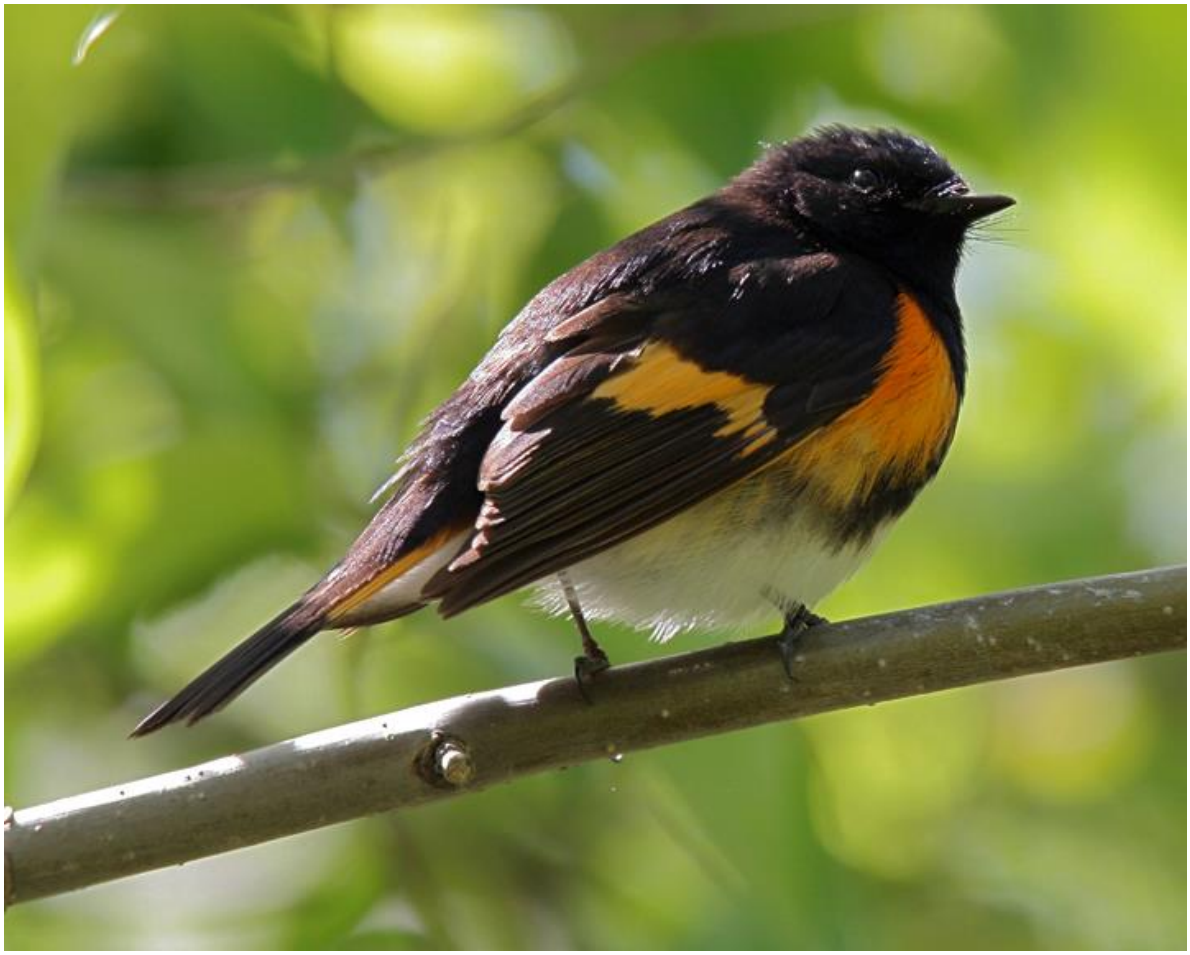
Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

November 2016



AMERICAN REDSTART photo by William Bofinger

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe
Photographer Emeritus: John Koscinski
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

Program

Tuesday, November 1. 2016, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor center

Nina Love

SOMETHING BLUE (Horseshoe Crabs)

Nina Love, an ardent nature lover and long-time bluebird-box monitor, is a resident of Kendal at Oberlin. She will educate us about an important conservation issue concerning horseshoe crabs. These are not the tasty species served at seafood restaurants, but familiar sights at some Atlantic coastal beaches of the US. This ancient species furnishes critical eggs for migrating shorebirds. But the crabs also are important for bait and fertilizers uses, and their blue blood is widely used for diagnosis of human diseases.

Field Trip

Saturday, Nov. 19, 2016, 9:00 a.m.

Rocky River Reservation Metro Park

Meet at nature center parking lot

24000 Valley Parkway, North Olmsted

Bill Deininger to lead

Program Notice

Due to a scheduling conflict, the locations of our March, April and May monthly programs will be moved to the Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center at Sandy Ridge Metro Park in North Ridgeville. We apologize for any inconvenience. The dates and times will not change.

September Field Trip
Sandy Ridge

By **Larry Wilson**

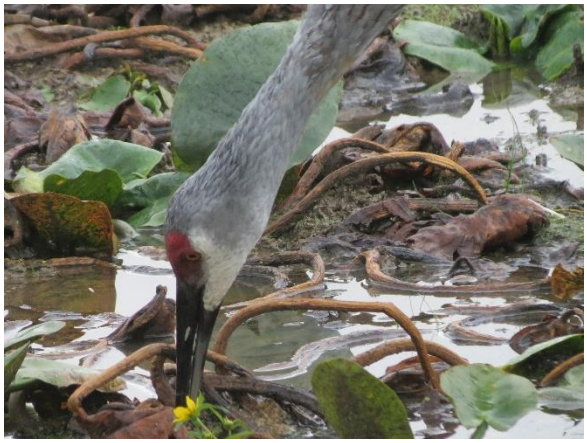
The day started with a couple of heavy downpours, but Arlene Ryan and I were determined to fulfill our commitment to lead the field trip at Sandy Ridge. So we drove to the park with our raincoats and not many expectations. By our 9 a.m. projected starting time only Doug Cary was there, but shortly afterward Harry Spencer and Marty Ackermann arrived just as the rain picked up. We waited patiently for the rain to stop, and shortly afterward it did. So we started out with brightening skies and hopes.

Birders at Sandy Ridge photo by kind hiker

We didn't see much in the woods, but as we got to the water things picked up. A bald eagle was surveying its domain from a snag in the middle of the lake and as we approached the observation hill we came across a pair of sandhill cranes placidly foraging in the swamp, not ten feet away. The

sun had come out and the humidity had returned, so we started shedding our rain gear. Doug had a full suit on and as he took off his rain pants both cranes became extremely agitated for quite some time! So at our next monthly meeting, in addition to our regularly scheduled program, Doug will do his impression of a sandhill crane mating dance!!!

We finished with 27 species that day, not bad for a hike that started out so dark and dreary. The species were blue jay, kingfisher, European starling, mourning dove, red-bellied woodpecker, chimney swift, great egret, great blue heron, mallard, wood duck, bald eagle, killdeer, lesser yellowlegs, sandhill crane, American goldfinch, song sparrow, green winged teal, Canada goose, tufted titmouse, northern cardinal, northern rough-winged swallow, American kestrel, tress swallow, eastern wood-pewee, northern flicker, black-capped chickadee, house sparrow.



SANDHILL CRANE PHOTO BY H. Spencer

Hog Island Birding Camp
Scholarships Available Again

For the past three decades BRAS has offered educators, naturalists and community leaders the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills at Hog Island to educate our community about bird conservation, wildlife in general, and the environment.

This year we offer two scholarships to adults. Each scholarship covers tuition, room and board, and travel expenses. Our goal is that the recipients will follow the examples of those who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors of conservation and education in our community.

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine learning from accomplished naturalists, birders and educators.

Hog Island campers love its natural surroundings and rustic 19th-century buildings. Delicious meals are served in a communal dining room.

The following camps have been particularly valuable to past participants: ***Joy of Birding*** (June 4-9), ***Field Ornithology*** (June18-23), and ***Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week*** (July 16-21). For details and registration go to hogisland.audubon.org. Individuals interested in applying for the BRAS scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at jjjablon@aol.com or 440-365-6465. ***JJ***

Bluebird Report – 2016

Penny Brandau, Bluebird program chairperson, always puts together the most thorough, and informative, newsletters around. Her report for this past summer came out at the end of September and presented very striking statistics.

The BRAS bluebird trails were already the second most productive in the state according to the Ohio Bluebird Society but our numbers have risen greatly. This year 498 bluebird fledglings flew out of BRAS boxes compared to 364 in 2015 – a 37 percent increase! In addition, tree swallow numbers were up to 1,007 a 22 percent increase. House wren numbers declined from 106 to 64, possibly a result of increased bluebird and swallow production. A few black-capped chickadees, titmice and nuthatches also took advantage of BRAS boxes.

The BRAS bluebird program doesn't intend to rest on its success, however. Penny also presented preliminary results of projects to increase the number of bluebirds even more. She said the use of lavender sprigs under nests seems to forestall blowfly infestations while boxes that are 4x4 inches square as opposed to 5x5 inches seem to attract more bluebirds and tree swallows. In addition, the old theory of pairing boxes may not work as well as intended since one usually seems to sit empty – something I have noticed on my trails.

None of these hypotheses are definitely proven as yet, Penny pointed out, but we can be sure her program will keep on researching methods to increase the numbers of bluebirds in our trees. ***JJ***

AMERICAN REDSTART

Setophaga ruticilla

By **Barbara Baudot**

Redstarts are found in both the Old and New Worlds and are distinguished as such. The American redstart is a New World warbler. These sweet, sometimes volatile, birds we see flitting in and between trees in search of insects are small, passerine birds in the family *Parulidae*. Aside from its name, the American redstart is unrelated to its Old World namesake. Both Old and New World redstarts are obviously related by name. "Start" is the modern English expression of the Middle English *stert*, meaning tail of an animal.

American Redstarts compare in size with black-capped chickadees, 4.3-5.1" in length with wingspans of 6.3-7.5". Adult males are primarily black with bright orange patches on their sides, wings, and tails. Their bellies are white. Females have duller yellow or yellow-orange patches instead of bright orange ones. They have gray heads and under parts, with olive back and wings and dark-gray tails. Young males have plumage similar to females until their second fall.

They feed mostly on insects, including leaf and plant hoppers, flies, moths and their larvae, wasps, and beetles. Redstarts forage between the ground and near the top of the canopy and in the sub canopies, taking most of their prey from twigs, branches, and leaves—more flying prey than most other warbler species. Rapidly spreading and flashing their conspicuous black/yellow or black/ orange patches facilitates finding their startled prey. In late summer, redstarts feast on small berries and fruits, such as barberry, wild plum and magnolia. Redstarts usually forage alone but may stay near their mates in the breeding season and they sometimes join mixed species flocks in the nonbreeding season. Foraging adults may in turn be preyed on by raptors, while eggs and nestlings are vulnerable to climbing mammals, snakes, and larger birds.

During the early stages of courtship, the male shows his mate potential nest sites usually near a supportive trunk or stem of a tree or shrub. She tests out many sites before finally choosing one. Then, left alone for several days, the female builds a well- camouflaged, tightly woven nest of small fibers from a rich variety of natural sources. She lays a clutch of 1-5 white or creamy speckled eggs. The chicks hatch after 10-13 days, and remain in the nest for 7-13 days. Both parents feed the nestlings. Once the chicks leave the nest, the parents divide up the chicks for feeding duty.

Though normally monogamous, the male is capable of managing two mates and broods almost simultaneously. Once his first mate is incubating her eggs, he may start singing so as to attract another lady. He spends more effort however providing food for his first nest than for his second. If the male succeeds in securing a second mate, his second family is usually in another territory as much as a quarter mile away. Males defend each of their territorial boundaries with songs, posturing, and aerial displays.

Redstarts are long distance migrants. They breed in eastern North America, and winter in Florida, the Greater Antilles, and northern South America. They are common spring and fall migrants in the East. Arriving in May in much of the U.S. and Canada, they depart in September or early October. The journey is often hazardous. Like most nocturnal migrant songbirds, colliding with structures such as skyscrapers, cell-phone towers, radio antennas, and wind turbines can kill them. Today, however, they are not considered an endangered species.

References: "American Redstart, Life History, Identification," allaboutbirds.org/guide/American Redstart/id. **"American Redstart"** in Wikipedia.

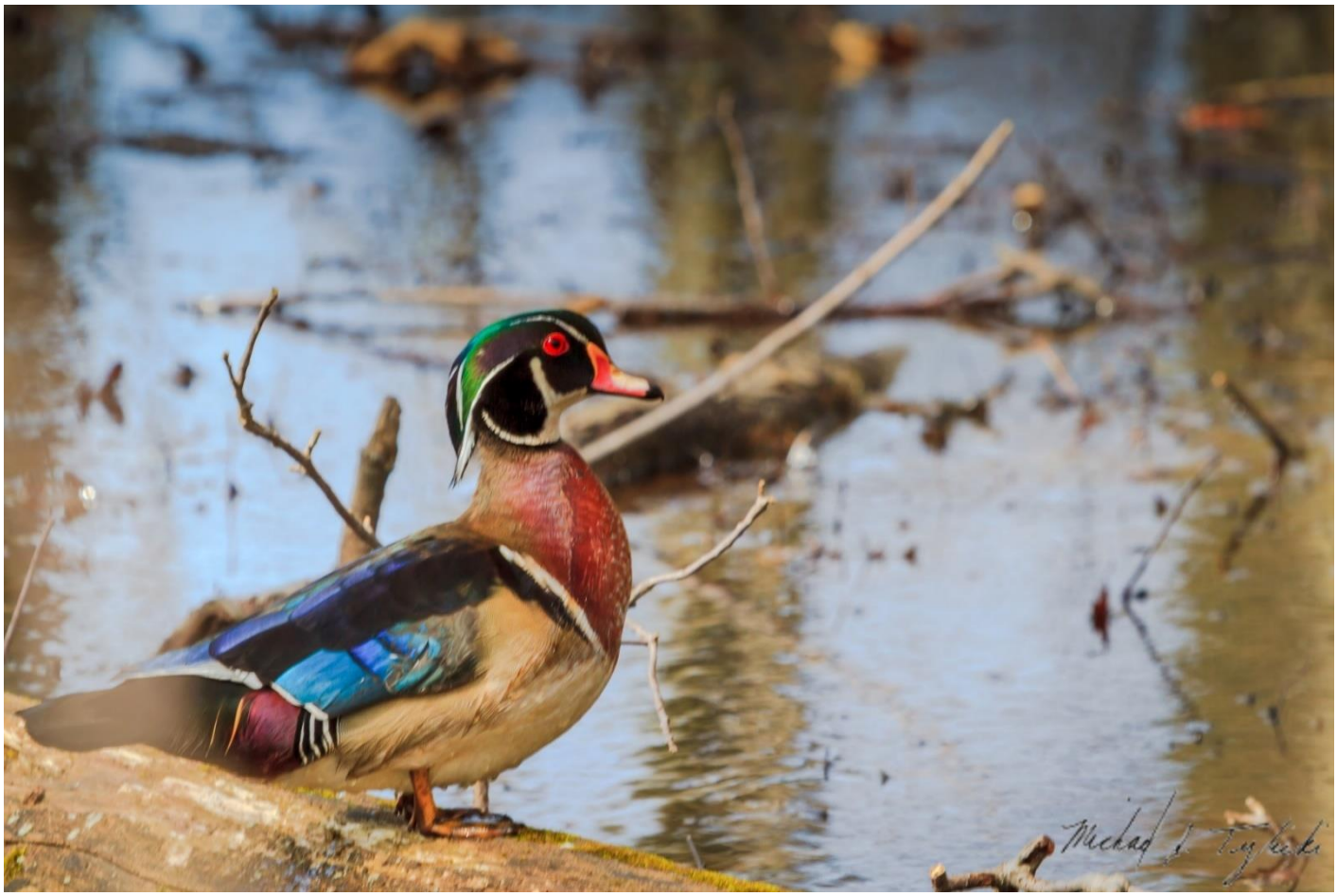
WOOD DUCK

Aix sponsa

By **Cathy Priebe**

The male species of this particular water fowl is probably one of the most handsome ducks I have had the privilege to witness on a very regular basis at Sandy Ridge Reservation, one of the best parks to see resident and migrating ducks in Lorain County.

The wood duck is easy for me to identify even from a distance by its distinctive manner when swimming, bobbing its head forward and back as it weaves in and out of vegetation near the water's edge or swimming in a small group, usually from 6 to 20 individuals. The male's striking colors, green



WOOD DUCK photo by Mike Tylicki

head, chestnut breast, buff sides and red eye also make identification simple.

Also referred to as a perching duck, the wood duck is as nimble walking and flying in the treetops, as it is graceful gliding in the water. Preferring old growth swamps and thickly vegetated marshes near woodlands, the wood duck will nest in holes created by woodpeckers, natural cavities or strategically placed nest boxes.

The female will lay more than two dozen (white) eggs and incubate them for about 30 days. The nestlings are not mollycoddled at all. After only resting for a day after hatching, they jump from their safe haven down to the forest floor, sometimes dropping almost 75 feet, to join their mother on a journey to the nearest body of water.

The wood duck is now a very common breeding bird in Ohio, although not in the early 1900's. Many bird experts speculated that due to habitat loss and hunting, the wood duck would be extinct by the early 1930's. Building nest boxes, creating more wetlands and providing the right habitat, brought this waterfowl back from the brink so we are able to enjoy its beauty and its unique lifestyle.

Some fun facts about wood ducks:

*They prefer to socialize among their own kind and stay away from other ducks.

*They have strong claws that can grip bark so they can perch on branches.

*The female has a very eerie call, Oooo-EEEK, when startled.
*Females have a large white teardrop around their eyes and their plumage is a muted gray/brown.
*One of the few ducks that eat acorns, fruit and nuts.
* Also referred to by Pete Dunne as a "Swamp Squealer".
References: Birds of Ohio by Jim McCormac; Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion by Pete Dunne; All About Birds, Cornell Lab.

A Birder's Diary: Mallard Sex and Reproduction

By **Carol Leininger**

You are never too old to learn new things. Ever since I was a student I knew that male birds pass their sperm to the female via a cloacal "kiss" that lasts just seconds. I also knew that a female bird starts out with two ovaries and oviducts but one of the pair degenerates long before adulthood.

A few years ago the Cleveland Museum of Natural History had a traveling exhibit on reproduction in animals and much to my surprise I saw the reproductive system of a female mallard for the first time. Her one oviduct actually had numerous side ducts, which ended up being dead ends – only one duct actually led to the egg awaiting fertilization. I wondered about that for some time.

Then an article appeared in **Bird Watcher's Digest** (March-April, 2015) by Jerry Lang that explained this further. Apparently, unlike most birds, male waterfowl have a penis to release sperm into the female's tract. Often the females are forced into receiving sperm from a male other than their mate. According to Lang this happens in forty to fifty percent of all matings in mallards. When this happens the female will then contract the muscles in her main oviduct so the sperm never reach her eggs but end up in one of the ducts that is a dead end. When her chosen mate enters her tract she relaxes the muscles of the main oviduct to allow only his sperm to fertilize her eggs.

A female mallard duck is not just a plain ordinary bird. Every bird is just as unique an individual as every human. Wouldn't it be wonderful if humans could prevent a pregnancy in this way?

It's Not Just Polar Bears Anymore

Species at the top of food chains are generally those who are first affected by environmental and climate change. We all know how a warming earth threatens polar bears. Increasingly, research is showing how those further down the chain are also threatened.

Hannah Wauchope of The University of Queensland School of Biological Sciences has "said that suitable breeding conditions for Arctic shorebirds could collapse by 2070. Her research predicts that these migratory birds will eventually be restricted to a few far northern islands if current conditions persist.

The problem is the Arctic is warming faster than most other places, leading to the "shrubification" of the tundra. This enables red foxes to more efficiently prey on shorebirds.

Why would researchers in Queensland, Australia study Arctic shore birds? Probably because some of these amazing migrants, such as the bar-tailed godwit fly over 7,000 miles from Alaska to the South Pacific. And they do this non-stop! ***JJ***

References: "Birds on Top of the World, with Nowhere to Go" in ScienceDaily.com; ***"Arctic Eviction"*** in the Plain Dealer, July 30, 2016., page A07.

Osprey Observations: Chesapeake Bay

By **Scott and Lori Spencer**

Some of our Chesapeake-Bay-osprey-observations as non-trained ornithologists:

Ospreys migrate. Many of our local species on the Chesapeake winter over on the bay, but our ospreys disappear reliably at the fall equinox (September 20) and re-appear around the spring equinox (March 20). According to the internet, they winter in the Caribbean and South America, an amazing journey.

Ospreys are territorial. They seem to mate for life. Almost every navigation marker on the Chesapeake has an osprey nest on top. Eggs are laid in May. By June, babies' heads can be seen poking up above the nest.

During July and August, youngsters start to flap their wings and get booted out for test flights. Osprey parents seem rather indulgent. They allow young adult children to live "in the basement" until migration time in September. Construction and maintenance of the nest appears to be ongoing and tedious. Osprey Dad when not fishing, goes off to find a long stick to bring back once or twice per day. Sometimes the stick is so heavy the bird can barely stay in the air. When the stick gets dropped onto the nest, inevitably Osprey Mom makes him move it to a "better" location, even if only a few inches. Male readers… does this seem familiar?

Ospreys never stop talking, sunup to sundown. During our quiet Bay evenings at anchor, we can hear their familiar "chee, chee" as they fly around fishing and working. In the morning, forget sleeping on the boat after sunrise, because of the chatter. Some of the nests are on navigation markers very close to boat traffic. Ospreys always have something to say when a boat comes near.

Ospreys eat only fresh wiggling fish. If updrafts are available, they circle high in the air watching for prey. If no updrafts, they flap their wings and keep on fishing (as opposed to eagles or vultures that land in a tree and wait for better wind). When ospreys spot a fish, they briefly "hover" before folding their wings and diving straight down into the water. If the maneuver is successful, lunch is juggled under the talons until the fish is in a characteristic head first position carried like a torpedo under the bird. Then back to nest to share with spouse and children.

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The Chesapeake Bay is a bird-watcher's paradise and not just for ospreys. We've only started to learn a few of the hundreds of bird species that visit throughout the year.

We highly recommend the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge on the Maryland Eastern Shore and Wye Island Natural Resource Management Area.

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The mission of the Black River Audubon Society is to promote conservation and restoration of ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife through advocacy, education, stewardship, field trips, and programs for the benefit of all people of today and tomorrow.

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