

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

September 2011



Dickcissel/Dane Adams

Editors: Jack Smith and Harry Spencer

Photographer: John Koscinski

Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

# Program

September 6, 2011

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

**Judy Semroc**

Conservation Specialist, Cleveland

Museum of Natural History

## The Natural History and Cultivation Importance of

### Pollinators

**Judy Semroc** has a BS in geology from the University of Akron. At CMNH she provides natural history property evaluation for the Conservation Outreach Program, advises landowners on enhancement of native species for their properties, conducts scientific research projects on various preserve sites, and assists with species documentation through photography and field research. She also leads hikes and field trips and is a co-author of *Dragonflies and Damselflies of Northeast Ohio*. Judy is a member of the Dragonfly Society of America, the North American Butterfly Association (NABA), President of Chrysalis in Time – Ohio Chapter of NABA, and President of the Quail Hollow Land Conservancy.

## Field Trip

Saturday, September 17, 2011, 9:30 a.m. Meet at Shreve Lake

### **Brown's Bog, Killbuck Marsh, Funk Bottoms**

**Directions:** Shreve Lake is about 60 miles south of Elyria. Follow State Route 301 south for some 50 miles. After crossing Interstate 71, continue for about another 8 miles. Turn left on Western Road (or Smithville Western Road) and drive about 1/2 mile. Proceed 4 or 5 miles south on Elyria Road past Route 3 to Brown's Road. Turn left (east) on Brown's Road and proceed for about 1/2 mile to Shreve Lake.

**Itinerary for the day:** From the parking lot at Shreve Lake we will caravan to Brown's Bog. There we will hike the half-mile trail to the Bog. Next we will caravan to the Killbuck Marsh area. At Noon time we will have lunch at the famous Amish Des Dutch Essenhaus in Shreve. On our way home after lunch we will visit Funk Bottoms off State Route 95.

## Henslow's Sparrow

By **Jack Smith**

The superb photo of Henslow's sparrow demonstrates most of the characteristics needed to identify this bird. The relatively flat head, the double black-mustache streaks, and the fine brown streaks against the white breast are clearly visible. The bird was discovered by John James Audubon in 1831, and he named it in honor of the famous Cambridge University professor, John





Henslow's sparrow/Dane Adams

Stevens Henslow. The sexes of this species are similar in appearance.

The birds frequent grassland sites such as weedy fields and meadow. They breed in moist shrubby grasslands, and winter in the fields and open grassy areas of the pine forests of the Southeastern U.S.

The species migrates at night to Ohio in early April, produces one or two broods, and most migrate south in late August, although a few stragglers leave in September and October. The birds forage mostly on a smorgasbord of insects and seeds, and nest in small colonies at sites near the ground in well hidden areas, often at the base of clumps of grass. Sometimes a nest has grass arching over, providing further concealment. Sometimes a male leads a female to a nest-site with an offering of nesting material in his bill. From grass and weeds the female builds a cup-shaped nest and lines it with fine grass and hair. She incubates three to five eggs which hatch after about eleven days. Both parents feed the nestlings. Fledging occurs in nine or ten days.

This flat headed, short-tailed sparrow is most difficult to spot, let alone photograph, because it is secretive. One has to have the patience of Job to observe an individual bird, because it mostly hides in dense grass with an occasional appearance at the top of a clump of grass. There it throws its head back and delivers a song of sorts that sounds like *tsilick*.

The *Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas* recorded most breeding Henslow's sparrows in the grasslands of reclaimed coal mines in unglaciated plateaus of Ohio. The population has been declining throughout the breeding territories largely because of destruction of grassland habitats. As more grassland habitat is claimed for agricultural purposes, further declines can be anticipated. Henslow's sparrow is on Ohio's watch list, and more grassland habitat must be set aside if the population of the species is to be stabilized. More reservations such as the Peak Reserve in Eaton Township possibly can provide more breeding sites.

**References:** *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas* by Bruce G. Peterjohn and Daniel L. Rice; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; Peterson's *Field Guide to the Birds* by Roger Tory Peterson; [www.wbu.com/chipperwoods/photos/hsparrow.htm](http://www.wbu.com/chipperwoods/photos/hsparrow.htm)

## MARGARET PEAK NATURE RESERVE

By **Jeanne B. Williams**

"Provide the habitat and they'll come" a bird watcher recently said to me about Peak Nature Reserve.

And they have.

Both birders and birds.

Savannah, grasshopper, and vesper sparrows, bobolinks, American pipits, Lapland longspurs, and a black-bellied plover, to name a few, have come, and the list goes on. Several of us birders have tallied 125 species in only two years. Bird watchers and photographers from near and far, including Canada and Cincinnati, have visited Peak Reserve.

Black River Audubon Society held its June Field Trip at Peak. We walked the diverse paths on a rare dry and sunny morning after a spring of record-setting rain.

We were fortunate to have two Eaton Township Peak board members, Dick Knechtges and Barb Galvin, accompany us. Black River members attending were: Jim Marsey, Martin Ackermann, Harry Spencer, Harriet Alger, Tammy Martin, Mike Smith, Nan Miller, Patty and Kevin McKelvey and me. We spent nearly three informative hours at the relatively serene marsh. Our bird count (kept by faithful scribe Nan) was 52, including a singing male dickcissel that was a lifer for several in the group.

The morning provided a timely opportunity to express our congratulations and appreciation for the establishment of this birding gem to the accompanying board members. They graciously and openly welcome our suggestions for future improvement and enticements to both birds and birdwatchers.

The Reserve, located on Butternut Ridge Road between Route 83 and Durkee Road in Eaton Township, officially opened to the public in September 2009. It was generously donated to the township by the Peak family with the restriction that it be used as a public nature preserve. Its 98 acres was partially used as a vegetable farm and as a sod farm in recent years. The front fields are now sown with soybeans to generate funds for preserve upkeep.

The grassy trail runs along the base of Butternut Ridge before joining the gravel road comprising the remainder of the trails running along tree lines, circling three ponds, and separating fields of soybeans.

Horned larks have nested in the soybean fields for at least a couple of years, and it is not uncommon to see fledglings scurry from the paths back to the cover of bean plants. And how deer love that field! Last year I often saw a ten-point buck pop his head through the beans.

Other mammals seen at Peak are mink, coyote, muskrat and ground hogs.

The mixture of trees and hedge along the western trail provides nesting cover for a variety of songbirds including cedar waxwings, Eastern kingbirds, and indigo buntings, Baltimore and orchard orioles, and willow flycatchers, to name a few.

The wooded area to the south has an old logging road through the middle that is most accessible in the fall, winter, and early spring seasons. A pileated woodpecker left a large oblong hole in one tree, and a red-tailed hawk nests in another.

The grassy area adjacent to the woods is home to song sparrows, nesting chipping sparrows, dragonflies, and damselflies. A few of the dragonflies and damselflies that I have identified and photographed are pennants, skimmers, bluets, spreadwings, and dashers.

The gurgling chatter of the marsh wrens and the noisy clucking of redwing blackbirds adds to the activity around the ponds that also host a variety of migrating waterfowl.

To provide better viewing and photo opportunities, future plans include an earthen observation mound at the junction of the three ponds.

Because of the seclusion of the Reserve and its relative newness, many memorable moments are the norm. Once, I watched quietly as a muskrat transported each of its pups by mouth from one side of the east pond to the west side. On the last trip its mate swam behind with a large green cattail in its mouth. Priceless!

Other moments were the eerie descending whinny of a sora, the screaming overhead of a protective red-tailed hawk as I advanced toward its nest, the delightfully humorous sight of three tiny black hooded merganser chicks running across the water to the safety of cattails. And the sight and sound of a male dickcissel on top of a purple teasel singing his heart out was special.

Those who frequent this lovely 98 acres could add similar remembrances for which we are truly grateful to Eaton Township and the Peak family.

## **DICKCISSEL**

The Miniature Meadowlark

By **Nancy Miller**

Dickcissels are usually not found breeding in Lorain County, although there is one previous record. Their appearance the last two years in Margaret Peak Reserve in Eaton Township has been remarkable. They prefer clover, alfalfa, and timothy hayfields, but also breed in grassy borders of



marshes and wet prairies, especially with sweet clover. Peak falls under this category.

Dickcissels superficially resemble small meadowlarks with their yellow breast and black bib, but are smaller at 6 to 7 inches. They have a sparrow-like striped back with chestnut shoulder patches, and a yellow eyebrow. The female is duller. Their conical bill sometimes means they are mistaken for house sparrows.

Males vigorously sing in their territories, saying their name repeatedly, "dick dick dick ciss ciss ciss." They may mate with several females, but do not help raise the young. The nest is on the ground, well hidden. Four pale blue eggs are incubated 12 to 13 days. Food is insects or seeds from the ground or low plants.

Dickcissels winter in Venezuela or nearby countries. They return from May 15 to June 10. They quit singing in July and are hard to find until they leave in August and September. A few overwinter and are rarely found at feeders. These birds are known as wanderers, even found in the open Atlantic as far as 100 miles offshore on Sable Island. In the winter in the United States they may be overlooked at feeders.

**References:** *Birds of Ohio*, 2004 James M. McCormac and George Kennedy, p 309; *The Birds of Ohio*, 2001 Bruce G. Peterjohn, p 528-530; *Reader's Digest Book of North American Birds*, 1990, p 141; *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, 2000 David Allen Sibley, p 471

Editors' note: Dane Adams photographed the dickcissel shown on the first page of this issue of WINGTIPS at the Margaret Peak Nature Reserve in July 2011.

## LARK SPARROWS IN LORAIN COUNTY

By Nancy Miller

In the nineteenth century lark sparrows were widely distributed in Ohio except for the eastern third of the state. Then they greatly declined, nesting only near Toledo and in Butler County. Oak Openings has been the best place to see them in recent years.

This year they nested in Lorain County in one of our newer parks. Sally Deems-Mogyordy and her husband were walking their dog on the Bridgeway Trail May 19. She said she was stunned when she first saw a pair of lark sparrows exhibiting mating behavior. Not until June 3 did she relocate them. She knew she needed good pictures to document this for the Breeding Bird Atlas. So she called Jen Brumfield who called Jerry Talkington and Emil Bacik. They found and photographed the nest.

Many more people saw and photographed these birds the next week, including Mike Smith. He said it was his 200th bird of the year and a life bird. LCMP naturalist Tim Fairweather observed the birds one afternoon when some local birders (including me) were there. The birds exhibit interesting behavior to



protect the ground nest from being easily located. They land several yards away and walk around the nest until they are fairly close, feed the young quickly and then fly off. Afternoons when it was very hot, they shielded the nest with their wings.

Lark sparrows are large sparrows with a distinctive chestnut red head with black and white stripes. Their breast is white with a black "stickpin". They live in dry, sparsely vegetated fields. The Bridgeway Trail is a spoil area, made up of waste material from the steel industry. This is very porous, so remains dry and not well vegetated. In Florida, I saw lark sparrows in winter along sandy, dry roads.

Their nests are usually on the ground, but may be low in a bush. They lay 4-5 white eggs which are incubated for 9-12 days. The young are fed grasshoppers, caterpillars, and other invertebrates. Because the birds are careful not to advertise the nest location, I did not hear them sing. The song sounds interesting, however. It is slow-paced and varied with mechanical-rattling sounds alternating with melodious trills.

**Note:** Bridgeway Trail is reached from Route 611, west of French Creek Reservation. Take Lake Breeze Road south to the first parking lot on the left. Follow the trail to the right and then left over the large bridge. The sparrows were sometimes seen perched on the fence. Also present along the trail are three mimids: catbird, mockingbird and brown thrasher, as well as many other birds including eagles. The wildflowers are lovely in the summer. Many people use the trail for walking, biking and dog exercise.

**References:** *The Birds of Ohio*, Bruce G. Peterjohn, 2001, p.490-492; *Birds of Ohio*, James S. McCormac, 2004, p.290; *The Sibley Guide to Birds*, David Allen Sibley, 2000, p.493

## A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

Picture this. You're sitting in a rowboat among mound-like islands of mangroves. It is near sunset. Over your head scarlet ibises begin to fly single-file in long straight lines – hundreds of birds. This show continues for about an hour as you admire the birds' long, thin, strongly down-curved bills, heads and necks extended forward, and long legs trailing behind. The birds have come to roost on these islands, and, as the sun goes down, the green mangroves turn a brilliant red.



Part of the scarlet ibis's extensive resume is that it is Trinidad's national bird. Sixty-million-year-old fossils have been discovered; and Egyptians venerated the birds, often mummifying and burying them in pharaohs' tombs.

Feather color arises from diverse sources. That of the scarlet ibis is due to carotenoid pigment obtained from the enormous number of fiddler crabs that the birds ingest every day. In contrast, the reddish necks of snow geese arises from the iron in the water where the birds feed. A third variation is the pink bib of some penguins produced by their diet of shrimp. Feather color also can be caused by the absorption and reflection of light due to the intricate structure of some feathers.

# White pelican visits Sandy Ridge

By Cathy Priebe

On June 17, 2011, around noon, a large white bird landed in the small lakes at Sandy Ridge Metro Park in North Ridgeville. It did not take a guide book to identify the white pelican, the first ever in the park's history. "We have never had one at our park," exclaimed naturalist Tim



Fairweather. "They generally stop west of here near the lake. This is quite unusual for this species to visit us."



The regal white bird hunted, dined, preened and swam around the area as if it owned the place. Sunning itself in the middle of the water, the white pelican gave eager visitors great photo opportunities and a memory to last a lifetime.

The visit was, unfortunately, short lived. After a few sweeping test flights, the celebrity pelican took flight on June 22 almost exactly at the same time it first flew in, according to Fairweather.

***Do others a favor! Invite them to the next Audubon meeting. They may not know what they are missing.***

## Excerpt from Treasurer's Report

July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011

**Expenses** (Dollars): WINGTIPS, 5,845; Scholarship, 945; Programs, 600; Insurance, 1,851; Audubon Adventures, 5,111; Postage, 706; Outstanding Speakers, 901; Other, 1,467; Total, 17,426.

**Income** (Dollars): Restricted Trust Funds, 2,762; Pfeiffer Trust, 5,195; National Audubon, 1,283; Sales (calendar etc.), 440; Local Dues, 581; Donations, 10,550; Miscellaneous, 94; Total, 20,904.

**Total Assets** (Dollars), June 30, 2011, 197,769.

## Board Members and Term Expiration

Kenny Austin, 2012; Cathy Priebe, 2012; Wendy Akin, 2012; Debbie Mohr, 2012; John Ryan, 2012, Marty Ackermann, 2013; Gary Hawke, 2013; Terri Martincic, 2013; Jim Marsey, 2014; Courtney Brennan, 2014; Steve Chavez, 2014; Harry Spencer, 2014.

## Officers

President, Debbie Mohr; First Vice President, Gary Hawke; Second Vice President, Marty Ackermann; Secretary, Wendy Akin; Treasurer, Steve Chavez