

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

March 2012



**EASTERN BLUEBIRD
DAVE LOEBER**

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

Program

Day in the Life of an African Penguin

Tom Leiden

CEO & President of the Leiden Cabinet Company

Tuesday March 6, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

For details: see the Announcement Section of our WEBSITE.

Field Trip

March 17, 2012 (Saturday)

Oberlin and Wellington Reservoirs, Findley State Park,

Meet at the Oberlin Reservoir at 9:00 a.m.

January 21, 2012 Field Trip: Lorain Harbor and Avon Lake Power Plant

By **Sally Fox**

The weather was frightful, but the birds were delightful for our outing. Snow had fallen through the night and a cold stiff wind was blowing off the lake, but that did not deter a few hardy souls led by John Pogacnik.

We were greeted by an estimated 30,000 gulls in the Lorain Harbor. Interspersed in this mass of ring-billed gulls were herring, greater black-backed and lesser black-backed gulls. Because of John's sharp eye and expertise, he found two hybrid-mixed great black-backed x herring gulls and one glaucous gull in that mass of birds.

At one point an immature bald eagle soared over causing all the gulls to take flight, which was quite an amazing sight. A small flock of Bonaparte's gulls were seen in the small basin on the east side of the river. In addition, our group was astounded by the thousands of red-breasted and common mergansers congregated in the Black River and harbor areas. None of us had ever seen so many common mergansers in one spot!

After spending some time at the harbor, we moved on to the Avon Lake Power Plant where we found a female wood duck and a ruddy duck. The eye-watering winds shortened our visit so we parted ways.

Harriett Alger and Dick Lee went to the Lorain County Airport and saw red-tailed hawk and American kestrel. Tammy Martin, Barb Knapp and I went to the Backpacker's Shop to check out their feeders. We saw European starling, dark-eyed junco, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, tufted titmouse, American goldfinch, northern cardinal, blue jay, American robin, house finch, American tree sparrow, white-throated sparrow, and house sparrow.

Heading back to Vermilion, we added mallard, lesser scaup, redhead, American black duck, common goldeneye, pied-billed grebe, American coot, Canada goose, hooded merganser, and great blue heron.

We were rewarded with some great looks at some interesting and unusual birds. What a great way to spend a blustery winter day.

A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

Sandhill cranes are remarkable birds. I've enjoyed watching the trials and tribulations of a female at Sandy Ridge Reservation. The first couple of years it was all she could do to attract a mate. Then it seemed as if neither one knew exactly how to get along with the other. After a couple



of years they seemed to be progressing – building a nest, laying eggs, and incubating. But again, no chicks.

I have visited Nebraska in March to watch the spring migration. Nebraska is a stopping point on the migration route, and cranes can be seen feeding and dancing in the fields for miles around. I even saw a whooping crane among them! Thousands of birds standing in the middle of the Platte River at sunset is quite a sight. The conventional wisdom is that the cranes feel safer from predators if they huddle together in the middle of the river.

Recently I have watched a fall migration of the cranes at a wildlife area in Indiana. For two hours, flocks of cranes kept arriving to fill a large meadow. They came from all directions after feeding all day in nearby harvested-fields. I could hear their croaking when they were still just a black line in the distant sky. By sunset there were thousands of birds croaking all at once as the green meadow gradually took on the appearance of a giant gray blob of birds. I marveled at how quickly silence reigned as the sun went down and the birds slept. It was a truly amazing sight.

OUTSTANDING SPEAKER SERIES

Saturday, April 21, 2:30pm

Carlisle Visitor Center

The Black River Audubon Society and Lorain County Metro Parks are proud to sponsor the 2012 *Outstanding Speaker Series* featuring **Dr. Bridget Stutchbury** of York University. Since the 1980s, Dr. Stutchbury has studied behind-the-scenes details of the social lives of birds to understand why females cheat on their mates, what makes a male attractive, why some pairs divorce, how birds claim a territory, and what all this means, not only for our avian friends, but for us as well. She will also talk about geo-locator tracking of purple martins and wood thrushes, and what this has revealed about their amazing migration to Central and South America. Dr. Stutchbury has authored two books, *Silence of the Songbirds* (2007) and *The Private Lives of Birds* (2010), the latter the basis for this lecture. This lecture is free and open to all.

Getting Ready For Bluebirds

Biographical Note: The following information has been adapted from the experiences of Bob Luttmer of Versailles, Darke County, Ohio. He is an avid bluebird fan, a longtime member of the Ohio Bluebird Society, and has 350 bluebird boxes ranging over 60 square miles. Bob and his volunteers raised 1,215 bluebirds, 580 tree swallows, 298 house wrens, and 115 black capped chickadees during the summer of 2011.

By **Cathy Priebe** and **Bob Luttmer**

Spring is almost upon us and now is the time to get your bluebird nest boxes ready for occupancy! If you already have a bluebird box or trail, this information will be a nice refresher. If you are considering inviting bluebirds on your property, here are some great tips to make your experience more successful for you and your birds.

The most important factor you need to consider before putting up a bluebird trail is location, location, location! Make sure you have an open field area with a fence line that has small trees and shrubbery for perching, nest building materials and catching bugs. Do not place the box above bushes or tall grass. This will make it an easy target for predators. Also, place the opening of the box looking out toward the open area. This makes it easy for the birds to fly in and out. If you are not installing a bluebird trail, consider putting up at least two boxes. Good birds such as house wrens, tree swallows and chickadees also like boxes and they can opt to nest in the extra box.

Try to think like a bluebird. First, where is the food? Bluebirds like berries, especially mulberry, so you

should consider having fruit-bearing shrubs or trees within a two acre circle of land. If you cannot find the right location in your back yard or nearby, some cemeteries and golf courses are ideal areas for a bluebird trail and they may be open to the idea. Ask them!

Secondly, what predators are in the area? Raccoons, snakes, cats, dogs and yes, the common house sparrow are all enemies that need to be considered. Farms with livestock and other animals tend to have feed that attract house sparrows, so try to locate your boxes away from places, such as birdfeeders, that sparrows frequent. Since this may not be possible, you will have to remove or deter these pests from your boxes. Grease the poles for raccoons and snakes and simply remove sparrow nests as often as necessary. Sparrow traps are available for the serious bluebird caretaker.

And lastly, once you have your bluebird nest, monitor your trail. Sometimes your tenants will need a helping hand. Removing unwanted ants, flies etc. may be necessary for the young to survive. And don't worry if you have to touch the babies. The parents will not reject them.

If your first attempt does not attract bluebirds, but you are able to attract tree swallows or other beneficial birds, don't worry - the bluebirds will soon follow. Add another box or two and see what happens. Be flexible, you may have to find another location if you are unsuccessful after numerous attempts. Sometimes it takes perseverance and TLC, but if you build it, they will come!! Eventually!

For more in depth information on bluebirds, contact the Ohio Bluebird Society at info@ohiobluebirdsociety.org. If you are interested in volunteering to monitor an already established local bluebird trail, call 440-322-0820 or log onto www.blackriveraudubon.org.

GREAT GRAY OWL *Strix nebulosa*

By **Harry Spencer**

According to Roger Tory Peterson, the great gray owl is our largest North American owl. It is round headed with a strongly lined facial disk that dwarfs yellow eyes. Note the white mustaches. To photograph the bird shown here, Dane Adams drove to Kingsville, Ontario, where the rare visit of the species so far south had been widely reported on the internet. This species reportedly was seen once in our area during the nineteenth century.



GREAT GRAY OWL
DANE ADAMS