

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

November 2010



## Program

Tuesday, November 2, 7:00 p.m.  
Visitor Center, Carlisle Reservation

## Wildlife in an Urbanizing World: The Cuyahoga Valley as a Case Study

**Professor Gregory A. Smith**

Department of Biology, University of Akron

Professor Smith is a wildlife ecologist with degrees in zoology and biology, and studies birds and mammals to investigate how and why populations and communities are structured across space and time. He is interested in patterns of biodiversity and how that diversity might be explained and preserved. He has conducted research on species as varied as American kestrels, red-cockaded woodpeckers, black-tailed prairie dogs, and coyotes.

## Field Trip

Saturday, November 20, 9a.m.  
Wellington Reservation

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

## Help secure the future of Black River Audubon Society with a planned gift!

By **Jack Smith** and **Steve Chavez**

A few weeks ago one of us (JS) received a call from a friend and long-time active member of Black River Audubon Society. He wanted the taxpayer identification number of the Black River Audubon Society, an Ohio nonprofit organization.

The caller was in the process of drawing up his last will and testament in which he and his wife planned to give a percentage of their estate to the Black River Audubon Society after they both had passed away. Both he and his wife believed that the Black River Audubon Society has been doing a great job over the years in fulfilling its mission and that with additional financial support would accomplish even more in future years.

Several years ago the Black River Audubon Society unanimously voted to set aside all bequests, endowments, and other planned gifts in various available trusts in which nothing but the income generated would be used for support of the organization or designated programs. Benefactors thus would leave this world with a feeling that they made a gift that keeps on giving in perpetuity.

Planned giving is for everyone; all ages and budgets. Gifts can be in the form of cash, stock, mutual funds, bonds, or IRAs.

Charitable giving through a planned gift to the Black River Audubon Society helps make sure that its mission to conserve habitats for wildlife and educate the public about birds will continue to thrive. No gift is too small and every gift is welcome.



### Birds identified at Sandy Ridge: September 18 Field Trip



**Lincoln's sparrow/Dane Adams**

crow, northern rough-winged swallow, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, American robin, gray catbird, European starling.

Nashville warbler, palm warbler, song sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow, swamp sparrow, northern cardinal, indigo bunting, red-winged blackbird, American goldfinch, house sparrow.

Canada goose, wood duck, American wigeon, mallard, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, green-winged teal, pied-billed grebe, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, green heron.

Bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, red-shouldered hawk, semipalmated plover, killdeer, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, semipalmated sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, stilt sandpiper.

Mourning dove, yellow-billed cuckoo, chimney swift, belted kingfisher; red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, northern flicker.

Eastern wood-pewee, blue jay, American

## A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

I often recall my experience at an ornithology camp at Hog Island in Maine. It was sponsored by the National Audubon Society and the several teachers were extremely knowledgeable. I slept in a large dorm called the Crow's Nest where I listened every day at dawn and dusk to the calls of common loons out on the bay. I thought they sounded so sad, but listening to them is my favorite memory.



In later years I learned a great deal more about common loons. They tend to nest on floating vegetation on quiet lakes with lots of fish to feed the young. Such lakes are found in eastern Canada, the Adirondack region of New York State, and New England. The loons now have serious problems and their populations are declining.

Quiet lakes don't exist anymore in many places in the United States. People love to fish, swim, camp, boat, and water ski everywhere, and the least disturbance from any of these activities can scare an adult loon off the nest and discourage incubation. The birds do like their solitude. Also, lakes with lots of fish are not as common anymore, either. Cities, factories, especially steel mills throughout the Midwest have released large quantities of sulfur from burning coal into the air. This sulfur-laden air is often swept eastward into New York and New England producing acid rain that falls on lakes and forests. Trees die. Lakes begin to turn acidic and many fish die, forcing adult loons to travel great distances to find food for themselves and their young.

This is a sad story about loons, but all of us need to be aware of the problems loons face. I hope that an educated public will take action to save these beautiful birds.

## A November Birding Guide

By **Harry Spencer**

Anyone birding in our area during November 2010, should profit by the following list that provides guidance about expected bird species with an estimate of the likelihood of encountering each species. The list is based upon our birding during November 2009. During that month Black River Audubon members recorded on eBird 76 checklists containing 86 species. Numbers indicate the percentage of checklists in which the species were recorded.



Canada goose 63, mute swan 1, trumpeter swan 1, tundra swan 1, wood duck 16, gadwall 12, American wigeon 14, American black duck 12, mallard 70, northern shoveler 18, northern pintail 22, green-winged teal 17, redhead 1, ring-necked duck 17, lesser scaup 1, surf scoter 1, bufflehead 3, hooded merganser 11, red-breasted merganser 3, ruddy duck 20, common loon 3, pied-billed grebe 25, double-crested cormorant 4, great blue heron 11.

Bald eagle 11, Cooper's hawk 7, red-shouldered hawk 11, red-tailed hawk 34, American kestrel 1, merlin 1, peregrine falcon 4, American coot 22, killdeer 3, Bonaparte's gull 7, ring-billed gull 61, herring gull 18, lesser black-backed gull 3, great black-backed gull 4, rock pigeon 12, mourning dove 20.

Great horned owl 1, barred owl 1, belted kingfisher 20, red-headed woodpecker 25, downy woodpecker 64, hairy woodpecker 18, northern flicker 30, pileated woodpecker 5, eastern phoebe 1, blue jay 83, American crow 58, black-capped chickadee 76, tufted titmouse 53, red breasted nuthatch 3, white-breasted nuthatch 72, brown creeper 4, Carolina wren 12, winter wren 1, marsh wren 1, golden-crowned kinglet 11.

Eastern bluebird 58, hermit thrush 1, American robin 57, European starling 61, cedar waxwing 9, yellow-rumped warbler 12, eastern towhee 4, American tree sparrow 36, song sparrow 30, swamp sparrow 11, white-throated sparrow 17, white-crowned sparrow 5, dark-eyed junco 38.

Northern cardinal 71, rose-breasted grosbeak 1, red-winged blackbird 8, eastern meadowlark 1, rusty blackbird 4, common grackle 3, brown-headed cowbird 3, purple finch 5, House finch 14, American goldfinch 78, evening grosbeak 1, house sparrow 51.

## Environmental Education Materials Available

By **Dick Lee**

For many years the Black River Audubon Society has encouraged and supported environmental education for the young people in our community by purchasing Audubon Adventures kits to be used by teachers, naturalists and homeschoolers. Audubon Adventures was developed by professional environmental educators for children in grades 3-6. The program presents basic scientifically accurate facts about birds, wildlife and their habitats. The goal of Audubon Adventures is to develop in young people an appreciation, awareness, and understanding of the natural world in which we live. The program is packaged as a classroom kit (serving 32 students) or individual kit (serving one student). The theme of the 2010-2011 school year is ‘**Wildlife on the Move**’, which focuses on migration of **birds, monarchs and dragonflies, whales, and sea turtles**. Included in each unit are student handouts, background information for the teacher, hands-on activities for both inside and outside. The kit also includes *Nature Journaling for Everyone*, a guide with helpful information, advice and techniques for starting and keeping a nature journal. The kit has a chart which shows how the content meets national and state standards.



If you are an educator and desire to participate in the Audubon Adventures program and receive the free teaching materials or if you have any questions about the program, please contact Dick Lee, leedck@windstream.net.

## Bring a friend to a meeting!

By **Bernie Pluchinsky**

Share with others our splendid programs and activities featuring not only birds but conservation and the ecosystem. Join in spreading the news.



## Audubon Camp Scholarship Available

By **Dick Lee**

Part of the mission of Black River Audubon Society is to educate others about conservation of our natural resources. To accomplish this mission the chapter has annually awarded scholarships to educators and naturalists to enhance their knowledge and skills at the Maine Audubon Camp at Hog Island. The camper spends one week off the coast of Maine learning from some of the most respected naturalists and environmental educators in the nation.



Hog Island campers love its natural setting and rustic 19<sup>th</sup>-century buildings. Campers stay in rooms with twin beds, or a dormitory. Delicious meals are served family style in a communal dining room.

Past scholarship recipients include both secondary and elementary teachers, naturalists and individuals who just want to improve their knowledge and skills in teaching others in the community about conservation and restoration of ecosystems.

The 2011 summer schedule includes **Joy of Birding** (June 12-17) and **Sharing Nature-An Educator's Week** (July 14-19).

The scholarship pays tuition and fees plus room and board. The recipient pays transportation costs.  
Anyone needing more information or interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Dick Lee at 440-322-7449 or leedck@windsream.net.



Northern shoveler/ John Koscinski

American Wigeon/ John Koscinski



## Approximate flightless periods for some ducks

The X's and Y's indicate flightless periods. Adapted from Fish and Wildlife Leaflet 13.4.4, 1990

	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	
AMERICAN	YYYYYYYYY				MALE
BLACK DUCK		XXXXXXXXXXX			FEMALE
AMERICAN		YYYYYYYYY			MALE
WIGEON		XXXXXXXXXXX			FEMALE
LESSER		YYYYYYYYY			MALE
SCAUP		XXXXXXXXXXX			FEMALE
MALLARD	YYYYYYYYY				MALE
		XXXXXXXXXXX			FEMALE
NORTHERN	YYYYYYYYY				MALE
SHOVELER		XXXXXXXXXXX			FEMALE
WOOD	YYYYYYYYY				MALE
DUCK		XXXXXXXXXXX			FEMALE

## The Eclipse Plumage of Ducks

By **Jack Smith**

The above photographs taken by John Koscinski vividly portray American wigeon and northern shoveler ducks in eclipse plumages. Eclipse plumage is a term used to describe the duller female-like plumage into which most male ducks molt during post-breeding periods of the summer months. In that molting process the birds lose all their flight and tail feathers. During the preceding year, ordinary activity, such as flying and foraging, physically wore away part of the feathers. For the bird's survival those feather must be replaced, first by the eclipse plumage and later in the fall by their breeding plumage.



The above chart illustrates the flightless periods for several duck species.

I illustrate this complex process of molting and plumage formation with some details for northern shovelers. Like most ducks, female shovelers select and construct the nests as well as do all the incubation. Unlike most ducks, male shovelers remain with the female at least through part of the incubation period. When the males depart they fly to remote wetland areas, sometimes hundreds of miles away. There they go through the post-breeding molting cycle ending with eclipse plumage. This process takes three to five weeks between mid June and mid August. The males are flightless during the process so they seek areas of the wetlands that have ample food and protective cover against airborne and land predators. Perhaps the female-like feathers protect against becoming someone's dinner.

Females, after supervising precocious young during the days after hatching, generally choose wetland areas

near the nesting sites for molting.

Dry waterfowl feathers are close to 86% protein and represent a great percentage of the bird's total protein. To replace all these feathers demands an environment with adequate food sources rich in amino acids needed for protein synthesis. One such amino acid is cystine that is important for the production of keratin, a main ingredient of feathers.

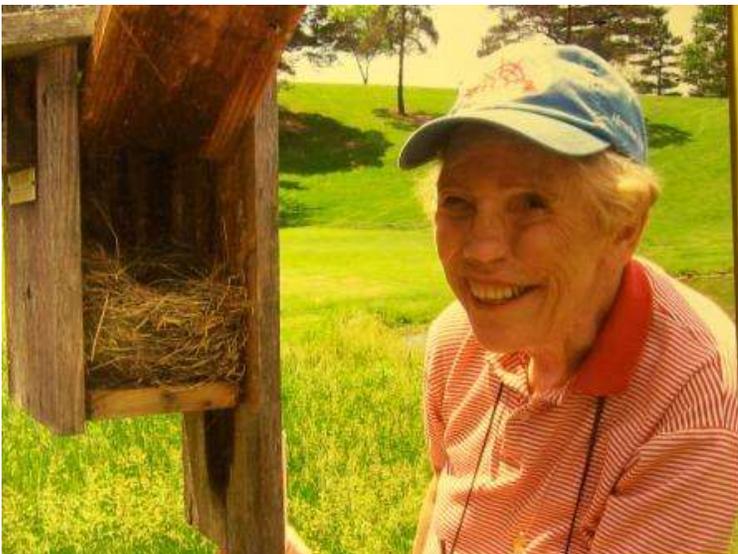
During this flightless period, wetlands that provide both cover and food are the most important and ideal habitats for these birds. An adequate number of wetlands, rich in cover and food, must be maintained, if duck population numbers are to be maintained. Sometimes human intervention by wetland maintenance, such as water level control, helps greatly in providing better foods, such as vertebrates and appropriate plant life. In contrast, those wetlands that have been overwhelmed by invasive species such as phragmites, purple loosestrife, and narrow-leaved cattail have been destroyed as food sources for waterfowl and other birds. Control of these invasive species is critical for maintenance of healthy wetlands.

Northern shovelers nest in the northern latitudes of Canada and the United States, including some areas of the western Lake Erie region. For the most part shovelers spend winter months in southern United States, although they winter in a few places in Ohio, one of which is Castalia Pond.

#### Additional note: **A Bird with an Unusual Beak**

Northern shovelers can be quickly identified by their big shovel-like beaks that they use in a unique way in shallow waters in ponds and streams. At Castalia Pond the shovelers often feed in the shallow areas. The birds push forward moving their bills from side to side through the surface water layer. The bills have comb-like teeth called lamellae, lining both edges of the upper and lower mandibles. With this equipment the birds are able to filter out tiny invertebrates and microorganisms and discard the unwanted mucky mess. Also the tongue and the roof of the bills have very sensitive nerve endings. These specialized spatula-like beaks enable these birds to fill a special niche among other ducks and geese.

**References:** *Sibley Guide to Birds* by David Allen Sibley; *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *Birds of North America* by National Geographic; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; *The Northern Shoveler* by Spike Knuth, Internet; *Habitat Management for Molting Waterfowl* by James K. Ringelman, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Internet



### **Clara Corozin**

This long-time Black River Audubon member and Bluebird-Trail Pioneer was photographed by Kate Pilacky at a BRAS bluebird nesting box located at the Forest Hill Golf course, August 2010.



H. Spencer