

WINGTIPS



PIED AVOCET by Barbara Baudot

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NOVEMBER 2019

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November 2019 Program
Tuesday, November 5, 2019, 7 p.m.
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

**“Urban Wildlife: What’s Up with Smart Coyotes,
Friendly Deer and Fearless Geese”**



Jon Cepek
Cleveland Metroparks, Wildlife Ecologist

Jon Cepek is the Wildlife Ecologist for the Cleveland Metroparks. Jon has been involved in wildlife research and management in northeastern Ohio since 1998. Prior to working for the Cleveland Metroparks, Jon was the District Supervisor for USDA Wildlife Services and also a Wildlife Biologist for the National Wildlife Research Center. He is on the board of the North Central Section of the Wildlife Society and has served as President of the Ohio Wildlife Management Association, and the Ohio Chapter of the Wildlife Society. Jon is a retired Command Sergeant Major with 23 years of Army and Army National Guard service including deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.

November Field Trip

Saturday, November 16, 2019

Preserve at Eagle Point

3435 Cleveland Rd. W., Sandusky

(Paul Sherwood to lead)

September Field Trip Report

Five birders, led by BRAS guide and board member Paul Sherwood, made the trip to Howard Marsh near Curtice, Ohio and netted a total of 35 interesting species, especially among the water and shorebirds.

The birds spotted were Canada goose, trumpeter swan, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, green-winged teal, ruddy duck, pied-billed grebe, common gallinule, American coot, killdeer, stilt sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, semipalmated sandpiper, short-billed dowitcher, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, ring-billed gull, Caspian tern, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, great egret, snowy egret, reddish egret, black-crowned night heron, downy woodpecker, peregrine falcon, blue jay, tree swallow, marsh wren, European starling, American goldfinch, song sparrow, red-winged blackbird, common grackle, and palm warbler.

Afterward, the five trekkers made sure to head to the ever-popular Blackberry Corners restaurant to discuss the highlights of the trip.

Applications for Hog Island Scholarships

BRAS is again offering a Hog Island birding camp scholarship to an adult educator or naturalist. The successful applicant will acquire additional skills to educate students and the public about bird conservation, wildlife in general, and the environment. The scholarship will cover tuition, room & board, plus travel expenses.

The goal is that the recipient will follow the examples of others who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors for conservation and environmental education in our communities.

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine, learning from accomplished naturalists, birders, and educators. In off hours, they can explore the camp's natural surrounding and rustic buildings that have a long history with National Audubon. And no one has ever returned with complaints about the quality of the meals served during their stay.

A reservation has been made for the BRAS scholarship winner for the **Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week** camp, although other camps might be possible.

For more details and description of the camping experience, go to hogisland.audubon.org. Individuals interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at jjablons@lorainccc.edu or 440-365-6465. Be sure to leave a message.

Urban Birder David Lindo to Visit Northeastern Ohio

Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society (WCAS), with the co-sponsorship of a number of organizations, including Black River Audubon Society, will bring renowned British birder David Lindo for a series of events from November 2 through 9, 2019.

Lindo, the author of a number of influential birding books, is best known as "*The Urban Birder*" for his advocacy of the discovery of birds within cities. His most recent book is *How to Be an Urban Birder*. Voted the 7th most influential person in wildlife by BBC Wildlife magazine, Lindo is a member and officer of many international associations.

Lindo's visit to northeast Ohio will celebrate the launch of Urban Birding Cleveland, a WCAS initiative for all ages of local birders. The series of events will feature speaking engagements and birding activities. There will be opportunities for the public to meet Mr. Lindo and take part in birding walks with him.

Schedule and ticket information can be found at the WCAS website: wcaudubon.org/urban-birding-with-david-lindo-2019.html.

AMERICAN AVOCET and PIED AVOCET *Recurvirostra americana and Recurvirostra avosetta*

By **Barbara Baudot**

If you come upon avocets whether in estuaries, inland wetlands, or on mud flats you are most fortunate. My first sighting of a pair of pied avocets in the south of France was truly magical. They were advancing slowly, foraging around some reeds, and our meeting was unanticipated. I remained virtually motionless, trying not to disturb them, and eventually I photographed them. Without doubt, avocets

must be the most beautiful and graceful of wading birds. I haven't read anything stating otherwise. Explicit appreciation of their elegance is commonplace, even by John James Audubon when, to his surprise, he discovered American avocets near Vincennes, Indiana in 1814.

The four recognized species of avocets constitute the genus *Recurvirostra*, referring to the upward curving bend of their long black bills. They discontinuously inhabit the temperate and tropical regions of the five continents. All avocets are moderately-sized, weighing approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound and measuring around 18 inches long, including bill. Avocets are monomorphic except for size, females being slightly smaller. Whatever their species, males and females are elegantly dressed in sleek white body plumage set off against different patterns of black or dark brown feathers on their wings and backs. Their long legs are bluish gray. Head and neck plumage distinguish the species. The behavior of the species is standard.

Like many waders avocets feed by probing and pecking in moist mud or sand. Additionally, their long, slender up-curved bills enable 'scything,' a behavior specific to foraging avocets. Advancing slowly through shallow water or mud, they sweep their ultra-sensitive bills back and forth repeatedly to detect aquatic invertebrates, insects and worms, and sometimes small fish.

Avocets are highly social, and breed in loose colonies, perhaps mixed with other wading birds. Members of these flocks cooperate to defend their colonies from predators. Audubon described such an incident involving himself: "... [these] gregarious birds, on emitting cries of alarm after having been scared off their nest, could induce other incubating individuals to leave their eggs also, and join in attempting to save the colony. So, it was with avocets, and the other two sitters rose on wing and flew directly at me, while the one with the four younglings betook herself to the water, ... followed by her brood..." Avocets will also hunt in unison. Simultaneously, sweeping their bills across a wetland or mud flat they corral small fish or crustaceans and share the catch.

Nest sites of avocets vary. They may be bare ground marked by scrapes in the soil. Sometimes scrapes are lined with debris or soft prairie grasses. In times of flooding nests are built upon mounds of soil. The breeding habits of all avocet species are similar. They are monogamous for a breeding season and both male and female work together through the whole process.

The most numerous species are the American avocet and the Eurasian pied avocet. They are distinguished principally by habitat and head/neck feathers.

The American Avocet is found along tidal pools, shallow salty or alkaline lakes, prairie ponds, marshes, and on extensive mud flats along the coasts and in the interior, preferring wide open spaces. Its plumage differs from other species of avocets, in particular during breeding season when its head and neck turn a rusty cinnamon. In the non-breeding months its head and neck are grayish white. The American avocet breeds in the western half of North America and winters from California and Texas to Guatemala. It is occasionally found on the East coast.

The most wide-ranging species is the pied avocet which inhabits open wet lands, estuaries and coasts of Eurasia and Africa; from Ireland in the west to far eastern Russia, and in Africa from Senegal to the upper Nile to the southern tip of South Africa. The pied avocet has a black feathered crown and back of the neck. It is its black feathered cap that distinguishes this species from other species. It breeds in central Asia and in scattered localities in Europe. Many migrators winter in Africa's Rift Valley.



Pied Avocet

(Photo courtesy of Barbara Baudot)

All the species are threatened by pollution of wetlands with insecticides, selenium, lead and mercury. Other threats include infrastructure development, land reclamation, human disturbance, and reduced river flows, as well as diseases including avian flu. Today

avocets are protected by international migratory acts. On the positive side, recognizing the United Kingdom’s successful efforts to bring back the pied avocet from near extinction in 1840, the pied avocet was adopted as the logo of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. An estimated 450,000 breeding pairs of avocets exist today. Hopefully you will have the thrill of observing them.

References: Audubon Birds of America; allaboutbirds.org; “Avocets” in Encyclopedia Britannica.

WILLET

Tringa semipalmata

By **Gina Swindell**

Uncommon to Ohio, willets are typically an exciting find for Buckeye birdwatchers. Usually seen as fall migrants in July and early August, these large sandpipers, about 17-24 inches in length, are often seen sifting about for aquatic invertebrates and fish in mudflats and beaches along Lake Erie. Normally found as single birds, they have a descriptive *pill-will-willet* call and display a flashy black and white wing pattern in flight.



Willet

(Photo courtesy of Rob Swindell)

Known as a “nervous” shorebird, willets nest on the ground—either in the grass or on the beach—in small depressions hidden by grass and surrounding vegetation. They have one brood per year, with a clutch size of four eggs incubated for 22-29 days. Described as intelligent and unpredictable, males will protect the nest by alarming the female of danger. Willets, like killdeer, will engage in a broken wing scheme to

draw predators, such as hawks, herring gulls and snakes, away from their nest. Willet pairs often remain with their mates for several years. Both parents incubate the eggs and teach the chicks to feed, with the female leaving up to two weeks before the male.

They return to the same nesting area each spring after traveling 3,500 miles from the northeast coast of South America. They have one of the greatest migration ranges of temperate shorebirds—from the Canadian Maritime to Venezuela. Avian ecologist, Joe Smith, tracked 19 willets in 2010 and found that they make the trip in 3.5 to 4 days. Difficult to catch, researchers describe them as built for speed and, compared to other shorebirds, they fly like “fighter jets.” They can live up to 10 years.

Willetts have declined from 1966 to 2014 and are at risk of becoming threatened or endangered. Several factors have led to their decline, such as conversion of grasslands and wetlands to agriculture use—decreasing the amount of suitable breeding territory for the western willet—and coastal development in California. Concerns for the eastern willets surround rising sea levels due to climate change infringing upon salt marshes. Willet habitats in South America are subject to shrimp farming, mining along the Amazon River, and changing land use patterns in that region.

One species or two?

Two subspecies of willets are commonly recognized—the eastern and western willet. As the names suggest, the eastern willet nests along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts, while the western willet breeds in the western interior of the continent. However, the subspecies often come together during migration and may share wintering grounds along the coasts of Central and South America.

Physically, the western willet is larger than the eastern willet. The western features larger legs, necks and wings, but are paler and less patterned than the eastern. Their songs are only slightly different.

Research on molecular data, led by Jessica Oswald, found that, “the anatomical attributes noted above differentiate the subspecies 94 percent of the time, and that genetic tests detected no hybridization or genetic introgression between the two subspecies. Indeed, the two forms appear to have been on their own evolutionary paths for at least 300,000 years.” Thus, “*taken together, the geographic, morphological, ecological, and genetic data strongly support the argument that eastern willet and western willet are two distinct species.*”

It is always fun to add a bird to a life list. My husband and I were able to check off the willet while attending the Space Coast Birding Festival in Melbourne, FL. We will always remember where we saw our first one. Though we missed it, there was a flock of 51 willets that stopped in at the Lorain Impound in April, so keep your eyes open and maybe you'll get to see this beautiful shore bird right here in our own "backyard."

References: Birdwatching Daily, Wildlife ODNR, Biodiversity Works, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, All About Birds, Chesapeake Bay Program

Red-Tails in Love

A Black River Book Review by Tammy Martin

Following years of collecting, I find myself with a rather extensive library, primarily nature-related. Surprisingly or not, the largest portion covers bird/avian topics. For those who know me, this really should not be a big surprise. Now that I'm retired, I plan to finally read some of them, and, as I do, I'll offer a brief report for *WingTips*. So, let's get started.

My first book is Marie Winn's ***Red-Tails in Love: Pale Male's Story—a True Wildlife Drama in Central Park*** (Vintage Books, 1995, 2005). I purchased this book at an Oberlin Public Library book sale, the source for much of my collection. Love book sales! Oops! Stick to the book, Martin.

Marie Winn tells the tale of an avid group of nature lovers, the "Regulars" who monitor all aspects of nature in Central Park, however her focus is on the birders. This dedicated group daily monitors, reports, educates, and advocates for the birds of Central Park...migrants and year-round residents. Marie joins the spring warbler walks, participates in the annual Christmas Bird Counts, monitors woodpecker roosting sites, and chases owl sightings. However, when a pair of red-tailed hawks arrives and builds a nest on a Fifth Avenue apartment building (home of Woody Allen and Mary Tyler Moore), Marie and the "Regulars" become obsessed.

In general, readers will learn all about birding, but more specifically in terms of hawks...mating, nesting, and banding, as well as the public challenges faced in this very urban setting as it relates to having winged neighbors. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (MBTA) comes into play when the apartment residents find the nest less than desirable. However, thanks to the MBTA, this very devoted and outspoken group of hawk-watchers perseveres to keep the nest in place for repeated use.

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Attention: Chance Mueleck**





Willets

(Photo courtesy taken at Lorain Impoundment, courtesy of Jeanne Buttle Williams)

Local Photographer Jeanne Buttle Williams

She doesn't think of herself this way, but Elyria photographer Jeanne Buttle Williams is an inspiration. Not only do her photos inspire a love of nature, her determination to be shooting photos in the local parks every day at 77 rouses many of us to get outside.

Coming off shoulder replacement surgery caused by more than 50 years as a hairdresser, Jeanne was back at Elyria's Elywood Park, walking without pain a week later! Unable to use her camera at first, she quickly recovered the ability to raise both arms to do so.

An artist by nature, Jeanne studied painting at LCCC soon after the college opened. She credits that experience for her ability to compose a photo before taking it, cutting down on editing time. The training probably gave her an appreciation of light and color, making her photos much more striking.

Judging by the photos she places in social media, one would think Jeanne has photographed birds most of her life. Surprisingly, she thinks of herself as a landscape photographer. "But, birds are so challenging," she says simply in explaining why she got into avian photography just five years ago. Now she has learned that "I love my 600 mm telephoto lens!"

Area birders are definitely thrilled that the little, energetic and determined lady is healthy and back hiking through county parks and fields, taking her wonderful photos and posting them regularly. **JJ**



AMERICAN AVOCET photo by Patty McKelvey

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