

WINGTIPS



SORA photo by Debbie Parker

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OCTOBER 2018

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October 2018 Program

Tuesday, October 2, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Chuck Slusarczyk

“So Many Moths, So Little Time”



Hailing from Cleveland, Ohio, Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr. is a life-long birder and wildlife photographer with a recent passion for moths. His interest in nature and especially birds began at a very young age, even before attending his first bird walks in 1975. His interest in moths was sparked several years ago when he found and identified his first Catocala moth at his lights in his Cleveland home. He now finds it a great way to spend summer months when birding is slow.

Chuck has presented a number of programs for birding and nature organizations, including Black River Audubon. His photography has appeared in many print publications and birding and nature sites, as well as on his personal pages.

Chuck's program, titled ***“So Many Moths, So Little Time,”*** reflects the fact that the more moths you see, the more you want to see! It's a visual program highlighting some of the many species of moths to be found in our area throughout the summer. He hopes you find it enlightening!

October 2018 Field Trip

Howard Marsh

Saturday October 20, 2018, 9:00 a.m.

South Howard Rd., Curtice, Ohio

Meet at parking area next to restrooms

(Toledo Metropark Ranger will lead)

Save the Date!

2018 is the 60th anniversary of the Black River Audubon Society. In commemoration, BRAS will celebrate the occasion with a reception following its annual Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker day, November 10, 1:30 - 4 pm at the Carlisle Visitor Center.

Julie Zickefoose, author/artist of “Baby Birds,” will be our speaker. More description of the event will follow in next month's Wingtips.

GREAT CRESTED and HORNED GREBES

By **Barbara Baudot**

In 1831, J.J. Audubon wrote: “*The Crested Grebe often passes to the south in September, with its head still adorned with a large portion of the feathers of its spring and summer tippet. While residing at different places on the Ohio, I have many times witnessed the passage of the Horned and Crested grebes.*”

Astonishing to find this passage! I photographed the great crested grebe on the Etang de Vaux in central France, and Dominique Michal captured the horned grebe on the Oberlin reservoir. The crested grebe is the largest grebe found in palearctic Europe and Asia, with sub species only in Africa and Australia. The horned grebe, a smaller bird, is a palearctic circumpolar species with sub species in North America and Eurasia (the Slavonian grebe). Confronting wintery conditions, both species migrate to warmer inland or coastal waters.

Thus, the surprise to discover Audubon's observations of *Podiceps cristatus* “on the Ohio” in the company of *Podiceps auritus*. Was Audubon mistaken? Was the crested grebe a New World species in 1831? The debate continued for decades. In 1894, Audubon was deemed wrong; it may be that he had relied upon the judgement of a friend. Today the crested grebe is not listed as a North American bird. Audubon was simply mistaken in this case.

What, then, do we know of these grebes?

A unique grouping of waterbirds, grebes belong to the order podicipediformes and its only family – podicipedidae. Podiceps is the largest genus among six genera, which includes horned and crested grebes. In existence for at least 25 million years and unrelated to other waterbirds, grebes may share some characteristics with flamingos and loons.



Horned grebe in Audubon.org

Working together, breeding pairs of horned and crested grebes build floating nests from aquatic plants near the edges of open wetlands. Therein females will lay two to five eggs. After 23-30 days grebettes emerge cloaked in black and white striped soft down, ready to dive. For many weeks they remain under both parents' protection and ride on their parents' backs.

Grebe species have adapted to their environments. Like Darwin's finches, their beaks differ in form and size depending on the food they eat. Crested and horned grebes consume fish and crustacea and thus have long pointed beaks while insect-eating grebes have stubby beaks. Fish-eating grebes consume their own feathers and also feed them to their grebettes. Why? Feather balls pad fish bones, help form pellets, and/or protect from parasites.

Grebes have large feet set well back on the body. They are minimally webbed with wide lobed toes that are adapted for hydroplaning and swiftly maneuvering under water. Famed for their diving and underwater skills, grebes are clumsy waddlers on land. To fly, they must hydroplane until able to take off on their narrow wings.

Non-breeding crested and horned grebes are covered in gray, black, and white feathers. During breeding season, male and female grebes of

both species dress in bright, feathered finery. The semi-gregarious crested grebes display tall, black crowns and ruffled collars of black and rufous feathers. The intensely territorial horned grebes have rufous necks and bellies, gray backs, and black heads with a solid yellow patch from each eye to the back of their head.

Both crested and horned grebes enjoy spectacular courtship rituals. The male approaches the female to perform an elegant dance, including body-positioning chest to chest, alternate head-shaking and turning, bill-dipping, preening, and simultaneous diving. The highpoint occurs when the birds rush toward each other, their feet paddling at high speed until, bodies upright, they hydroplane across the water flicking water weeds at each other. They then gracefully move off in opposite directions. Nest building follows.

The IUCN published a worldwide study on the existing six genera and twenty-two species of grebes. Researchers found four species bordering on extinction. Neither great crested nor horned grebes are yet endangered but, sadly, their watery habitats are increasingly threatened.

References: Grebes, Horned Grebe, Great Crested Grebe, Wikipedia; "The Great Crested Grebe in America" in *Birding New Jersey and the World*; Grebes, Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan, IUCN/SSC Grebe Specialist Group, 1997.

Another "Exotic" Migrant

Something strange has been happening here over the last several months. For the third time this summer, Lorain Countians were surprised by a bird they are not used to seeing in the area.

In June, local and northern Ohio birders were in a frenzy over the appearance of a roseate spoonbill in Oberlin. People came from throughout much of the state hopefully to catch a glimpse of the large, rather ungainly bird with the strange bill. Later, a black-necked stilt made an appearance, a long-legged shorebird whose breeding grounds are nowhere near Lorain County.

Then, On Sunday, August 26, an American white pelican was spotted in the environment you might expect when one was seen in the marshes at Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville, stirring interest for several days.

Sandy Ridge naturalist Tim Fairweather, who was not at the park that Sunday, arrived Monday morning to see a message left by a part-time employee that simply said *Pelican!* "It was probably reported by a visitor and the worker might not have seen the bird," Fairweather explained. "I saw it later that morning, fishing in the middle of the marsh."



Photo courtesy of Kevin McKelvey

This white pelican appearance was actually the second during the nineteen-year lifetime of Sandy Ridge, according to Fairweather. “Another came here in June 2011,” he said. “That was definitely the first and only time. I've been here since the park opened in 1999, and there hasn't been another.”

According to a map In Audubon.org, Lorain County is actually on the far eastern edge of possible white pelican migration, perhaps because of that earlier sighting. But the large birds are definitely news in these parts.

“Ottawa and Magee Marsh have flocks fly through in the spring,” Fairweather pointed out. “But they are very rare farther east. This one may have been blown off course to to begin with in Canada and wound up here. From high up he could probably see the water and the large herons and swans. That's probably what attracted him.”

After refueling in the Sandy Ridge waters for 48 hours, the visiting pelican stayed until late Tuesday, August 28, then lifted into the sky and continued its homeward journey. Hopefully, he appreciated its short stay in the area. *JJ*

Elyria (Black River) Audubon Society Takes Off April 1958

Birding in 1958, when Elyria Audubon Society began, was very similar in some ways, different in others, compared to today. This is obvious by more than the later name change to Black River Audubon Society. The activities were much the same but the number of birders involved, and possibly their enthusiasm, was even greater.

The new group's founders, most (perhaps all) of whom were members of Jack Smith's informal Sunday morning bird walks at Elywood Park, hit the ground running in beginning its activities.

Just as today, the Society was well-publicized. Given the times, that meant the local newspaper, the Elyria Chronicle-Telegram (C-T), which did an excellent job notifying the public of the new group's meetings.

On Tuesday, April 1, 1958, the C-T ran a notice about that evening's meeting, the second for the new group, at the Elyria YMCA. Then, in the next day's issue, readers were told that the new Society had voted to sponsor the very well-attended Sunday spring bird walks. The six hikes were to be held *weekly* through May 8.

Perry F. Johnson was selected as the hike coordinator. Later the chief naturalist for Lorain County Metro Parks, the Wetland Center at Sandy Ridge was named for him in 1999. Four leaders of sub-groups were also chosen: Jack Smith, of course, as well as Dale Kellogg, Elizabeth Yoder, and Earl Lautenschleger, the latter two Elyria school teachers. It was proposed that two or three more leaders might be added later! The attendees were expected to be so numerous that they had to be split into smaller groups for effective birding. That proved to be the case.

The first official hike of the Society took place Sunday, April 13, beginning at 7:30 am. *Sixty birders* showed up, proving the need to divide into smaller groups within Elywood Park. As good birders always do, they kept their annual and life lists. A total of 29 species was recorded. The C-T reported that the hikers were especially thrilled by the sightings of Carolina wren, veery, and fox sparrow.

By the end of the spring migration season and the first six scheduled hikes, a hundred different individuals recorded 85 species just at Elyria's small Elywood Park off Washington Avenue, near downtown. During the final walk, the 45 participants that day listed 64 species, including red-tail hawk and four warblers that had not yet been seen: hooded, bay-breasted, magnolia, and Cape May. Seven different warbler species had been seen during the six hikes.



Jack Smith, originator of the Sunday morning bird hikes and a founder of what became the Black River Audubon Society, in a much later photograph.

I have always assumed that birding, a growing hobby, was a less widespread activity sixty years ago. But judging from the numbers of attendees given in the C-T reports during the spring of 1958, it seems it was much more popular then. Today, we sometimes draw one-tenth as many birders to our hikes that are held only once a month.

However, we should not read too much into these statistics. Times have changed, and birders undoubtedly go about their activities in different ways. Individualism is greater, and many prefer to watch birds on their own or in small groups of friends whenever the mood might strike them. In addition, today's variety of media sources of avian information may make learning from others on a group walk seem old-fashioned. The pastime is probably as large, or larger than ever. Hopefully, we will still have birders, and birds for that matter, far into the future. *JJ*

SORA

By **Cathy Priebe**

Once again we have a bird that is easier heard than seen. This is really the case with the sora. Unless you are lucky enough to flush this secretive creature, you are more likely to hear its call (kurrreeee) before actually seeing it as it elusively navigates through the grasses and cattails in the wetlands where they breed in Ohio.

I have been truly fortunate to actually observe young soras in North Ridgeville's Sandy Ridge Reservation. Just beyond the observation deck on the left side of the trail, my friend and I stopped to watch a small gathering of wood ducks only to disturb four small soras in the water, not too far from the path. We were both startled and amazed as we watched the little critters disappear from view within seconds. It is not always that difficult to see this bird, only when you are actively searching for one!

Despite, or perhaps because of its secretiveness, the sora is one of the most common rails in Ohio and is a prolific breeder. The female lays up to 18 eggs in a basket-shaped nest over water or sometimes in a wet meadow concealed in vegetation.

The sora has a very short yellow bill with a black face and throat with a warm brown back. Its neck and breast are gray along with green legs. They feed on plants, seeds, water insects, and mollusks.

Believe it or not, this little bird is actually hunted in Ohio and thirty other states. Luckily, there is not a heavy demand for their two and a half ounce body. As a result, there are not many rail hunters. But the nests of sora and other rails do suffer from parasitism. It is not unusual to find a rail nest with eggs from others, like a Virginia rail, king rail, or another sora.

Soras can migrate over a range of time, generally arriving in Ohio in late March to late May and leave our area from mid-July to early November.

Some interesting facts about soras:

- They cohabitate with the least bittern, Virginia rail, marsh wren, and red-winged blackbirds.
- When swimming, their head is raised but lowered when walking in a crouched position.
- They are often seen feeding alone and will retreat quickly when startled.

- They have been nicknamed the “masked marsh chicken,” and their bill is described as resembling a piece of candy corn.
- Soras have been known to respond to imitations of its call or to squealing noises..

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

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(but including Wingtips) is \$15 /Year**

Name _____

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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.”

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225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014
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Horned Grebe

The photo of this rather wet horned grebe was taken by Dominique Michal at the Oberlin Reservoir. A diver that swims well, the horned grebe breeds in the far north, and winters in the southeast. During migration it often “refuels” on reservoirs by foraging underwater as this one has obviously been doing. Be sure to read Barbara Baudot’s article about the great crested grebe in the main text of the newsletter.

Sandy Ridge Bird Walks

The fall Wednesday morning bird hikes are in full swing again at Sandy Ridge, Lorain County Metro Parks premier waterfowl location. Naturalist Tim Fairweather will lead the walks every Wednesday through October 31 from 8 to 10 am.

Afterward, you can enjoy coffee and other refreshments in the park nature center while discussing the hike and filling out your checklists.

Participants of all birding levels are welcome; there is no need to feel embarrassed to ask questions of Tim or the more experienced birders. Many got their start during these walks.



GREAT CRESTED GREBE photo by Barbara Baudot

BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

1958-2018: 60 Years of Birding

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