog Island, learning from accomplished naturalists, birders, and educators.

Past scholarship winners have loved the camp's natural surrounding and rustic buildings. Delicious meals are always served in the communal dining room.



The Hog Island wharf (from Audubon.org)

A reservation has been made for one lucky BRAS scholarship winner for the *Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week* camp which will run from July 15 to 20<sup>th</sup>. A different camp might be possible if openings exist.

For more details and a description of the Hog Island camping experience, go to [hogisland.audubon.org](http://hogisland.audubon.org). Individuals interested in applying for the BRAS scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at [jjablons@lorainccc.edu](mailto:jjablons@lorainccc.edu) or 440-365-6465. **JJ**

## Hawks and the Sounds of Silence

Our members often ask why their backyards are frequently silent without a songbird to be seen, sometimes for a few days. One reason may be the sharp increase in hawks in our neighborhoods. Over the

last few decades both Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks have experienced notable growth in numbers, particularly in urban areas.



Cooper's hawk (from Audubon.org)

According to Matthew Miller (December 31, 2018 article in [nature.org](http://nature.org)), raptors, and hawks in general, in serious decline at mid-twentieth century, due to “direct persecution and pesticides,” have rebounded and are spreading into unlikely areas – American cities.

As their numbers again increased, hawks only colonized the outskirts of urban areas, but today they are entering neighborhoods with densely-packed homes and even invading downtown areas. The hypothesis is that it is easier to hunt songbirds at birdfeeders, especially in areas that are not filled with trees.

Although that might sound like a bad thing for our songbird populations, there is a definite upside to the trend. Just as many of us have often wished, urban hawks seem to target invasive species! We might expect they would like rock pigeons, but studies have shown starlings and house sparrows appeal to them!

It should be pointed out that much of the data regarding shifting hawk populations as well as their changing migration patterns comes from citizen science projects such as Christmas Bird Counts and the upcoming Backyard Bird Count. **JJ**

Reference: “Why You’re Seeing More Hawks at Your Bird Feeder” by Matthew Miller in [nature.org](http://nature.org).



# RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

*Melanerpes carolinus*

By **Barbara Baudot**

Our homes in New Hampshire and Ohio have been situated on the edges of woodlands where pairs of red-bellied woodpeckers were frequent guests at our feeders, and fascinating for us to watch and photograph. The males and females were easy to distinguish by their feathered head caps extending from neck to beak, the male in a red band, the female of equal parts red and gray. Generally, we had one monogamous pair in residence at a time. They always fed well at our seed and mealworm feeders. They would take a bit of food and fly in an undulating pattern to a dead tree on the edge of our lot.

We often observed these birds walk up or down the trunk with their short legs and zygodactyl feet (the first and fourth toes in back and the middle two in front). Like other woodpeckers, they drill and drum on trees with their strong bills to store their food in crevices in the bark or to hollow out a nesting place. Both parents engage in nest building, incubating and feeding their young. One late spring I discovered a pair taking turns feeding their fledglings on our porch!

Engineers have observed nature's design to protect these birds, equipping them in a way to spare their brains from the stress of drumming on hard services. Their skulls consist of strong, but compressible, sponge-like bone, which is concentrated in the forehead and back of their skulls. These structures and the flexibility of their beaks have inspired engineers modeling resistant materials to protect the "black boxes" of airplanes. The design of protective helmets is also influenced by woodpecker brain structures and composition.

The foraging activities of red-bellied woodpeckers, aided by their unusually long, sticky tongues, help control insect pests, including wood-boring beetles that threaten trees. The abandoned nesting cavities of the red-bellied are important contributions to ecosystems, as many birds and small mammalian species, incapable of excavating their own tree holes, use them for breeding and roosting.

Finally, it should be noted that red-bellied woodpeckers have reacted to climate change by spreading from their breeding grounds in the southern U.S. to more northern reaches, even to lower eastern Canada. They are not an endangered species.

**References:** "Red-bellied woodpeckers" in Wikipedia; "Red-bellied woodpecker" at [allaboutBirds.org](http://allaboutBirds.org).

**Black River Audubon membership only  
(but including Wingtips) is \$15/Year**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

**Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon  
P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036**

**“The mission of the Black River Audubon Society  
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.”**

**National Audubon Membership Application**

**(Includes membership in Black River Audubon  
and subscriptions to WINGTIPS and AUDUBON  
magazine: \$20/year)**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

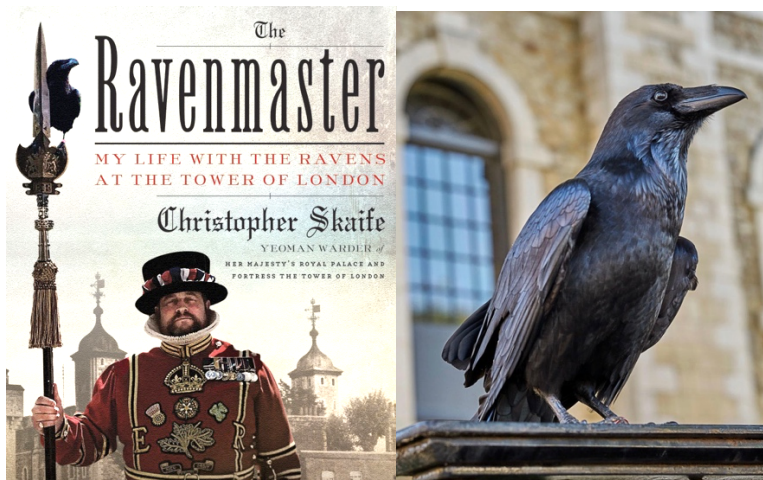
**Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8**

**Send your check to: National Audubon Society,  
225 Varick Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10014**

**Attention: Chance Mueleck**

# An Audubon Book Note

## *The Ravenmaster*



If you're "cravin' ravens" and can't wait until the next season of *Game of Thrones* begins in April, there's a book out for you. Audubon.org, back on October 24, 2018, reported on *The Ravenmaster: My Life with the Ravens at the Tower of London* by Christopher Scaife, reportedly the Tower's sixth officially appointed Ravenmaster.

Scaife admits that what sounds like an ancient tradition, is actually an innovation of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Still, the large corvids, perhaps the most intelligent birds in the world, seem to have been patrolling the castle/fortress/prison/etc. for centuries as legends have cropped up about them. It's said that as long as they roost on the battlements, the country will prosper.

The ravenmaster's autobiography is said to be action-packed, even violent in a *Game of Thrones* kind of way, with flock feuds, blood-soaked dog biscuits, Black Widows, and fatal prison breaks. No Red Weddings were mentioned unfortunately.

The review claims "the book puts the corvids' antics on the same stage as the Tower's gruesome history. With birdy charisma comes drama, and with drama comes an adventure that only a Ravenmaster can write."

I plan to check it out, keeping in mind that, as always, "Winter is Coming."



RED BELLIED WOODPECKER photo by Dominique Michal

## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

*"Birding Since 1958"*

**P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036**

**440-365-6465**

**[www.blackriveraudubon.org](http://www.blackriveraudubon.org)**