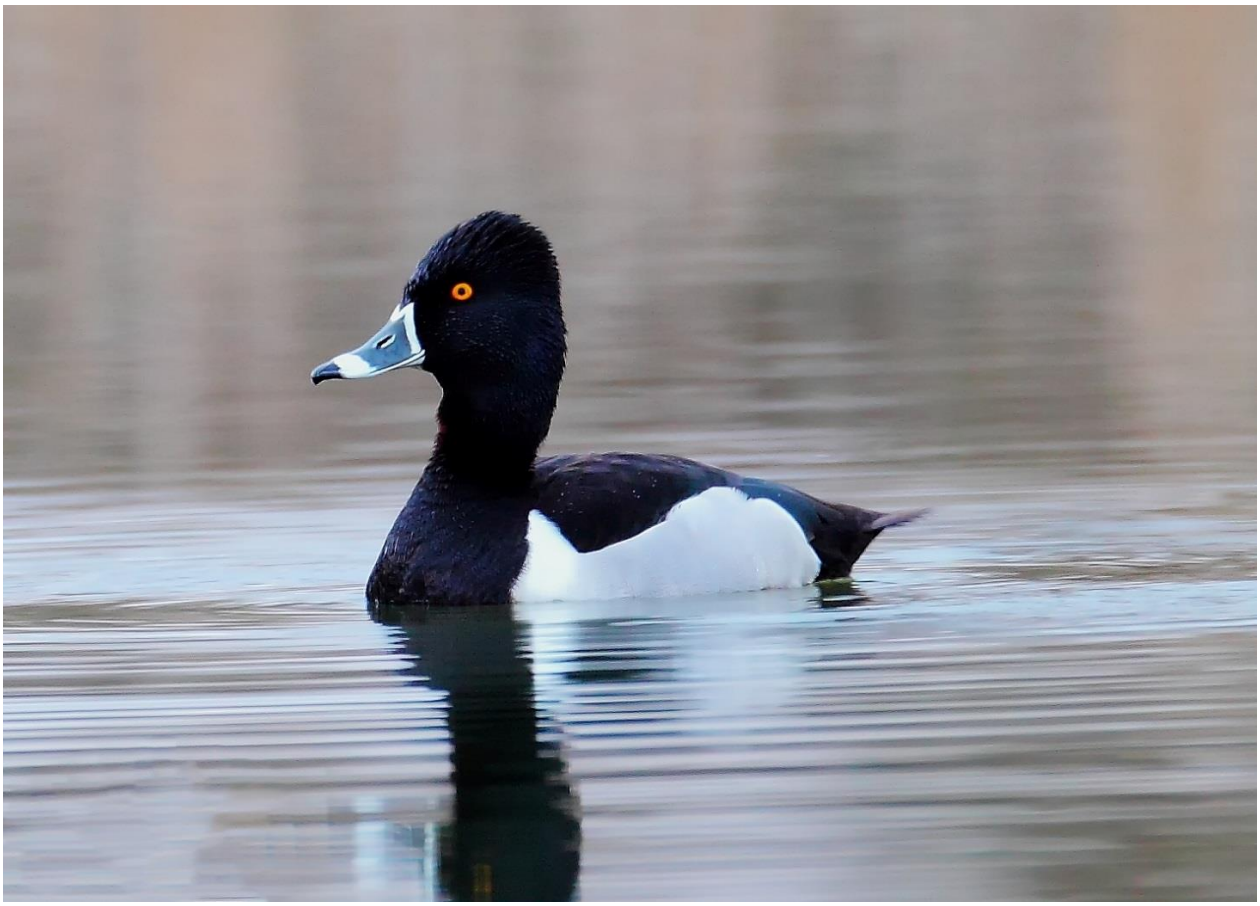
Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

November 2014



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Program

Dave Williams

Tri-county Beekeepers Association

Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Bees

Tuesday, November 4, 2014, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

There's no one better to tell birders everything they want and need to know about bees than Dave Williams. Dave's career began with a degree in chemistry from LCCC before he went on to earn his bachelor's degree in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana.

He has been involved in beekeeping and has been a member of the Lorain County Beekeepers Association since 2000 in his spare time away from his job as a Health Inspector for the Lorain City Health Department.

Dave's presentation will make use of actual hive equipment as he wishes to encourage questions from the audience.

Field Trip

Saturday, November 15, 2014

Carlisle Reservation

Meet at the Raptor Center at 9 a.m.

Harry Spencer of Black River Audubon will serve as the guide.

July 19 Field Trip to Old Woman Creek

By **Diane Devereaux**

On July 19th, members of Black River Audubon Society joined a group of canoeists in an exploration of Old Woman Creek National Estuarine Research Reserve in Huron, Ohio. The guided tour, led by Cheryl Wolfe-Cragin, focused on the ecology of the estuary and its watershed.

An estuary is a place where a river meets the sea or, in the case of Old Woman Creek (a freshwater estuary), where the creek waters meet and mix with the waters of Lake Erie. The habitat is diverse and includes the open waters of the creek, marsh, swamp, upland forest, prairie remnant, scrub-shrub, barrier beach and near-shore Lake Erie.

Waterfowl and wading birds are attracted to the habitat. As we paddled, we saw bald eagles (immature and mature), barn swallow, blue jay, cardinal, cedar waxwing, cliff swallow, common

yellow throat, cowbird, grackle, great blue heron, great egret, house finch, house sparrow, house wren, indigo bunting, kingfisher, marsh wren, red-eyed vireo, red-winged blackbird, rose-breasted grosbeak, rough-winged swallow, warbling vireo, and white-breasted nuthatch.

One of the highlights of paddling Old Woman Creek in July and August is seeing the beautiful yellow American water lotus (*Nelumbo lutea).* The water lotus were late in blooming this year so the channels of the estuary were clear for canoes. In some years, the plants are so thick it can be difficult to paddle through them. The flowers can be up to 11 inches in diameter on stems reaching 2 to 3 feet above water level.

The Reserve is a cooperative partnership between the Ohio Department of National Resources and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Guided canoe trips are offered by ODNR in June, July and August. Registration is required and canoes are provided by Old Woman Creek. Other paddling opportunities are available to individuals who have their own canoes or kayaks but paddlers must obtain a permit from the Old Woman Creek Visitor Center prior to paddling.

September 20 Outing to Sheldon Marsh

By **Tammy Martin**

September birding can be rewarding and challenging as juveniles abound and fall migrants move through. Our outing to Sheldon Marsh provided both, and more. In nearly shirtsleeve weather, fifteen birders rendezvoused at the marsh for a walk. Led by Paul Sherwood, we explored all the various habitats (woodland, pond, open field, edges, marsh and the lakeshore), tallying forty-two species.

Highlights included eight warblers (Nashville, northern parula, chestnut-sided, magnolia, black-throated green, bay-breasted, blackpoll and American redstart) and nearly a woodpecker perfecta (or whatever six out of seven might be called), as we observed all species except pileated. Members expressed many "oohs and aahs" as we watched a family of redheads perform right about us!

Later some debate surrounded a swan species viewed in a Sawmill Creek golf course pond. A close-up view through a scope confirmed a beady-eyed trumpeter swan DECOY. Made ya look!

As expected on a fall hike, the late summer flowers were also noteworthy, especially the purple asters and yellow goldenrods. One non-composite drew some attention as well . . . a blooming smooth false foxglove. Lovely. Following this rewarding walk, several BRAS members then attended this year's Lake Erie Wing Watch

Water lotus photo by Diane Devereaux

festival at nearby Osborn Park. We even manned an educational vendor booth. It was indeed a perfect day to be outside!

Turtle in Sheldon Marsh, photo by Penny Brandau

EARED GREBE photo by Dane Adams

EARED GREBE

Podiceps nigricollis

By **Cathy Priebe**

I like to ID waterfowl. They do not move very fast and allow for very long looks from either a scope or binoculars. When I was given the assignment to write about the eared grebe, I I thought, "I've seen one of those." According to my list I have not.

Often confused in its nonbreeding plumage with nonbreeding horned grebes, eared grebes are an occasional spring migrant and an infrequent rare fall visitor. Sometimes found on Lake Erie, they also tend to visit inland lakes, wetlands and reservoirs when migrating. They do not nest in Ohio. The pied-billed grebe is the only Ohio nester while the eared is a common breeder of the western interior, Europe, Asia, Central Africa and South America. It has the honor of being the most abundant grebe in North America and the world.

The breeding eared grebe is small, (smaller than the pied-billed and horned), all black with chestnut sides with a feathery spray of yellow ear tufts behind red eyes along with white under parts, a thin straight bill and raised crown.

Diving for its food, the eared grebe gleans the water for small fish, aquatic insects, crustaceans and other larval creatures. It is somewhat unusual to witness grebes in flight as they are generally seen on water and they avoid walking on land.

Here is some more interesting information about the eared grebe:

* The Ohio Cardinal reported five locations hosting single birds in Spring 2013; Ferguson-Metzger Reservoir, Huron Harbor, Wellington Upground Reservoir, Paulding Reservoir and Marysville Reservoir. Two individuals were also seen at Gordon Park from November 25 through December 29, 2013.
* They have cyclical periods of atrophy and hypertrophy, which shrinks or swells their internal organs and pectoral muscles depending on whether they need to migrate. This strategy leaves them flightless for almost 10 months per year, the longest of any flying bird in the world.
* It is thought that grebes eat feathers to protect their stomach lining and intestines from sharp bones, parasites, or to slow food passage for complete digestion.
* Grebes struggle walking on land, as their movements are very awkward in an upright position.
* Their facial expression has been described by Pete Dunne as crazed or demonic.

The next time I hear of an eared grebe nearby, you can bet I will give it my best shot to add it to my life list!!

References: *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *The Ohio Cardinal; Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; above inset photo from birds.audubon.org.

RING-NECKED DUCK

Aythya collaris

By **Jim Jablonski**

It has bright, yellow eyes, flashy white and silver-gray sides and a distinct white ring near the tip of its bill. So what's it named for? A brown band around its black neck that no one can see, of course!

Although another example of ornithology's strange naming practices, the ring-necked duck is, in my opinion, one of the classier waterfowl that travel through our area. The female, although both darker in some parts of its body and lighter in others, is also an attractive, if much less striking duck. Unlike the male with its yellow eyes, the female has a well-defined eye ring. It also has a white patch at the base of the bill.

The ring-necked male is fairly easy to identify but it can be difficult to keep one's binoculars focused upon it as it frequently dives beneath the surface before coming up some distance away. While down there it is searching for tubers, grasses, seeds and other vegetation but it will also eat mollusks and aquatic insects. It tends to have a more general appetite than other diving ducks.

Divers tend to prefer open water. They tend to have shorter wings relative to their weight and need to run for a distance before taking off. But the ring-necked goes its own way; unlike other divers, it can spring up from the water. Thus it can be found at times in small ponds and, with its generalized diet, in shallower waters than other diving ducks. It will even forage at the surface, upending itself in the shallows like a dabbler and will even forage in flooded areas.

A migrant through Ohio, the ring-necked breeds in the upper Midwest, New England and Canada. Like most ducks it builds a nest of grass, moss and down near the water's edge on lakes, ponds and swamps. The female lays anywhere from six to fourteen olive-colored eggs that take up to four weeks to hatch. And, of course, the hatchlings soon follow their mother to the nearby water where they mainly eat insects in the early going. Those that live fledge seven to eight weeks later.

The ring-necked mates later than most ducks and with several months given over to breeding, it at times runs the risk of being caught in the far north during freezes. But eventually it takes off, often in single-sex flocks, for the southern U.S. and Latin America, as far south as Panama, where they winter on lakes, slow-moving rivers and estuaries but only rarely in coastal salt water bays.

The ring-necked has faced environmental problems. Like mallards, pintails and others, it often eats hard seeds. Unfortunately, metallic shot, especially lead, can be confused with these seeds. And the ring-necked has been one of the ducks affected most by lead poisoning.

Still, the duck's population trends are mixed. Its range has even been increasing, especially in Canada and New England. Generally it seems its population has gone up in the east since the 1930's while it has been dropping in the central states of the country. Overall, the population may be stable.

The ring-necked should be passing through our area soon. Just remember, if you see a duck that disappears now and again, forget about the neck, look for its white and gray sides, check out its bill and look for the yellow eye!

References: *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *Field Guide to Birds* by Donald and Lillian Stokes; *The Birders Handbook* by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin and Darryl Wheye.

LCCC Students Help Black River Bluebird Trail

By **Penny Brandau**

The Columbia bluebird trail had major improvements done on it this past spring by several LCCC students from Ruby Beil's ecology class. Nest boxes were removed from areas that had become overgrown. They were then repaired and relocated in more suitable sites for cavity nesting birds.

Each box had a Kingston predator guard attached to it to discourage predators. The students obtained the boxes' GPS locations and recorded descriptions of the habitat and box dimensions for the Cornell Ornithology Lab's citizen science program.

One of the students, Leah LaFarciola volunteered to monitor the boxes throughout the breeding season. She made at least weekly trips to Columbia Reservation, taking careful notes and eventually witnessed the drama of seeing bluebirds and tree swallows raise their young.

In 2013 only four tree swallows and two bluebirds fledged from the eleven boxes at Columbia. Some of the boxes were very difficult to locate due to heavy brush that had grown around them. Obviously this habitat is not desirable for bluebirds or swallows. After relocation in 2014, the boxes produced thirty-seven tree swallows and three bluebird fledglings – a great improvement.

I would like to thank Sean Murray, Columbia's Assistant Park Manager for his help in relocating the boxes and keep their areas mowed and to former monitor Steve Chavez who alerted us to the need for the improvements. Also, I would like to thank each of the LCCC students who did the early work as a service-learning project and for Leah who did the longer work of monitoring the trail.

A Birder's Diary: BIRD-HUMAN ANATOMICAL COMPARISONS

By **Carol Leininger**

Birds, like people, are vertebrates with a bony skeleton. However their bones and body are filled with air sacs to provide the lightness needed for flying. The skeleton is also more rigid with the back vertebrae fused to strengthen the bird for the action of flight.

Although many of the bones in a bird's skeleton are very similar to ours, some differences do stand out. Our sternum (breastbone) is short and flat whereas in birds the sternum is a huge rudder-like bone called a keel. Its enlarged size is due to the large flight muscles that attach to it.

A few other peculiarities are the hyoid and pygostyle. In humans, the hyoid bone supports our tongue and is rather small. In birds the hyoid (wishbone) has two rather long horns and in woodpeckers these horns go from the tongue to circle back, up and over the skull to the nostrils. The horns provide attachment for the muscles that permit the bird to extend its tongue, often four times the length of the bill, into holes and crevices for extracting grubs.

The pygostyle (tailbones) of a bird are much enlarged compared to the tiny fused tailbones in humans. These bones in a bird require more strength as the tail feathers used in flight attach here.

The pelvic girdle is also interesting in birds, as it remains open below to allow for the laying of large eggs. Our pelvis is a closed circle, which sometimes is too small for the child's head and can require a caesarian birth.

The most interesting skeletal comparisons between a bird and a human are in the appendages. Our arm consists of a humerus (upper arm), ulna and radius (lower arm), carpals (wrists), meta-carpals (hand) and phalanges (fingers).

On the wing the broadened, shortened humerus is only visible internally, but the ulna is broadened and the point for attachment of secondary feathers while the digits support the primaries. In our leg we have a femur (thigh), tibia and fibula (lower leg), tarsals (ankle), metatarsals (foot) and phalanges (toes).

The bird's short femur is buried in the flesh of the bird's body. The drumstick consists mainly of the tibia while the fibula is reduced to a thin sliver. The ankle and foot bones are fused into one greatly elongated tarsal bone which is what we see as the bird's leg. The phalanges with claws make up the foot of the bird. Thus birds actually walk on tiptoe with their heel off the ground.

This is a rather generalized comparison. There are other detailed differences but this should be enough for you to closely examine the bones of your turkey carcass after the Thanksgiving meal.

Betty Lake

By **Donald Lynch**

Betty Lake, long-time member of Black River Audubon and current Board member, died September 23, after a short illness. Her memory was celebrated by a Service or Remembrance and a Nature Walk at the Wesleyan Village, where she lived.

As Chair of the Membership Committee of BRAS for several years, she kept track of the name tags at our monthly meetings with great dedication, rarely missing a meeting. At her Patio Home along the Black River at Wesleyan Village she enjoyed entertaining birds at her bird feeder.

For many years Betty lived on a fifteen-acre site on Fairmount Road near County Line Road in Geauga County. She worked at several optical retail stores in Cleveland, and, at Holden Arboretum, she and my wife, Margaret, volunteered for several years guiding grade-school students on nature walks. The oldest of her four children retired as music professor at Bowling Green University.

By **Dick Lee**

My best memory of Betty is when I took her with me to monitor my bluebird trail. I had a nest with naked day old hatchlings. I carefully took one out of the nest and laid them in her little hand. Her face lit up like a full moon. She had never held a newly hatched bird in her 80+ years. Her delight of course made my day but also gave me a wonderful memory every time I hold a pink hatchling. Many times she reminded me of how she loved that experience and thanked me profusely. I loved seeing her childlike joy in new experiences and discoveries.

When it came time to assemble and mail the WINGTIPS, Betty was a faithful volunteer. She asked to put the labels on the ones going to Elyria members. Then she could set aside those that went to Wesleyan Village members and deliver them herself. She wanted to save the chapter 17 cent postage on each one

By **Harriet Alger**

Betty was one of my inspirations for birding by tram. I saw her, repeatedly at Sandy Ridge and once at Holden, start but unable to complete a hike. She was a regular tram-ride participant until failing health eventually prevented her from attending.

She was hospitalized several times for COPD during her last few years and was in nursing care for a while. Nevertheless, she frequently appeared in her role as hostess at Audubon meetings, greeting the members and making sure visitors were furnished tags. She was the best at ensuring that I always turned in my nametag at the end of each meeting!

Whenever possible Betty attended Quaker services in Cleveland after she moved to Wesleyan from Geauga County. Her personality, demeanor and dress always seemed to me to reflect her Quaker background.

Betty Lake holding newborn bluebird chick. Photo by Dick Lee.

Jack Smith & Betty Lake.

Photo by Harriet Alger.