

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

October 2016



*John Koscinski*

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE photo by John Koscinski

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# Field Trips

**Augusta-Anne Olsen**

**State Nature Preserve**

**Saturday, Oct. 15, 2015, 9:00 a.m.**

Meet at 4934 W. River Rd., Wakeman

Tammy Martin to lead

## **Old Woman Creek/Sheldon's Marsh August Field Trip, August 20, 2016**

By **Tammy Martin**



Ten hearty birders, including two Western Cuyahoga Audubon friends, met at Old Woman Creek for a late summer walk on the main loop trail. Although the woods seemed fairly quiet, the overlook gave great views of the estuary and a nice variety of bird species. We simply waited as they arrived and flew by. The water level was perfect for enjoying the water lotus aquatic plants, some blooming and others showing their large seed pods.

Next, we drove to Sheldon's Marsh, where we walked out to the lakeshore, birding along the way and stopping at each overlook. At one site, we met an enthusiastic family from Akron with two budding young birders. We shared scope views of green herons and Midland painted turtles, while encouraging them to participate in Ohio's Young Birders Club. Once we made it to the northern-most point, we scanned a calm Lake Erie for cormorants, gulls, terns, and shorebirds.

In spite of a quiet beginning and warm August morning, we still tallied 46 species, including wood duck, mallard, double-crested cormorant, great blue heron, great egret, green heron, turkey vulture, bald eagle, Cooper's hawk, red-tailed hawk, spotted sandpiper, ring-billed gull, Caspian tern, rock pigeon, mourning dove, yellow-billed cuckoo, chimney swift, belted kingfisher, red-headed woodpecker, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, pileated woodpecker, eastern wood-pewee, eastern kingbird, red-eyed vireo, blue jay, American crow, purple martin, tree swallow, northern rough-winged swallow, bank swallow, barn swallow, black-capped chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, Carolina wren, eastern bluebird, American robin, European starling, northern cardinal, indigo bunting, red-winged blackbird, common grackle, Baltimore oriole, American goldfinch, and house sparrow.

After the bulk of the group departed, Dick Lee, Paul Sherwood, Holly Lynn and I made a final stop at nearby Medusa Marsh to scope for shorebirds. The water level of the middle impoundment was ideal, as we tallied an additional nine species for the day, some being 'first-of-the year' birds for me, and 'lifers' for Holly. These added species included black-bellied plover, semipalmated plover, killdeer, greater yellowlegs, semipalmated sandpiper, least sandpiper, pectoral sandpiper, stilt sandpiper, and marbled godwit (2 of them!!). We were not disappointed!

## **A Birder's Diary: The Responses of Birds to Threats**

By **Carol Leininger**

Even though we often hear about a bird population declining, birds as a group seem to survive due to a variety of defensive behaviors. Social behaviors provide safety for the performer's mate and young as well as other birds nearby. A bird's response to danger depends on the species and its physical and behavioral adaptations, the types of predation to which the bird is normally subjected, whether or not the bird is breeding, and the intensity of danger signals it makes.

**Fleeing and freezing** – When a hawk threatens small birds at a feeder, fleeing into dense vegetation helps. Birds with cryptic coloration might choose to freeze in place.

**Communicating danger** – When a bird sights danger, their calls can alert others.



**Threatening** – When a great-horned owl opens its wings and mouth to appear larger and hisses and snaps, many predators will turn away.

**Attacking** – Owls and great black-backed gulls as well as other birds are known to attack humans if their nest and young seem to be in danger.

**Massing** – Ducks often bunch up in a raft formation and shorebirds fly off in large flocks, making it difficult for the predator to see just one individual.

**Exploring** – If a new and different bird feeder or other object is placed in their feeding area – it may take a few days before birds will approach and slowly inspect it before deciding if it is safe.

**Mobbing** – Small birds tend to mob a hawk or owl perched nearby. This alerts many other birds and soon a mixed group will be harassing the predator. The mob may be irritating enough to get it to leave the area.

Defensive behaviors are some of the many interesting behaviors birds exhibit that make birdwatching so popular.

## Ospreys

By Scott Spencer



Ospreys (*Pandion haliaetus*) are like canaries in a coal mine. Ospreys provide an excellent indication of the overall health of a river or estuary ecosystem. According to Captain John Lipscomb of the boat "Hudson Riverkeeper", ospreys mean healthy fish, which means clean water.

Riverkeeper (<http://www.riverkeeper.org>) is dedicated to raising awareness and solving environmental issues in the Hudson River watershed. My wife, Lori, and I had the privilege of traveling with Riverkeeper for several days this summer along the Mohawk and Hudson Rivers in our 41-foot trawler "Venture". River cruising is a slow-paced way to enjoy scenery and meet new friends. We had

plenty of time waiting at canal locks, learning from Captain Lipscomb about his boat and mission.

Our boat, Venture, is based in the Chesapeake Bay, and we were homeward bound from a wonderful cruise to Ottawa, Canada, and back, when we met up.

How do ospreys fit in to this picture? It turns out that the appearance of water can be deceiving when it comes to some forms of pollution. Captain Lipscomb gave us bad news and good news about the Mohawk River in Central NY State. At Amsterdam, NY, about 60 miles from the mouth, the water is clean enough to swim in. At Waterford, NY, where the Mohawk meets the



RIVERKEEPER photo by Lori Spencer

Hudson, the river is basically an open sewer despite clean appearance. (This was particularly unfortunate for me because I swam in both places on hot days! But I had no apparent ill effects.)

Ospreys know the difference. There are a few in the middle sections of the Mohawk in the areas where Riverkeeper finds the least pollution. Near the mouth of the river, there are zero ospreys. As we transit down the Hudson, ospreys reappear along unpolluted stretches until we approach NY City, where they disappear again. Ospreys are relatively common along the coasts of New Jersey and Delaware. Once we reach our home waters of the Chesapeake Bay (Maryland and Virginia), ospreys become, in Captain Lipscomb's words, "Thick as pigeons". He also reflects that the



CHESAPEAKE BAY OSPREYS photo by Lori Spencer

Chesapeake has a thriving fishing industry (rockfish, crabs and some oysters), which goes along with the osprey population and clean, if muddy-looking, bay water.

We tremendously enjoy watching ospreys during our local cruises on our boat. It's very easy to project human characteristics onto some bird species. Eagles are regal, majestic... and lazy. Great blue herons are always cranky. Ducks and geese are noisy and love crowds. Ospreys seem to be the hardest working and the most likeable of the Chesapeake birds.

## GREAT TIT

*Parus major*

By **Barbara Baudot**

The great tit is the Eurasian cousin of the familiar chickadee and titmouse; all belong to the *familiae* of *paridae* or tit. Although quite small at approximately five inches, the great tit is the largest bird in the family. It is easily recognized by its yellow underparts with a black band running down the center of the breast, a bluish black crown, neck, throat, bib and head; and large white cheek patches. Its back is olive green, the greyish-blue wings feature a white bar, and the sides of the tail are white. Males can be distinguished from females by the much thicker black central band on their breast. Females are slightly duller than the males.



A vocal songbird, it has up to 40 types of calls and songs that carry different messages. A sharp 'chit' 'chit' serves as a contact call; a 'teacher' 'teacher' call claims territoriality. The great tit's many calls give the impression that there are more birds on a territory than is the case.

Today the great tit accounts for the vast majority of the genus *Parus*. The great tit is one of the Northern Hemisphere's most ecologically adaptable birds. Its range is in gardens and woodlands throughout Europe,

Eurasia, Japan and Indonesia and also North Africa. Although introduced to the United States a few decades ago, it did not survive here.



GREAT TIT photo by Barbara Baudot

The tit's very large population, broad geographic range and characteristically easy adaptability to different habitats make it one of the least vulnerable of songbirds today. It is generally not a migratory bird. Much like Darwin's finches, interbreeding, natural hybridization, and adaptations to different ecological conditions have led to the evolution of 14 different genera of *Parus*. The breakdown is not complete as many sub species are being identified.

Like related species, the great tit is a cavity nester and commonly uses tree holes and nest boxes. The female lays up to twelve, white and reddish brown spotted eggs and incubates them alone. Both parents in these generally monogamous couples share feeding of the nestlings. It is not uncommon for a couple to raise two broods yearly.

The great tits are primarily insectivorous in the summer, feeding on insects and spiders. During the breeding season, the tits prefer to feed protein-rich caterpillars to their young. The bright colored breasts of the great tit are attributed to carotenoids in these caterpillars. In autumn and winter, when insect prey becomes scarcer, they add berries and seeds to their diet. I observe them eating sunflower seeds year round.

Great tits combine dietary versatility with a considerable amount of intelligence and the ability to solve problems with insight. For example, the great tit is found to use a pine needle as a tool held by its bill to extract larvae from tree holes. In England, they have been observed breaking the foil caps of milk bottles against door stoops to obtain the cream at the top. Large seeds or prey are dealt with by "hold-hammering," where the bird holds the item with one or both feet, then strikes it with its bill. When feeding young, adults will hammer off the heads of large insects to make them easier to consume, and remove the guts from caterpillars so that its tannins will not retard a chick's growth. They have even been known to kill pipistrelle bats and some small birds, seeking nourishment from the brains of this prey. The tits only do this in winter when bats are hibernating and their regular food is scarce.

**References:** Encyclopedia of Life, [col.org/pages1051974/](http://col.org/pages1051974/); Scientific American Blog network, [iucnredlist.org/details](http://iucnredlist.org/details); **Evolution and genetic structure of the great tit complex:** Proceedings of the Royal Society of London B: Biological Sciences; **Great tit** in Wikipedia

## **BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE**

*Poecile atricapillus*

By **Cathy Priebe**



How could you not love this little bird? They are not only cute and feisty, but they are one of the most common avian inhabitants found across North America. Aptly named for its black cap, both sexes have a black bib and white cheek, gray back and white underparts with buffy sides and wing bars.

My experiences with chickadees have always been enjoyable if not sometimes frustrating during warbler season. Catching many of their meals on the wing, their fly catching behavior often mimics warbler feeding. They also glean insects from trees and other vegetation, but they are probably more famous in my backyard for coming to the birdfeeders. I have often been scolded by these small critters for not keeping my bird buffet properly filled. Usually, they are the first ones to dive in while I am still filling the feeders.

The black-capped chickadee nests in Ohio and generally constructs its home in tree cavities or bird houses. The female lays six to eight speckled white eggs and incubates them for about two weeks. Chickadees are very curious and seemingly friendly birds, often coming very close to humans. They prefer to live in mixed woodlands and forests, parks and in backyards that cater to their seed preferences.

Even though this bird is non-migratory, birds in their northern most range will often come south, sometimes overlapping into the home of the Carolina chickadee. Both birds share similar colorations and characteristics, but the Carolina is a half inch smaller and is a trimmer, cleaner bird than the "scruffy" black-capped who has been described by Pete Dunne as a "ruffian" compared to the well-groomed Carolina chickadee.

Some fun facts about black-capped chickadees:

- \*They say their name when they call. Chicka- dee-dee-dee. It does not get any easier than that to help a first time birder!!
- \*They absolutely love sunflower seed and will grab one seed at a time and fly to either eat or store it away.
- \*It has been noted that chickadees have great recall and can remember where they cached seeds a month later!!!
- \*They often respond to phishing and will answer you back if you whistle their song.
- \*They can be trained to eat out of your hand.
- \*They are able to survive harsh winters by inducing their body into a regulated hypothermia to help them conserve valuable energy until their next feeding.
- \*They love to play and it is amusing to watch their antics around backyard feeders.

The black-capped chickadee has always been one of my favorite backyard birds, and I am delighted to hear their cheery calls, especially during our long Ohio winters.

References: **Birds of Ohio** by Jim McCormac: **Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion** by Pete Dunne.

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE from Audubon.com



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