

**Black River Audubon Society**

# **WINGTIPS**

October 2015



OSPREY photo by Diane Devereaux

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Cathy Priebe, and Harry Spencer  
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

**Kurt G. Sarringhaus with Jan Koepp and Jeanne McKibben, MD**

## **Southern Africa Safari 2013**

**October 6, 7 p.m.**

**Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center**



Kurt has been an attorney in Oberlin for nearly forty years, focusing on estate planning and probate. Jan has been a registered OB nurse for over forty-five years and, in addition, has been an international board certified lactation consultant for the past ten years. Jeanne is a physician, having practiced medicine in Oberlin for approximately 40 years. Jeanne enjoys videography and has made approximately twenty documentaries. Together, they all share a passion for Africa.

Experience, through videos and photos, a safari to Botswana, Zambia and Zimbabwe during the summer of 2013. Jan, Jeanne and Kurt will take you along for an exciting and educational thrill ride to the Dark Continent.

### **Photos by READERS**



WOOD DUCK photo by Greg Pasek



TRUPETER SWAN photos by Mike Tylicki

## Field Trips

Saturday, Oct. 17, 2015, 9:00 a.m.

Royal Oaks Park/Indian Hollow LCMP

Meet at parking lot on Parsons Rd., south side, east of Indian Hollow LCMP; Marty Ackermann to lead

### A Birder's Diary: Cultural Attitudes Toward the European Starling

By Carol Leininger

The European starling, widely hated in the U.S., is actually a very attractive bird. Its fall plumage is speckled with white and tan spots, which wear off gradually during the winter, leaving a glossy black spring plumage with iridescent purples and greens, which give it a metallic sheen.

Starlings can be easily distinguished from other blackbirds by their short tail, long slender bill, and jerky walk. They have adapted well to life in towns and cities as well as the country, raising several broods each year. Recently, large flocks of starlings have been shown in birding magazines as huge clouds in the sky, constantly changing shape like a giant amoeba.

Eugene Schieffelin, a businessman from the Bronx, decided to introduce the starling into New York's Central Park in 1890. It was his bright idea to bring all the birds mentioned in Shakespeare's plays to the greatest city park in the country.

From that small start, in ninety years the starling became one of the most abundant birds in North America. Today, in the United States, they are considered serious pests and one of the worst invasive bird species along with the house sparrow. They are blamed for pushing other cavity-nesting bird populations (e.g., eastern bluebirds and kestrels) into a swift decline. But the starling is invasive in other countries as well – New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, the West Indies, and Fiji all have colonies of this European bird.

*Birds and People* by Mark Corker is an excellent reference book for anyone interested in the literature, history, philosophy and folklore of birds of the world. Starlings were killed and eaten by starving soldiers in ancient times; they were thought to help devour locust swarms; and have been loved as a harbinger of spring in Russia where nest boxes were built specifically for them. This bird, much maligned by American birders, has been cherished and kept as pets all over the world.

### AMERICAN GOLDFINCH

*Spinus tristis*

By Jim Jablonski

Who doesn't love the American goldfinch? Arguably the second most popular backyard bird to the northern cardinal, it was said in the Audubon Songbirds Calendar for 2015 that encounters with goldfinches "can lead to a lifetime interest in birds and an enhanced appreciation of nature." I know that for a fact since I am an example.

Knowing very little beyond recognizing robins, cardinals and hummingbirds, I decided to put up a bird feeder when I retired from my fulltime job some years ago.

The next morning I glanced out my window to see a flash of yellow. "Wow, someone's canary got loose" was my first thought. A moment's reflection passed and I realized that was unlikely. "Is that what they call a goldfinch?" I asked my sixty-year old self. A quick check of Google photos and the realization hit – even my neighborhood in Elyria had gorgeous birds! *I had always thought one needed to travel to be a birdwatcher – at least away from my neighborhood with its swarms of house sparrows and starlings. Six decades of being oblivious to the wildlife around me had finally ended.*



After all, who does not appreciate the chipper goldfinch? With its breeding plumage of gold set off by its black cap pulled down past its eyes and black and white wings, the tiny American goldfinch definitely holds its own against the larger northern cardinal for best-looking backyard bird. Add to that its cheery “perchicoree”



AMERICAN GOLDFINCH photo by Diane Devereaux

call and undulating flight to and from feeders and you have one of the more entertaining of American birds.

The male is attractive enough that he simply has to accentuate his normal behavior to attract a mate. He simply exaggerates, the loops in his flight, while circling his territory and making his calls. Perhaps the circle is meant to impress the female with the size and the bounty within. This finch is a very late nester, often putting off mating until mid-summer – some speculate that it may time hatching with the appearance of thistle seeds, one of its favorite foods.

Once the couple is together, the female begins to build one of the strongest nests in the avian world. The cup is so tightly constructed of grasses, flower heads, thistle down, fur and feathers that they have been known to hold water – even to the point of drowning hatchlings when filled during a storm!

It is said that males will sometimes carry a few materials to their mates but provide no meaningful help with the nests.

Soon after construction 4-5 bluish white eggs result. Now the

male’s work begins in earnest as he feeds the female throughout incubation while she sits on the nest up to 95% of the time. She often calls to the male and begs to be fed. However, after the eggs hatch both parents feed the young, which leave the nest between twelve and seventeen days after hatching. Two broods are the norm but more can occur. The male may do most of the later feeding while the female begins work on a nest for the second brood.

At backyard feeders, the goldfinch seems to prefer nyjer thistle seeds. The best way to present the seed, to avoid it being monopolized by house sparrows, is to use a feeder that forces the bird to hang upside down. The extremely agile goldfinch learns the technique quickly and even seems to enjoy it while sparrows attempt the acrobatics but eventually give up. It is also fun to watch goldfinch fledglings work at learning the trick. Sometimes it takes a while but they eventually catch on.

Cowbirds parasitize finches but, the smaller birds’ diet consisting mostly of thistle seeds and those of other plants is insufficient for cowbird hatchlings, and they typically die before fledging.

Due to its seed-based diet, the goldfinch doesn't need to head far south for the winter – available food is more important than warmth. And, for such a well-known, common bird, its migration patterns are not very well known. During winter it can form flocks of dozens or more and even up to three hundred, sometimes with its not so distant cousins, siskins and redpolls, as it searches for good feeding grounds.



The American goldfinch has been designated the official bird of three states, but the entire country can enjoy the species, which ranges throughout, although numbers are sparse in some mountainous western areas. In the Far West and Southwest, its range overlaps with its cousin, the smaller and less flashy cousin, the lesser goldfinch.

American goldfinch range

My backyard feeding experience has been to see small flocks of goldfinches for a few days and suddenly, without warning, see none at all for weeks, leaving the winter backyard bleaker still, even though both sexes are wearing their olive-drab colors during the colder weather. And they always seem to disappear during the Great Backyard Bird Count, exactly when I would like to record flocks of them and others of my favorites!

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

## ***OSPREY***

*Pandion haliaetus*

By ***Cathy Priebe***



While we were visiting good friends this summer, we took a relaxing pontoon boat ride on the Portage River in Port Clinton. The weather was perfect, blue sky, soft breezes and warm sun. Our journey took us near the mouth of Lake Erie and the Jet Express dock. Eagles were flying and perching throughout the trip. As we approached the more commercial area of Port Clinton, a low-flying bird caught everyone's attention. We watched in fascination as it suddenly dived and struck the water. It was an osprey!

Ospreys are mostly dark brown on top with white under parts (male, white throat) yellow eyes with a dark eye line, and a light head. Females are similar, but have dark necklace on their throat area.

The osprey has had a miraculous comeback in Ohio and North America after falling victim to the perils of unregulated agricultural pesticide poisoning in the 50's and 60's. With their populations severely reduced, osprey sightings in Ohio were rare in the 70's. After the chemicals were banned, the osprey became a more common and welcome sight.

Nesting in treetops or man-made platforms or towers, near water, their large stick woven nests are frequently re-used each year. The female lays 2 to 4 eggs and both adults care for the young.

Small fish are the main staple for this raptor, and they are elegantly obtained by diving from heights of up to 100 feet in the air. Our group watched spellbound as the bird repeatedly executed its diving display until it successfully snatched its prey and flew to a treetop to dine. Gulls waited impatiently, hoping it would drop some of its meal for them to scavenge.

Ospreys and eagles do not inter-mingle, and they chase each other out of their territories. Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville, Ohio often has an osprey visit the ponds for a short time each spring or



summer. According to head naturalist Tim Fairweather, an osprey has been living at the park for the first part of September 2015.

References: *Birds of Ohio*, Jim McCormac; *Stokes Field Guide to Birds*, Donald and Lillian Stokes; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion*, Pete Dunne.

## Our Oldest New Member

By *Jim Jablonski*

Last year my mother, Antonette Jablonski, was nearing her 101<sup>st</sup> birthday when I brought her the monthly edition of *Wingtips* that she always enjoyed reading. She looked at me and said, "You know I really should belong to the group and have it mailed to me."

After all, she always had an interest in birds although she was never actually a birder. Cardinals and hummingbirds were always her love and she would often call her children to come and see them out the window. She also made a point of throwing out breadcrumbs "to feed the birds." Although it took me decades to develop a deep interest in them, I attribute my current interest to those experiences in my childhood.

Knowing that with failing eyesight and hearing she would never attend a meeting, I said I could just keep bringing her mine to read. "No, I really should belong," she said. It was too late for her birthday but I took out a subscription for her as a Christmas present. She reads it cover to cover with a trusty magnifying glass. Hopefully this *Wingtips* will reach her in time for her 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday in October!



Editor's note by Harry Spencer: I am sad to add that Antonette Jablonski died in September 2015 while the paper edition of WINGTIPS was in press.

## The Birding Community E-Bulletin

Some time ago, Tammy Martin informed us of a good source for up-to-date birding news – *The Birding Community E-bulletin*. Written by Paul Baicich and Wayne Petersen, the E-bulletin is a great source for information on conservation topics, rarities, political issues related to birding, etc. Basically, it has "no fluff" in Tammy's words. In addition, its articles provide links to the relevant resources used for the E-Bulletin's releases.

The August 7<sup>th</sup> issue contained short articles on a field guide to Cuban birds, habitat restoration along the Gulf Coast, little egret sightings, the attacks and defense of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in the U.S. House of Representatives, and other topics. And Tammy was correct; all articles were very much to the point.

If you want to get onto the monthly E-bulletin mailing list contact either Wayne Petersen at [wpetersen@massaudubon.org](mailto:wpetersen@massaudubon.org) or Paul Baicich at [paul.baicich@verizon.net](mailto:paul.baicich@verizon.net).

Past E-bulletins are archived on the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) website: <http://refugeeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>. Below is one of the E-bulletin's articles from July of this year. **JJ**

## The Long Life of a Bald Eagle

The following article was in the July edition of The Birding Community E-bulletin.

*Early last month, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) reported a Bald Eagle killed alongside a road in Monroe County in upstate New York. The bird, a male banded with the number 03142, had actually been an individual that had been brought to New York from Minnesota as a youngster in 1977 and released at Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. The USGS Banding Lab Longevity Records indicate that eagle turned out to be the oldest banded Bald Eagle on record to date – older by a surprising five years.*

Once this 38-year-old male reached breeding age in 1981, he began nesting at Hemlock Lake, about 50 miles to the west of Montezuma NWR .

*“In my first year as the Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife program Supervisor in 1977,” remarked Carrol Henderson, “I arranged for the capture of four Minnesota nestling Bald Eagle chicks for restoration in New York and accompanied Peter Nye of the New York DEC to northern Minnesota where we hired a tree climber and took a total of four chicks – a chick from each of several nests, leaving a healthy chick in each nest.” One of those chicks was 03142.*

*Peter Nye, the now retired DEC Wildlife Biologist who spearheaded New York’s Bald Eagle Restoration Program, commented on the bird, “His longevity, 38 years, although ingloriously cut short by a motor vehicle, is also a national record for known life-span of a wild Bald Eagle. All I can say is, hats off to you, 03142; job well done!*

The above article is an example of those in The Birding Community E-bulletin, which is described in the previous article. You can go to the NWRA website <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/> to access all past articles in the E-bulletin.

## Reader Photo Opportunities!

You undoubtedly have noticed the attractive photos that now grace the second page of Wingtips. Mostly they are the work of our readers! We would like to offer other photographically-gifted readers the opportunity to have their photos placed inside Wingtips as well as on the Black River Audubon Society website.

If you are interested in having your photos published in either location, you can email your photos to Harry Spencer at [meshes@frontier.com](mailto:meshes@frontier.com) for Wingtips and/or to Arlene Lengyel, our webmistress, at [arstar50@yahoo.com](mailto:arstar50@yahoo.com). As Arlene pointed out in a message to me, “using members’ photos online makes the website more interesting.” **JJ**

**National Audubon Membership Application (Includes membership in Black River Audubon and subscriptions to WINGTIPS and AUDUBON magazine):** \_\_\$20/year, \_\_\$30/2 years, \_\_\$15/year Student/Senior

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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.**