

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

October 2011



Editors: Jack Smith, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe
Photographer: John Koscinski
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

Program

Tuesday, October 4, 2011, 7:00 p.m.
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Gary Riggs

Veterinarian and Conservationist

Wild4Ever: Birth of a Local Conservation Foundation

Gary Riggs is a veterinarian who also does work for the Akron Zoo and Ohio Department of Natural Resources. He will give a picture of what it means to be a wildlife vet. He also has his own charitable organization, Wild4Ever (www.wild4ever.com) about which he also will speak. Wild4Ever is involved with projects such as Venezuelan waterfowl, sun bears, jaguars, fauna of Madagascar, and Cambodian wildlife.

Field Trip

October 15 , 2011 (Saturday)

Wellington Reservation and Upground Reservoir

Meet (9:00 a.m.) at the Upground Reservoir where we will survey waterfowl in the water resting before continuing their migration. We will then proceed to the Wellington Metro Park across the road where we will hike the trails which travel through various habitats including marshes, open fields, woods, etc. We should see many neotropical and migrating birds. Experienced and beginning birders are welcome. Please join us!

Birding by Tram at Sandy Ridge

For experienced and beginner birders who have difficulty walking. Walking birders are welcome to help locate birds for tram riders. Thursdays, October 13, and October 27, 9-11 a.m. Reservations are required. Call Sandy Ridge at 440-327-3626.

A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

It helps to be an early riser if you like birding. I've awakened at 2 or 3 a.m. to catch a bus or van at 3:30 or 4 a.m. going to a hot spot for birds. At sunrise the birds awaken and tend to be most active. After a foodless night, their high metabolism demands some calories pronto.

One March I spent an extended weekend birding in Nebraska. We birders arose in the middle of the night to board vans and travelled for a couple hours through pitch-black darkness. Finally there was enough light, but we could see only flat, plowed fields, grasslands and railroads, many railroads. I think we got lost and crossed some railroads more than once.

Just as the sun began to rise, we arrived at a field with a low hill. In absolute silence we waited, watched, and listened. BOOM! BOOM! – We had found the lek of some prairie chickens just in time to see and hear them perform. WOW! WOW! These greater prairie chickens are fast disappearing as their tall-grassland habitat disappears.

On top of the hill we could see a couple of brown chicken-like birds with orange eyebrows and yellowish-orange “sacs” (enlarged esophagus) on the sides of their throats. These sacs inflate during their courtship performance and produce the deep booming calls to attract females.

More recently I visited a wildlife area in the southeast corner of Kansas because I was told there were a few



prairie chickens there. I walked the loop trail for an hour without seeing any prairie chickens. But it was mid-afternoon, and I had my head down most of the time as I focused on avoiding the hundreds of huge bison patties on the trail.

What one will do for a rare bird!

Adapted from a Audubon email message written by Stephen Kress

Audubon Hog Island Camp in Maine: 75th Anniversary Celebrated

By **Dick Lee**

One of the nation's greatest environmental education success stories was celebrated August 20, 2011 at Audubon's Hog Island Camp. Since 1936, some of the world's most respected naturalists have inspired campers of all ages to learn about and protect birds and the environment.



Roger Tory Peterson, was among the first teachers at the 335 acre island in Maine's Muscongus Bay. His birding experiences helped spark interest in bird watching in the U.S. Birding is the nation's second fastest growing hobby, after gardening.

Kenn Kaufman, only nine years old when he read Peterson's account of Hog Island, is now an international authority on birds and one of the Hog Island instructors. Rachel Carson, a pivotal force behind the modern environmental movement and creation of the EPA, described her visit to Hog Island in her landmark book *Silent Spring*. It was also here that Audubon's Dr. Stephen Kress pioneered Project Puffin, a seabird restoration program that is now being replicated to help different species of seabirds around the globe.

"There's only one Hog Island and it represents something special for so many people," said Audubon president David Yarnold. "Hog Island is a breeding ground for optimism. People's lives are changed when they see how birds lead us to ecosystems and they hold a special place in their hearts and souls for nature – and for Hog Island. Most important, Hog Island fuels our passion for teaching others about the world we've been entrusted to protect."

Millicent Todd Bingham inherited Hog Island in 1932. She partnered with John Hopkinson Baker, then Audubon's executive director, who had been searching for a site where Audubon could launch the organization's first educational camp. The goal, unconventional at the time, was to help campers develop a sustained interest in the natural world.

"By focusing Hog Island's programming on educators—who are often our most passionate conservation ambassadors—we have been able to multiply our impact exponentially;" said Audubon's Vice President of Education, Judy Braus. "Educators are immersed in the wonder and beauty of the island— and we know that the experiences they share as well as the teaching skills the program imparts will foster environmental stewardship among thousands of young people and adults in communities across the country."

In 1986 the Black River Audubon Society established a trust fund "*to support a scholarship program in perpetuity to summer ecological workshops such as those sponsored by the National Audubon Society*". Beginning in 1988 with Ken Reed, a future BRAS president, attending an ecology camp in the Rocky Mountains, the chapter has awarded camp scholarships to 28 campers. Of these, 19 have attended the Hog Island camp. Almost all of the campers have been educators, either in the classroom or as a naturalist working with the public. The classroom educators have varied from third grade teachers to college professors. Many scholarship recipients have extended their acquired skills and knowledge beyond their vocational positions to teach in more informal settings such as volunteering for the county and city parks and with the community organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club and Boy and Girl Scout troops.



Hog Island Summer Camp 2011

We always enjoy learning from the campers as they pass on what they've learned to those who attend our chapter field trips.

The forward-thinking of our chapter leaders has certainly enhanced our opportunities to accomplish a mission of Black River Audubon Society to promote conservation and restoration of the ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife through education.

Quotes from Hog Island instructors

"Hog Island takes hold of you. There are many beautiful places, but this one will change your life." —Scott Weidensaul, author

"If your life is steeped in birds, you owe it to yourself to return to the Source." Pete Dunne, Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, V.P. of New Jersey Audubon Society Natural History Information, and founder of the World Series of Birding.

"I've run out of superlatives to describe it. The knowledge this island has to share will change the way you look at the natural world." Kenn Kaufmann

Quotes from Teachers who attended classes on Hog Island

I have been teaching for 25 years and have never experienced a more well rounded and useful program than that offered to educators on Hog Island.

When I came to Hog Island I didn't know what to expect. Five days later I had been rewarded with the most transformative professional development experiences I have had as a teacher.

I really felt that I was in the presence of some of the best birding people in the country, if not the world.

The beauty of the island, the inspiration imparted by the staff and guest speakers, and the knowledge shared

by the instructors is a life-changing event!
Your program, staff, environs and heritage are an absolute treasure. Thank you for caring about our wonderful world and its future.
The staff was amazing. You have set the bar very, very high for all future camps.
It was one of the best weeks of my life.

Black River Audubon Park established in Elyria

By **Harry Spencer**

Founding member, co-editor of WINGTIPS, and long time supporter of Black River Audubon Society, Jack Smith recently donated river-front land to the City of Elyria, and requested that it be used as the nucleus for a city park to be named *Black River Audubon Park*. We thank Jack for his generosity and his diligent, cheerful service to our Chapter of the National Audubon Society. I think I speak for many of our members in saying that we are honored to have our Chapter name added to a public park.

Judy Semroc Talk September 6, 2011

By **Cathy Priebe**

“Plant it and they will come” was the catch phrase of the evening according to Judy Semroc, who educated an avid audience of BRAS members and guests about the importance of pollinators and their environment.



Semroc, a Conservation Specialist at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, touched on all of the aspects of attracting beneficial creatures such as bees, beetles, butterflies, moths, flies, birds, bats and yes, even wasps into the backyard. “Wind and water also contribute to pollination,” she explained, “but 80 percent of pollination is carried out by insects, birds and bats.”

Every flower has its own specific creature that is equipped to feast on the nectar that is sometimes hidden deep in the blossoms. As the creature enters the flower, the powdery pollen (fertilizing element) which guards the sweet treat is disturbed and usually carried on the pollinator’s body parts and later distributed as they flit from plant to plant, pollinating future seeds or fruits.

“It is important to plant flowers, bushes or trees that are either the pollinator’s food (nectar) or their host (home and food for caterpillars) to keep your yard healthy and full of life,” explained Semroc.

Unfortunately, the quest for the perfect yard or garden generally has negative effects on the plants and the insects we so desperately need to keep our environment happy. “Excessive mowing, spraying, invasive plants, non-native bugs and other contaminants significantly contribute to habitat loss and the demise of important insects,” Semroc lamented. “We all need to consider the future and do our own part in saving the environment.”

“Of course, creating a butterfly or hummingbird garden using native plants and specific perennials to entice desired pollinators is the easiest way to pitch in and at the same time have lovely flowers as a bonus,” she added.

Milkweed, mints, lobelia, joe pyeweed, ironweed, liatris, asters, monarda, cone flower, button bush, butterfly bush and even clover are just a few of the plants to include in your landscape. She also suggested providing a shallow area for water, some bare ground or rocks, and minimize mowing if possible to further add to the success of your “pollinator” garden.

It is not too late to start your butterfly/pollinator garden. Get a head start for next year by planting some perennials this fall so you and the pollinators can enjoy the benefits of a beautiful and healthy yard.

Solitary Sandpiper (*Tringa solitaria*)

By Jack Smith,

On the first page of this issue of Wingtips is John Koscinski's wonderful photo of a solitary sandpiper. Most species of sandpiper migrate in flocks but not this one; it generally migrates and is observed alone, hence living up to its name of solitary. It is a medium-sized sandpiper, 7 ½ to 9 inches in length with a wingspread of 15 to 17 inches and weighs only 1.1 to 2.3 ounces. It has a white eye-ring, a dark brown back, and greenish legs.



In Ohio it is seen more often along small streams, back waters of large rivers, and at standing water and vernal pools in inland areas away from the Lake Erie waterfront. In the spring, birds migrate from winter quarters as far south as the Amazon Basin, arriving here between mid-April and the third week of May. While watching a solitary, you can't help noticing the bobbing of the head and tail, much like the spotted sandpiper, but with a motion more like a bow. The bird mostly forages in shallow fresh water searching for insects or any other small aquatic creatures to eat; it generally avoids saltwater habitats. While carefully watching this little bird, you might see it quiver one foot. This clever move probably stirs up small creatures from the bottom, which become a timely meal.

By the first of June most solitary sandpipers have left Ohio for their breeding grounds in the boreal spruce forests of North America, stretching from the east coast through Alaska. Here this bird does things differently than most sandpipers. It does not nest on the ground, but seeks out nests built by songbirds such as the American robin, rusty blackbird, bohemian waxwing, eastern kingbird or gray jay. It is not known if these are old nests or nests newly constructed by these songbirds. The female has been seen adding lining materials to these acquired nests. The nests are in a muskeg (bog) in a coniferous forest and are 4 to 40 feet above ground in a spruce tree or other conifer.

The female usually lays four olive-buff brown spotted eggs. Incubation details are poorly known, but both parents may be involved. The eggs hatch in 23 - 24 days. The young are precocious and are not fed by the parents. Apparently the chicks have to jump from the nest to the ground, where they forage and feed themselves.

More research is needed about the migration of this species back to its wintering grounds in the Amazon Basin. It probably migrates mostly alone and at night. Individuals arrive alone in Ohio as early as late June with most observations beginning in late July through August. They are mostly gone by October.

Ornithologists have found the population of this bird hard to census since the bird is so scattered through the year, but no obvious decline in numbers has been discovered.

References: *Life of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *The Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *Field Guide to the Birds* by Roger Tory Peterson; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; www.wisconsinbirds.org/plan/spieces/sosa.htm

Stilt Sandpiper (*Calidris himantopus*)

By Jack Smith,

Thanks to Dane Adams, a great picture of a stilt sandpiper is shown on the next page. Note the rusty cheek patch, slight droop to the tip of its bill and the long greenish-yellow legs, all identification marks for this bird. Standing and walking it looks like a yellowlegs. When feeding, it acts much like a dowitcher, probing in the mud with a sewing machine-like motion. Its diet includes insects (including fly larvae and beetles), marine worms, snails, and seeds, leaves, and roots of aquatic plants. The stilt is a medium-sized sandpiper, 7 ½ to 9

inches long with a wing spread of 15 ½ to 17 inches and weighs 1 ¾ to 2 ½ ounces. The male and female look outwardly the same.

The stilt does not breed in the United States but merely passes through, mainly in the central part of United States, as it wings its way north in the spring from its winter quarters as far south as Argentina. Relatively few are encountered in Ohio, with most seen in Lucas and Ottawa Counties. Only a few records have occurred over the years in the Cleveland area in the spring.

This sandpiper breeds in the Arctic tundra above the timberline from Alaska through the Hudson Bay area. Kenn Kaufmann describes the following mating activities: The male begins display over the breeding area by flying slowly with shallow wing beats and calls incessantly. He then glides with wings in a shallow “V” while giving a guttural song. In courtship the male pursues the female in the air in a spectacular display. He gets in front of her and then raises his wings high over his back, singing as he plummets toward the ground.

The nest site is in a dry spot on a low ridge or on top of a sedge hummock and is often surrounded by water. The male makes nest scrapes and the female chooses the depression she wants. No nesting material is used. She lays four eggs, which are pale green to olive-green and heavily dotted brown. Interestingly, incubation is done in shifts -- the male takes the day shift and the female takes the night shift. The eggs hatch in 19 - 21 days, and the downy young soon leave the nest. Both parents may tend the young at first but the female departs in less than a week, followed by the male after two weeks. The young are able to fly in 18 to 20 days.

Many more stilt sandpipers pass through Ohio when they migrate south to their wintering grounds in South America. They are most common in the western Lake Erie region and uncommon to fairly common along the rest of the lakefront area. In the Cleveland area most are seen from July through September.

Laws now protect shorebirds, and counts of migrants suggest that the species probably has increased in recent decades.

References: *Life of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *The Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *Field Guide to the Birds* by Roger Tory Peterson; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres



***It doesn't take a special invitation! Attend a Black River Audubon meeting.
NATURE needs your help!***