

**Black River Audubon Society**

# **WINGTIPS**

November 2011



Editors: Jack Smith, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe

Photographer: John Koscinski

Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

## **Program**

Tuesday, November 1, 2011, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

**Cynthia Druckenbrod**

Director of Horticulture and Conservation

Cleveland Botanical Gardens

### **Friends or Foes**

**Cynthia Druckenbrod** is responsible for overseeing 10 acres of outdoor gardens and the plants and animals in The Eleanor Armstrong Smith Glasshouse. She was primarily responsible for planning and determining which plants and animals would inhabit the spiny desert and cloud forest biomes in the Glasshouse. Previously, Cynthia served as the director of the Day Butterfly Center at Callaway Gardens in Atlanta, Georgia, and, before that, worked at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo as an entomologist and managed the daily operations of the tropical Butterfly Garden. She has a BS in biology from Case Western Reserve University and an MS in entomology from Auburn University. She is an internationally recognized expert on the praying mantis and received the J. Paul Visscher Memorial Award of the Cleveland Audubon Society for Outstanding Ability and Promise in the Field of Conservation in 1992.

### **Abstract**

The talk will open your eyes to the seen and unseen world of insects in our gardens. It will showcase some of the interesting behaviors of insects that go on right in our front yards without our knowing it! The talk will also dispel common myths of good bugs vs bad bugs.

## **Field Trip**

Saturday, November 19, 2011

**Sheldon Marsh** at 9:00 a.m.

We will trail through old field, hardwood forest, woodland swamp, cattail marsh, and end at the barrier sand beach area of Lake Erie. Excellent bird watching is predicted! Directions: Located in Erie County, approximately 2 miles west of Huron on U.S. Route 6. Use the Rye Beach Road exit from SR 2 and go west approximately 0.5 mile to the preserve entrance.

## **Add to your Calendar!**

**Saturday, December 17, 2011**

**Elyria Christmas Bird Count**

**Wednesday, December 28, 2011**

**Wellington Christmas Bird Count**

Christmas Bird Counts are enjoyed by beginning and experienced birders as well as potential birders. New birders are accompanied by experienced birders. Most observations are made while riding, but walking is an option at several sites. Participants can spend an hour, two hours, half a day, or more as desired. At the end of the day we meet at central locations to compare observations and to socialize.

More details will be given at the November and December meetings. Or call 440-322-0820, or log onto [www.blackriveraudubon.org](http://www.blackriveraudubon.org).

## A Birder's Diary

By Carol Leininger

*Butternut Lodge:* For several years it was a tradition for Black River Audubon Society to spend a fall weekend there. Butternut Lodge was located within the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge and consisted of two large cabins with beds (one for men, one for women) and a nice lodge with kitchen attached. Unfortunately this spot no longer exists except in the minds of some of our older members.



About thirty members would arrive Friday evening for a snack before settling in. We brought all the groceries needed for the entire weekend. A KP duty roster was posted in the kitchen for meals. Our schedule usually consisted of 1) breakfast 2) hike the dikes 3) lunch (cold buffet) 4) hike some more) 5) dinner followed by a talk by the refuge naturalist and a snack.

Some things about those weekends I will never forget-

Trying to sleep with a thousand Canada geese outside our cabin honking all night.

Hiking so many miles on dikes that I thought we'd never find our way back.

Being the first out of the cabin in the morning to catch sight of a sora at dawn before it could run off into the woods.

Finally reaching a dike along the lakefront (boundary of the refuge) only to find a couple of hunters sitting surrounded by decoys. We looked at them. They looked at us.

Getting bitten by a wasp that crawled up inside my pants during the naturalist's talk.

And last, but not least, every time we packed our cars to leave on Sunday afternoon, as we were about to drive off, a bald eagle would circle over the cabins.

## One Nighthawk over Peak

By Jeannie B. Williams

My desire to see again a common nighthawk in migration has been on my mind recently.

On my birding websites the chatter has renewed my interest in these lovely nightjars that used to roost on the middle school across the street before relocating elsewhere. I enjoyed their "peent-peent" tinkling that broke the evening silence as they fluttered while hunting insects.

Between showers of one September day, after several days of indoor-entrainment, I headed to Peak Nature Preserve with its 98 acres of marsh, ponds, soybean fields and walking paths.

As I approached the marsh area with its three small ponds, I felt as if I were entering Alfred Hitchcock's movie *The Birds!* Fifty to one hundred swallows swooped overhead. Northern rough-winged, barn, and one cliff swallow zipped past, around, over, and very near me, as they demonstrated to an equal number of chimney swifts how to dip their wings and hit the water. The swifts were excellent mimics, and I found it difficult to distinguish the species.

Nearby a groundhog clumsily tried to climb a dead tree.



On the side of one large north pond, I took pictures of somewhat-faded tickseed sunflowers and golden ragweed. Along the path I photographed a yellow starthistle.

After 90 minutes of enjoying nature, I wondered if any common nighthawks flew above.

Sure enough there was one lone nighthawk. Tears came to my eyes as I bit my lip to choke back the sobs of gratitude as I marveled at the timing.

The nighthawk was twisting and turning, back and forth, over the ponds and soybean field. What a delight for me! The bird was alone in the sky, yet not alone.

He heard me. He sensed my heart's desire. He cares. He delights in delighting me!

The nighthawk dipped its wings allowing me a quick glimpse of its white slash mark on the sharply pointed wings. I watched intently and observed its jerking maneuvers from side to side. Then the bird rose higher and disappeared over an adjoining field.

I will not forget the moment

## Black-throated gray warbler

The first-page photograph of a black-throated gray warbler (*Dendroica nigrescens*), was taken by Greg Pesek on September 25, 2011 at Magee Marsh. The species normally summers in western North America from British Columbia to New Mexico and winters in Mexico and the southwestern United States. The species is an accidental migrant in Northern Ohio.

## The Common Redpoll

(*Carduelis flammea*)

By Jack Smith

John Koscinski has captured a great side view of the common redpoll perched atop a winter skeletal spike of what I believe to be common mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*). This bird is mostly a seed-eater but also takes some insects. Many of the seeds it eats are very small and, if I am correct about its perch, it is sitting on a bonanza of such a seed-producing plant. One plant may produce as many as 180,000 seeds, each less than 1mm. long and 0.5 mm. in diameter.



John Koscinski



In northern states, including Ohio, we see the common redpoll only in the winter and then only sporadically, some years in large numbers and other years almost none. It breeds in the Arctic areas of Canada and Alaska. This bird is extremely well adapted to the severe cold weather of this region, but when food is in short supply, it will migrate (mostly by day) to more southern regions where its food is more plentiful. In the Cleveland area it is considered an irruptive common migrant and winter visitor, appearing and foraging in flocks along with goldfinches and other species in open fallow fields where there is an abundance of seeds. It will also frequent feeders and is known to be very friendly. The average date of arrival is mid-October, and most birds leave by the end of April.

From the photograph you cannot tell easily if this bird is a male or a female. A front view would reveal a pink-to-red breast on the male only. The redpoll is a small finch about 5 to 5 ½ inches in length with a wingspan of 7.5 to 8.7 inches. Like a goldfinch it has the ability to grasp a perch and feed upside down. A special feature of this bird is a pouch in the throat area where it can store food for several hours, allowing it to feed rapidly in open cold areas and then move to sheltered areas to rest and digest food over longer periods of time.

As warmer weather arrives in the spring and days become longer, redpolls begin to migrate by day to northern areas of North America. As shown by banding records, some move from our area as far northwest as Alaska; a few travel to Greenland.

When wintering in our area, the males dominate females, but in their far north breeding grounds females dominate, even to the point of taking the lead in courtship. The areas selected for nest sites are in birch thickets and tundra scrub. Not much of the nesting territory is defended, and nests of other pairs may be close at hand. The nests, believed to be constructed by females, are in dense low shrubs within a few feet of the ground. A nest is a small open cup made of fine twigs, grass, and moss, lined mainly with ptarmigan feathers. A female typically lays 4 to 5 eggs. She incubates the eggs, and the male feeds her. The eggs hatch in 10 to 11 days. The female does most of the feeding of the young, while the contribution of the male for this chore varies. The young fledge 12 days after hatching. Migration then begins in flocks by day with movement only as far south as necessary to find food, primarily seeds. Cold does not bother this hardy little bird as long as the seeds are available.

**References:** *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *The Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* by Roger Tory Peterson; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; *Weeds of the Northern US and Canada* by France Royer and Richard Dickinson; *Wildflowers in Winter* by Carol Levine.

## Dr. Gary Riggs: Wild4Ever Foundation

Carlisle Reservation, Oct. 4, 2011

By Cathy Priebe

“The world of tomorrow depends on the young of heart today” were the opening words of veterinarian Dr. Gary Riggs, founder of Wild4Ever, a foundation dedicated to preserving wildlife locally and around the world.

Riggs enthralled the audience of Black River Audubon members and guests with his wildlife experiences and adventures, while he explained the importance of his mission which began only four short years ago.



“Even though our foundation reaches out globally,” he explained, “most of our work is done locally here in Ohio.” He added that 75 percent of the work is Ohio wildlife conservation with 200 plus cases a year, which include animal surgeries and other medical treatments for birds, mammals and reptiles.

The charitable organization also supports local animal sanctuaries, wildlife rehabilitation centers, and other metro park programs in Summit County and surrounding areas.

“One of our more noteworthy projects is the coyote program,” Riggs said. “We have enlisted area graduate students to help monitor and gather important information on coyotes and their habitats.”

Using tracking devices, the project has been able to study interactions of coyotes with people and pets and also map out their territories. “The population is also very healthy,” he said. “We frequently find that they are killed more by cars than diseases.”

Wild4Ever also sponsors local youth and scholarship programs with schools. “We want to create patterns to last a lifetime and teach our kids about the value of local conservation as well as global conservation,” stressed

Riggs.

For more information about Wild4Ever, log onto [www.wild4ever.com](http://www.wild4ever.com).

## **Dick Wallace Birder, Mentor, Audubon Leader**

**By Carol Leininger**

Before I joined the Black River Audubon Society many years ago, I attended a weekend of birding at Butternut Lodge at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. I met so many wonderful bird watchers, including two brothers, Mel and Dick Wallace. They talked me into joining BRAS.

Soon after joining, I was asked to be on the Board as program chair although I had never attended any of the programs. Both Mel and Dick, both past presidents of BRAS, encouraged and guided me in what became a truly rewarding pursuit for the rest of my life.

Mel passed away many years ago, but I kept in touch with Dick and his wife, Jane. I always enjoyed visiting with Dick and Jane at BRAS and Stocker events over the years. I have missed seeing them the last few years, but I knew they were struggling with major health problems.

Now Dick has passed. I think he can look down and see all 9000 species of birds at anytime he wishes. May he bird in peace.

## **Killing Albatrosses**

From *The Private Lives of Birds* by Bridget Stutchbury, Walker Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 2010, pp 107-108

Tragically, the birds are completely unable to adapt their behaviour to overcome deaths caused by longline fishing. Each boat sets thousands of hooks on lines that are over 30 kilometres long and towed astern. The hooks, each the size of a child's hand, are baited with squid and weighted so the lines are dragged down to depths where swordfish and tuna can be caught. The smell of squid attracts a frenzy of seabirds who land in the churning water immediately behind the boat and try to grab the bait before it disappears below the surface. If its beak is hooked, the bird is pulled under water and drowns, and is retrieved when the fishermen haul up the line the next day.

When a breeding albatross is killed on a longline, there are dire consequences for its offspring and mate. After the egg is laid, the male takes the first turn at incubation and may sit there without food for many days, if not weeks, until the female returns from sea. If she does not come back, the male eventually abandons the egg to save his own life. If an adult drowns, the single young chick slowly starves to death because the remaining mate could not possibly supply enough food by itself. Widowed birds have to return to the mating arenas a year later and start over in the lengthy courtship rituals needed to attract a new mate.

## **Postal addresses and numbers of National members of Black River Audubon Society**

**August 2011**

AMHERST 48, AVON 56, AVON LAKE 51, BAY VILLAGE 1, CLEVELAND 1, COLUMBIA STATION 29, ELYRIA 159, GRAFTON 46, HOMERVILLE 2, LAGRANGE 16, LITCHFIELD 4, LODI 6, LORAIN 65, N. RIDGEVILLE 56, OBERLIN 84, S. AMHERST 5, SHEFFIELD LAKE 16, SHEFFIELD VILLAGE 17, SPENCER 6, STRONGSVILLE 2, VALLEY CITY 16, VERMILION 4, WELLINGTON 35, WESTFIELD CENTER 3, WESTLAKE 1, TOTAL 729

***Just give friends a little push and they too can  
enjoy nature for a long time!***

## **Trumpeter swans of Caley**

By **Harry Spencer**

Again this year a pair of swans nested at one of the ponds at Caley Reservation. The birds are unbanded so it is not possible to say with certainty that it is the same pair that has nested in the same pond for the last several years, but it seems likely that it is. This year was unusual because five cygnets hatched, and all survived to fledge late in August. The photo shows the five cygnets and two adults in late June.



Trumpeter Swans, Harry Spencer