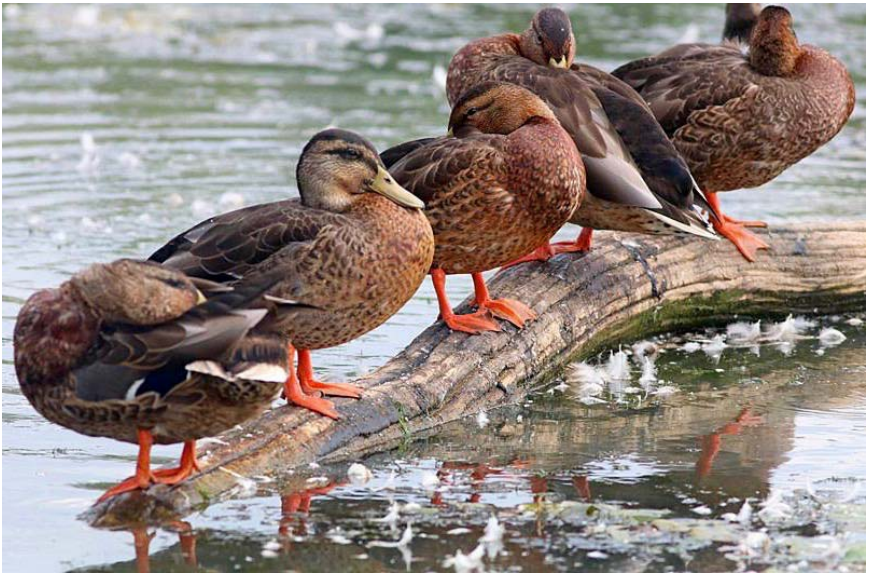


# WINGTIPS



MALE "ECLIPSE" MALLARDS photo by Debbie Parker

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OCT. 2017

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# **October Program**

Tuesday, October 3, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

## **Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr. “Birding Ohio’s Lakeshore”**



**Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr.**

Born in Phoenix, Arizona but raised in the Cleveland, Ohio area, Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr. is a life-long birder and wildlife photographer with a recent passion for gulls. He enjoys teaching new birders through his easy-going style and having fun along the way. His interest in birds began at a young age, even before attending his first bird walks in 1975. The Cleveland Audubon Society honored him with an award at age fifteen for “Outstanding Contribution in the Field of Conservation” and he won a bird identification contest sponsored by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History in the same year.

Chuck is an avid member of the Ohio birding community, and his efforts to assist and educate novice birders via social media are well known. Chuck has presented a number of programs for different birding associations where he shares his photos and stories, and he has also led field trips and given presentations in conjunction with the “The Biggest Week in American Birding.” His photography has appeared in many print publications and birding sites online.

Chuck says about his upcoming presentation to BRAS, “I’m excited to be presenting my program “Birding Ohio’s Lakeshore” to the good people of Black River Audubon. I like to describe it as a seasonal romp of some of the diverse species of birds I’ve seen in Ohio’s wonderful lakeshore counties, from the common to the rare. I’m looking forward to seeing everyone and presenting my program to you. See you there!”

## **October Field Trip**

### **Lake Erie Bluffs, Lake County Metro Parks**

**Saturday, October 21, 2017, 9:00 a.m.**

Meet at tower, 2901 Clark Rd., Perry Township

John Pogacnik to lead

## **August Field Trip Report**

### **Chippewa Inlet, Medina Metro Parks**

**By Tammy Martin**



Weather can always be an issue for our BRAS field trips, and August was no exception. It poured all the way to our site, Chippewa Inlet Trail, in Medina County. Eight members patiently awaited the storm to pass to begin our walk with Debbie Parker leading us.

Incidentally, Debbie lives nearby, so she visits her ‘local patch’ regularly and knows what to expect where. Nearly everything she predicted, we saw. A great person to serve as our guide.

Chippewa Inlet Trail, part of the Medina County Metro Park (MCMP) system, is a restored wetland thanks to mitigation funding, similar to Sandy Ridge and Columbia Reservations in Lorain County. We followed a crushed limestone trail through various habitats (field edge and woods, but mainly wetland/marsh/meadow), ending at a raised deck overlooking a large impoundment of water. Thanks to this variety of habitat, we tallied approximately 45 species of birds, including a few drab fall migrants. An unidentified warbler remained unidentified, but a juvenile yellow-throated vireo was correctly named after studying Debbie’s clear photographs.

Several heron species, plenty of young wood ducks, lots of barn swallows, and a few shorebirds were just some of the highlights.

Along the trail, we also dodged several American toads: one large adult and a few smaller young ones. With this late summer walk, I



Tammy explains some of the local flora.



Some of the birders who braved the weather.

also pointed out several tall, blooming wildflowers: swamp mallow, cup plant, and boneset, to name a few. One, the arrow-leaved tearthumb (what a great name!), I had to look up later, as I'd forgotten its identity . . . been too focused on birds lately. Ha, ha!

## **A Birder's Diary: Goldenrods, Insect Galls, and Birds**

By **Carol Leininger**



I always look forward to the bright yellow colors of fall. Fields of tickseed sunflowers and goldenrod are everywhere. I'm amazed at the variety of different species of goldenrods – the flower clusters may be in plumes, branching club-like wands or flat-topped arrangements. They thrive along roadsides, open woods, and other dry places.

Americans used goldenrods to treat toothaches, colds, heart disease, sore throats and fevers. People today blame them for hay fever, which is a mistake as the pollen from ragweed is the culprit. The most common type here in Lorain County seems to be the Canada goldenrod with a showy yellow plume of tiny flowers.

In early and midsummer tiny peacock flies lay their eggs in the growing tips of goldenrods before the flowers develop. This triggers a growth hormone in the stem to produce the galls around the eggs that keep them safe. The gall appears as a ball-like bump just below the flower cluster. Later the eggs hatch into tiny larvae that spend the winter gradually eating their new home from inside out. The larvae chew tunnels outward almost to the outside skin of the galls before turning into pupae.

Downy woodpeckers, field mice, and meadow voles recognize these galls and seem to know exactly what is in them. The larvae are a wonderful source of protein in their winter diet.

If the larva survives into the spring the pupa will change into a fly. It uses an inflatable, balloon-like structure on top of its head to open the tunnel and escape. Isn't it amazing how birds and other animals know just where to find tasty morsels of food?

We all depend upon one another – birds depend on insects that depend on plants and, in many situations, we humans depend on other forms of life as well. One can see many interrelationships of this sort. In spring migration more warblers seem to be found on trees that blossom early – perhaps insects play a role here as well. Maybe birders should spend more time thinking like a bird to increase their check lists.

**Reference:** “Emerald Necklace” by Robert Hinkle, 2012

## MALLARD

*Anas platyrhynchos*



By **Cathy Priebe**

I surely think it is safe to say that almost all of us have either fed and/or had the pleasure of seeing mallards at one point in our lives.

Early on, my parents would take us to a local pond or small lake to feed the ducks. It was a very common family activity back then (I am not going say how far back) and I fondly remember those days.

After getting married and settling down, we found out almost immediately that the property behind our house consistently retained water, especially during heavy spring rains. Without fail each spring, the “pond” would host a pair of mallards. But one season, I witnessed something I had never seen nor heard about. But first, a little background on our friend, the mallard.



**Male mallard in breeding plumage from Audubon.org**

The male mallard is a strikingly handsome lad when he is in breeding plumage. He has an iridescent green head, white neck ring, yellow bill and purplish breast bordered with white. The female is a very soft patterned brown, often confused with other female dabbling ducks. The female mallard does have a few distinguishing traits that can help even the most novice of birders make the right ID. The most obvious mark is her very large orange bill that is bisected with a dark saddle.

There are certain times of the year when even a male mallard can be difficult to identify as we found out when we decided to use the photo for the front cover of *Wingtips*. The pictured waterfowl are male mallards in eclipse plumage. After the breeding season, adult males sport a duller basic plumage for about two months.

Mallards mainly nest in low growing vegetation or in fields near water. Their eggs are greenish white and the female incubates for about a month. The young are almost immediately on their own after hatching, which includes eating while the parents guard them as they swim huddled together. Mallard predation for nestlings is almost 40% due to hawks, coyotes and aquatic animals. Despite this statistic plus hunting and other natural causes, the mallard duck is one of the most abundant duck species in North America.

Most mallards stay all year in temperate climates where lakes and ponds do not freeze. Fall migration can begin early September to late December and in the spring from early February through mid-May.

Getting back to my story. I happened to be feeding my birds one morning when I heard a ruckus in the wetland in our backyard. Approximately 4 male mallards were ruthlessly chasing a poor lone female as she quacked and desperately tried to escape their “amorous” attentions. Finally, her mate came to her rescue and they both flew safely away.

Here are some more interesting facts about mallard ducks:

- \* They can be very friendly if they have been fed by humans and extremely wary if they have been hunted.
- \* They are very sociable with other ducks and will feed together.
- \* Male mallards are somewhat promiscuous and have mated with other ducks, such as the American black duck, domestic ducks and others. This hybridization has produced a plethora of mixed “mallards” that consistently confuses even the most experienced birder.
- \* Called a dabbling duck because they go forward into the water with their tail sticking up, mallards forage for seeds from pond plants, fish eggs, aquatic invertebrates and larval amphibians.

**References:** The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior by David Allen Sibley; Birds of Ohio by Jim McCormac; Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion by Pete Dunne.

## **Late Summer Mallard Confusion**

**By Jim Jablonski**

Oh, the problems of a birding newsletter editor! Originally, in a plan to promote gender equality, I meant to begin running cover photos of interesting female birds now and again. When I received the striking color photo of mallards on the front of this month’s *Wingtips* from Debbie Parker, I thought I had the perfect image to start the series.

Then I started thinking. Five female mallards sitting together somehow didn’t seem right; males are almost always near them. Unsure if my reasoning made sense, I started asking birders, far more experienced than me, and surprisingly kept getting different answers – full-grown juveniles, females, males in “eclipse” plumage.

I bothered Debbie several times with questions until she eventually sent the photo to local expert Jen Brumfield who settled it – *males in eclipse*. After checking several field guides and googling every article I could find, I had started to lean in that direction. Their beaks did not seem like those of female mallards (as Cathy Priebe

describes them in in her article above) and the scattered feathers in the photo made me think of molting. Still, I was unwilling to commit to an ID. But if Jen Brumfield says they are eclipse males; that's what they are! And my plan to run female cover birds has to wait.

## INDIGO BUNTING

*Passerina cyanea*

By **Barbara Baudot**



Identified by Linnaeus in 1766, *Passerina cyanea* belongs to the family *Cardinalidae* that includes cardinals, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings and dickcissels.

Once I had the fortune to catch a glimpse of an indigo bunting. An iridescent blue male warbled on the railing of my deck in Southern New Hampshire. Although his presence was brief, it was so magical as to be unforgettable. No wonder this beautiful songbird, this so-called “blue canary” has been caged and sold abroad. A Nearctic bird, its presence in a number of European countries is attributed to escape from capture.

Much about this bird and its habits are unique. It is these specifics I describe below.

This so-called blue canary’s cheery songs, heard day and night, are learned from birds not their dads. Cornell Laboratory researchers discovered that young indigo buntings learn their songs from other nearby males. Indigo buntings a few hundred yards apart generally sing different songs, while those in the same “song neighborhood” share nearly identical songs.”

These small seed and insect eating birds with silvery conical bills are famous long distance migrators flying by night from as far north as Canada and the Maritimes to Central America and the Caribbean. They breed in the eastern half of North America. Stars guide their travels. These buntings are found to “possess internal clocks enabling them to adjust their angles of orientation to a star—even as that star moves through the sky.”





Wide spread admiration of the indigo bunting's breeding garb reminds me of Hans Christian Andersen's tale, *The Emperor's New Clothes*. The actuality is that this bird, like nearly all other blue birds, has no blue pigment. The iridescent color of its mating garb is mere illusion; we see only stunning blue hues refracted from microscopic structures in the feathers. Crush these feathers or look at one with light shining from behind it and we will see that these feathers are a brown-grayish-black exhibiting the melanin they actually contain. The bird molts the structurally blue feathers at the end of the mating season, thereafter he is cloaked in his true brownish feathers with only small refractions of blue on wing coverts. The dull gray-brown plumage of the female indigo bunting is akin to that of the non-breeding male, both birds looking similar to house sparrows, though less chunky.

The female indigo bunting is the heroine of the couple. Virtually a single parent, she builds her nest and raises a brood of 3 or 4 nestlings. The small-cupped neatly woven nest bound in cobweb silk is built in hedgerows or even among clusters of golden rod on the bushy edges of meadows. The nests are low lying, usually no more than 3 feet above ground. Sometimes the father feeds the fledglings if the female is preparing for a second brood. And although this species is of *least concern* on the IUCN list of endangered species, its numbers have decreased by 30% in the last 3 decades because of habitat threats, particularly industrial farming and capture.

To be noted is that the oldest recorded wild indigo bunting was a male, at least 13 years, 3 months old when he was recaptured and rereleased during banding operations in Ohio.

**References:** "Indigo bunting" in Wikipedia; datazone.birdlife.org/species/factsheet; "Are blue birds really blue?" in earthonthewing.blogspot.com; "Indigo bunting" in allaboutbirds.org by Cornell Lab or Ornithology.

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Lesser yellowlegs (Photo by Tim Fairweather)

**Wednesday Morning Bird Walks**  
**Sandy Ridge Reservation**  
**6195 Otten Road, North Ridgeville**  
**Wednesday, 8 - 10 a.m. through October 25**

The Wednesday morning fall birding walks at Sandy Ridge, led by Senior Naturalist Tim Fairweather, have begun again and will continue through October 25.

Tim points out the walks continue until 10 a.m., “unless the birding is really good when they could go a little later.” So far sightings of shorebirds such as the lesser yellowlegs shown above have been plentiful.

After each walk, coffee, snacks and check listing are available in the Nature Center. Bring something to share if you wish.



INDIGO BUNTING photo by Debbie Parker

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