

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

May 2009



Editors: Jack Smith and Harry Spencer
Photographer: John Koscinski
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel



Yellow Warbler/William Bofinger

Vermilion's Eagles

Bud Ennis

Tuesday, May 5, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Bud Ennis is a Vermilion resident and nature lover. His intense interest in eagles was spurred when a pair nested in his backyard. He has since spent considerable time observing and photographing them and is involved with the Eagle Monitoring Program

Field Trip

Magee Marsh, Ottawa NWR

Saturday, May 2, 9 a.m.

Meet at West end of boardwalk

March Field Trip - Reservoirs and Pancakes

Saturday, March 21, 2009

By **Eric Bruder**

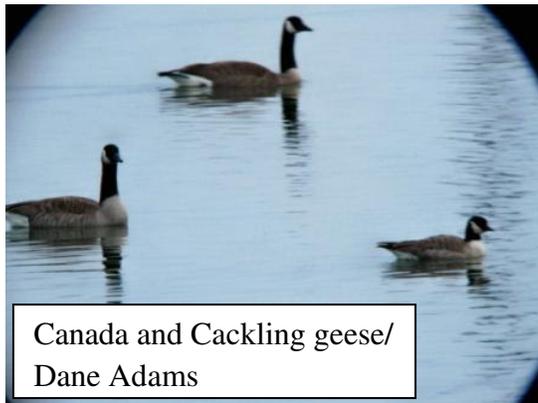


On a very nice, although slightly cool March day, eighteen birders took to the reservoirs and fields in search of birds. The day's activities started at Oberlin Reservoir with many birders arriving early before the scheduled start time. The crew included

Dane Adams, Jen and Ken Austin, Marty Ackermann, Ann, Dale, and Doug Cary, Sandra Jewell, Mike and Sue Kapcoe, Dick Lee, Nan Miller, Jack Smith, Mike Smith, Jean Sorton, Harry Spencer, Joann Wagner, and the author.

Highlight birds from the Oberlin Reservoir included hooded mergansers, ringed-neck ducks, redheads, buffleheads, northern shovelers, and numerous horned grebes in various stages of molt between winter plumage and breeding plumage. The group was also treated to a fly-by of a belted kingfisher with its

Oberlin Reservoir birders/H. Spencer



Canada and Cackling geese/
Dane Adams

rattling call and a northern harrier just to the west of reservoir.

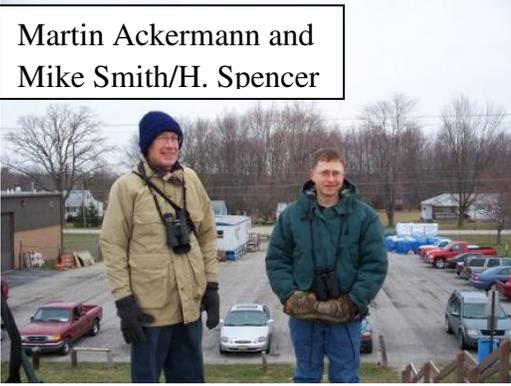
The group then caravanned to Caley Reservation. Several members searched for the long-eared owl but only found whitewash and pellets under the favorite roosting tree. We were rewarded with nice looks at an eastern meadowlark and an American kestrel briefly sharing the same tree by the ponds.

The next stop was Wellington Reservoir. The cackling goose spotted earlier in the morning by Dane Adams was no longer present. Dane captured a nice digiscoped photo clearly showing the size difference between a cackling goose and the larger Canada goose. The highlight bird was a red-necked grebe that was viewed by all the birders present. There were also numerous redheads and canvasbacks on the reservoir.



Red-necked grebe/Dane Adams

Martin Ackermann and
Mike Smith/H. Spencer



Sandra Jewell/H. Spencer



Dale Cary/
H. Spencer

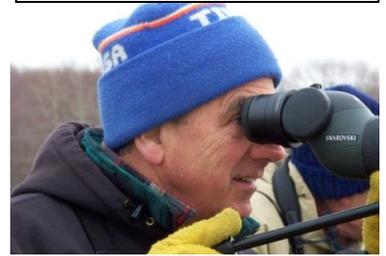


By now it was nearing 11:30 and several members left the group to attend to other appointments. Ten birders visited the picnic point at Findley State Park without much success and then ventured on to Chatham for a filling lunch of buckwheat pancakes, sausage links, and hot coffee.

After lunch, five remaining members of the group stopped by Spencer Lake. We were rewarded with a small flock of eastern bluebirds working the trees on the path across the lake and the final bird of the day was a calling ring-necked pheasant.

In total there were fifty species seen for the day. This was pretty good for mid-March. Species not already mentioned were: gadwall, American wigeon, mallard, lesser scaup, common merganser, red-breasted merganser, ruddy duck, pied-billed grebe, great blue heron, wild turkey, turkey vulture, northern harrier, red-tailed hawk, American coot, killdeer, ring-billed gull, rock dove, mourning dove, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, blue jay, American crow, horned lark, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, eastern bluebird, American robin, European starling, song sparrow, dark-eyed junco, northern cardinal, red-winged blackbird, common grackle, American goldfinch, and house sparrow.

Dane Adams/H. Spencer



Secretary's Summary: March 24 Board Meeting

By **Arlene Ryan**

Jack Smith and Arlene will set up the Black River Audubon exhibit at the 2009 Lake Erie Wing Watch. Harriet Alger will be setting up the Black River Audubon power point program.

Harriet gave a brief description of the grant application for Audubon Adventures programs that she has written to Ohio Audubon. A motion was made and passed to submit the grant.

On April 15 the Black River Audubon power point program will be presented to the Rehab Program of Community Health Centers.

Steve Chavez will be meeting with Wendy Miller and Billy Taylor of the Lorain County Boys and Girls Clubs to create programs for children after school.

Some concern has been expressed regarding the success of the young birders program.

Jack Smith suggested asking Norman Smith of the Massachusetts Audubon Society to speak at the next Outstanding Speakers program.

The Lorain Port Authority will be contacted regarding how to organize the June trip on the Black River.

The field trip to the Natural History Museum will be in July on Saturday or Sunday.

A motion was made and passed to give special recognition to Arlene Lengyel in the form of a plaque or framed tribute.

Several people were chosen to be on the nominating committee.

The next board meeting will be at the home of Jack Smith on April 28.

Nancy's Florida Journal

By Nancy Shipman

Waters of Florida



Florida has the Atlantic Ocean on the east, the Gulf of Mexico on the west and here, in North Central Florida, we have springs. These fresh water springs are numerous and vary in size and historic importance.

One of the most popular is Ichetucknee Springs which is just 12 miles from our winter home. In 1972 the US Department of Interior declared Ichetucknee Head Spring a *National Natural Landmark*. This water spring, in combination with six minor springs, creates a daily average flow of 233 million gallons of fresh water to form the Ichetucknee River. This year-round, 72 degree crystal-clear river travels six miles at a rate of one-mile-per-hour before emptying into the Santa Fe River. Historically this area has been home to Paleo Indians from 10,000-8,000 BC, Indians of the Weedon Island culture, 1000-1200 AD, the Spaniards and Timucuan Indians in 1600. Fossilized remains of mastodon, mammoth, saber-toothed cat and tapir have been found in the area. Now it is best known as a summer tubing spot. In season, the park has to limit usage to 4000 persons per day on the river.

We took advantage of the off season with a leisurely morning canoe float down the river. The scenery was spectacular. We saw great blue heron, American coot, wood duck, kingfisher, red-shouldered hawk, red-bellied woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, great egret, anhinga, blue-gray gnatcatcher, and turkey vulture. We heard northern parula warbler, red-eyed vireo, tufted titmouse and great crested flycatcher. The highlight of the trip was the limpkin that posed in plain view for us. These are an endangered species and there are two breeding pairs in the park. Since we didn't leave at the crack of dawn, we missed the otters and beaver that live in the river.

We will soon be heading north to enjoy our second spring. See ya'll then.

A Birder's Diary

By Carol Leininger



The call of the wild west is still strong with me after numerous visits. I can't explain why birding on the other side of the Mississippi River holds such appeal. I suppose it's just that the birds are not ones that I see and live with every day of my life. There are so many marvelous visual memories I can still see as if they happened just yesterday:

- A gilded flicker pops its head out of a hole in a saguaro cactus.
- A little brown dipper hops over rocks in a clear mountain stream, then suddenly jumps into the water completely immersing itself when it sees an interesting insect.
- A majestic golden eagle sits atop a cliff along the road, its posture says "I am the ruler of all I survey."
- A line of eight white pelicans glides over a lake just a couple feet above the water surface on a very misty morning as the sun tries to break through.

- In the grassy foothills of the Front Range a long-billed curlew wanders about amongst McCown's and chestnut-collared longspurs.
- Red-necked grebes dance over the water's surface in a North Dakota wetland.
- A spotted towhee with beautiful white field marks sings the song of an eastern towhee. Which is it? Hybrids abound.
- A white-headed woodpecker searches for insects in a recently burned and blackened woods in Oregon.
- A pronghorn antelope tries to outrun the approaching thunder, lightning, and dark clouds of a storm.
- A Say's phoebe nesting in an old abandoned barn in the midst of big sky country suns itself on a rusty old farm implement.
- A scissor-tailed flycatcher sits on a barbed wire fence with miles of open farmland as far as the eye can see.
- A group of noisy yellow-headed blackbirds feed among the grasses of a roadside wetland.
- The iridescent colors of a violet-green swallow sparkle as it flits about in the sun off the edge of a mesa.
- Near massive Devil's Tower many prairie dogs stand guard at their burrows and bark.
- A clay-colored sparrow sits on a branch at eye level within arms' reach and sings and sings. I stand and enjoy the concert.

259 Species identified by BRAS members

Since our first checklist in October 2005, Black River Audubon members have identified 259 species of birds, two-thirds of all Ohio species recorded on eBird. These identifications are recorded in the 2687 checklists posted on our eBird site. Of all contributors to eBird, none have recorded as many checklists of Ohio birds..

Advice for Checklist Contributors

From eBird.org, April 10, 2009

The trouble with 'X' — Why you should always estimate numbers!

Over the years at eBird we have always been flexible about allowing users to report either number of each species, or to provide an 'X' to indicate presence. In our latest round of analysis, however, we found that checklists where users estimated numbers for all species encountered were of significantly higher conservation value when compared with those that contain 'Xs', or even a single 'X' mixed in with numbers. In this piece we'll talk about why recording numbers is important, as well as provide some guidance as to how to estimate numbers in difficult situations. Read more about why making your best estimate of numbers always trumps the dreaded 'X'. (Follow the links at eBird.org to find the article described.)

Decline of Biodiversity

(Excerpted from *The Creation* by E. O. Wilson, W. W. Norton Co., NY, 2006)

The decline of Earth's biodiversity is an unintended consequence of multiple factors that have been enhanced by human activity. They can be summarized by the acronym **HIPPO**, with the order of letters corresponding to their rank in destructiveness.

- **H** habitat loss, including that caused by human-induced climate change
- **I** invasive species (harmful aliens, including predators, disease organisms, and dominant competitors that displace natives)
- **P** pollution
- **P** human overpopulation, a root cause of the other four factors
- **O** overharvesting (hunting, fishing, gathering)



What is the identity of this bird hiding in the grass?

Answer at end of article.

The Endangered Beekeeper

By **Jack Smith**



My introduction into beekeeping came as a teenager at the beginning of World War II. Because of the drastic shortage and consequent rationing of sugar, Dad decided to substitute honey for sugar. He bought three colonies of bees and designated my brother Tom and me as beekeepers. Both of us enthusiastically supported our new adventure by assembling equipment and studying the necessities of a beekeeper. It was a fascinating experience

Two years later the State Beekeeper, Harry Vanderberg, inspected our three colonies and immediately burned them because they were infected with American Foulbrood, a deadly bacterial disease that would eventually destroy the colonies. The bacteria produce spores that get into the wax and the hive-bodies and survive for decades. Eventually antibiotics controlled the disease, but now the bacteria have become resistant to antibiotics, and the disease is on the rise again.

The honey bee, *Apis mellifera*, is not a native species in the Americas. It was introduced when colonists brought hives with them as a life-giving source of food. Contrary to many other introduced species, the honey bee proved to be extremely beneficial in its ability to become a main pollinator of many fruits and vegetables, such as apples, pears, peaches, almonds, squash, pumpkins, and blueberries. The honey bee proved more effective as a pollinator than moths, humming birds, mason bees, and bumble bees. Some such as mason bees are individually more efficient but are few in number and could not compete with the tens of thousands of honey bees found in each colony. The numbers of native pollinators were reduced by the monocultural agriculture introduced by the early settlers.

Shortages of bees in some areas of China led to platoons of people using little brushes to pollinate apple

blossoms.

The pollinations by bees affect birds through the birds' dependence upon fruit and other plant food for survival. I give a personal example to illustrate the interdependence of species of plants and animals. In the spring time when the three crab apple trees in my front yard blossom, honey bees, probably mostly from my back-yard colonies, swarm over the flowers. In the fall and winter, these trees are loaded with fruit, and cedar waxwings eat them, especially in early spring.

This pollination by bees is under siege now, because of decimation of the number of colonies. This current number is less than half of the 1949 value. Many beekeepers are leaving the business either voluntarily or by bankruptcy.

The siege has several causes. Invasive species of mites (Trachea and Varough mites) have wiped out the feral colonies from our woodlands. Expensive chemicals must be applied to colonies, and, in time, the toxic chemicals contaminate the wax. Another invasive species, the small hive beetle, can devastate a weakened colony as well as the hives' essential frames and equipment.

Many commercial beekeepers rent their colonies to orchard growers, such as almond growers, and to other farmers whose crops require pollination. Chemical sprays used by the growers and farmers can kill the bees, and a beekeeper must remove colonies before this spraying. Moving can adversely affect the health of the colonies.

Bee colonies are subject to other diseases, such as the protozoan noseema, which causes severe dysentery, and a myriad of viral diseases.

This year I lost one out of four colonies. When I opened the colony on a warm day a few weeks ago, the bees were conspicuously absent. I believe that my loss was caused by the Colony Collapse Disorder, which has been reported by many beekeepers over the last couple of years. The cause of this ailment is unknown, but may be a combination of several problems including those mentioned here.

A Blue Jay has compounded my beekeeping problems. He sits on a fence near my hives and waits for bees to land at the front of a hive, at which time he swoops down, grabs a bee with his beak, carries the unfortunate creature to a nearby fence rail, smashes, and eats the bee.



White-winged crossbill/Dane Adams

Birding by Tram

By **Harriet Alger**

With the cooperation of Tim Fairweather and Lorain County Metro Parks, Black River Audubon will again offer birding by tram this spring at Sandy Ridge at 9 am on the following dates: April 30, May 14 and 28 and June 11 and 25.

These trips are designed for experienced and beginning birders who are not able to walk the trail. This includes birders who are able to leave the tram at stops to find and ID birds and those who must remain seated and bird only from the tram. Unlike regular tram rides, the tram moves slowly and stops whenever birds are heard or seen to allow use of binoculars and scopes. As with bird hikes, it takes about 1 and 1/2 hours per trip around the trail.

The tram will either be driven by Tim, Josh, or a volunteer. BRAS members who are walkers are welcome to

accompany the tram on foot to help find and ID birds for those on the tram. Since the tram has seats for only seven participants plus driver, please call or email Harriet Alger at 440-246-2853 or algerha@roadrunner.com to reserve a seat.

Summer Activities

Details and changes listed on our web site: blackriveraudubon.org

June Field Trip

Black River Boating Tour

Summer Hike

Saturday, July 18, 9 a.m.

Columbia Reservation

Summer Hike

Saturday, August 15, 9 a.m.

Indian Hollow Reservation

Lunch at a Grafton restaurant

Summer Hikes

Young Birder Hikes

Second Saturday of month

Details in LCMP *Arrowhead*

Summer edition of **WINGTIPS** online

Link at blackriveraudubon.org

Birds and Smelly Chemicals

Based on *Chemistry is for the Birds-5* by Dwight Chasar in *Isotopics* March 2009, American Chemical Society Cleveland Section

By **Harry Spencer**



Humans experience strong and unpleasant smells induced by many sulfur-containing chemicals. The smell of rotten eggs is due to the gas hydrogen sulfide, and many near relatives of hydrogen sulfide are similarly smelly..

Most birds, however, possess a very poor sense of smell, but two examples of species that have evolved dependence upon smells of particular sulfur-containing chemicals for survival skills are Turkey Vulture and Antarctic Prions.. Turkey Vultures find edible carrion by detecting the smell of ethyl mercaptan emitted by decaying flesh. Antarctic Prions, a petrel of the Southern Ocean, navigates back to nesting sites by smelling dimethyl sulfide emitted by photoplankton that inhabit certain ocean locations (*Biology Letters*, [2005] 1:303).

Hiding bird: Wilson's snipe.