

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

September 2013



SCARLET TANAGER photo by DANE ADAMS

Editors: Harry Spencer, and Cathy Priebe  
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## Mission Statement

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.

### Help Preserve Wildlife and Wildlife Habitats!

**Charitable giving through planned gifts to the Black River Audubon Society helps make sure that the Society's mission to conserve habitats for wildlife and educate the public about birds continues to thrive. No gift is too small and every gift is welcome. All are deductible.**

**Black River Audubon Society sets aside all sizable bequests, endowments, and other planned gifts in various available trusts in which only the income generated is used for support of the organization or designated programs. Benefactors thus leave this world with a feeling that they made a gift that keeps on giving in perpetuity.**

## Program

Tuesday, 3, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

### . David Wolf

Naturalist

### Surrounded By Nature:

### Reflections on a 25-year NE Ohio-Wildlife Career



Find out just how exciting your yard can be as local naturalist David Wolf shares wildlife stories he has experienced over the last 25 years in Northeast, Ohio.

Wolf, a graduate of Kent State University with a degree in Biological Sciences, began his wildlife career as an Aquarist at Sea World of Ohio. From there he joined the Cleveland Museum of Natural History as a Wildlife Specialist which helped him develop skills to later move on to become a Wildlife Program Specialist and the Director of Wildlife at the Lake Erie Nature and Science Center.

People are often reluctant to think about suburban and urban settings as nature places, but these are truly as much “nature” as are more wilderness places. The wildlife and the biological and ecological interactions that take place in our own backyards can be fascinating and help teach us many lessons about our world.

# Field Trip

September 21, 2013 (Saturday), 9 a.m

Sandy Ridge (Harry Spencer, starter)

## A Birder's Diary: Bird Eggs

By Carol Leininger

Bird eggs have fascinated me ever since I took a birding trip to England. There I saw trays of hundreds of eggs in many museums. Egg collecting was a popular hobby for many years, and I believe of all countries, England displays the most eggs. Today in the U.S. collecting parts of birds, including eggs and feathers, is illegal.



Finding eggs in a nest does not mean that you can identify the bird easily. Eggs come in a variety of sizes, shapes, features, colors, and markings. Eggs laid by one bird can vary in appearance. Some ostrich eggs weigh 3 pounds (1362 g), but some hummingbird eggs weigh 1g. In their first egg-laying season birds often lay smaller eggs than those of later seasons. Cuckoos that practice brood parasitism can adjust the size of their eggs to match those eggs already in the nest!



LOON EGG/WIKIPEDIA

*Shape*—Eggs range from spherical to elliptical (oval). I find pyriform shape (pear shaped or pointed at one end only) fascinating. Cliff-nesting birds often lay such eggs. If a pear-shaped egg starts to roll, it rolls in circles, not over the cliff. Sometimes birds that lay large clutches of eggs produce pyriform-shaped eggs that form a circle of eggs, pointed ends toward the center, an arrangement relatively easy to incubate.

*Texture*—Surface texture can vary. Some eggs are smooth (chicken). Some are deeply pitted or chalky. Some are glossy or greasy (waterfowl) and water-resistant.

*Colors and Markings*—Pigment glands in the oviduct produce the color. The first gland produces the background color, and subsequent glands produce markings. Blunt ends appear more colored because they go through the oviduct first, when the concentrations of coloring materials are highest. The coloring is usually constant for a species, but not always. Markings often are consistent for identification purposes with the blunt ends more marked. If the pigment glands add color while the egg is stationary, spots result; when moving, streaks. A cavity-nesting species usually lays white eggs.

This brief review does not discuss many other egg-aspects such as variation of clutch size, timing of egg laying and hatching, or the development within the eggs!

Birds are so fascinating.

# Scarlet Tanager

*Piranga olivacea*

By **Cathy Priebe**

When bathed in bright sunlight the scarlet tanager is one of the most brilliant red-colored birds that I have ever seen! Like most birds that are so brightly colored, tanagers forage in the treetops and are difficult to locate without the aid of fiery red flashes among the leaves. Usually a birder hears their distinctive calls before seeing the birds.



My first encounter with this gorgeous bird was on a local golf course. I am not a golfer, but that day I agreed to ride the cart while my husband, Dave, golfed. My main purpose was both to watch where his shots landed and to locate lost golf balls. While I was searching for errant balls, a bird flew into a nearby tree and its glowing red feathers and ebony black wings left me nearly breathless. Dave knew it was a scarlet tanager. I knew it would become one of my favorite birds.

Wintering as far south as Bolivia, the scarlet tanager is one of our longest-distance migrants. In almost every Ohio county the species breeds in mature, mixed, deciduous forests and large woodlots.

In spring and summer, males are unmistakably red with black wings (front-cover photo). Females, immature birds, and non-breeding males are greenish yellow with blackish wings (back cover). Scarlet tanager nests are flimsy shallow cups of weeds, twigs and grass placed high in the tree canopy. A female incubates 2 to 5 pale blue, brown-spotted eggs for about two weeks. Tanagers glean insects from leaves, fly-catch insects, and forage for berries.

Often described as sounding like “hoarse or raspy robins”, tanagers have a relatively easily identified song that usually ends in a “chip-burr” sound.

I was also lucky enough to witness a scarlet-tanager fallout at Mohican State Park in Loudonville, Ohio. My friends and I were hiking the Hemlock Trail in early May, when we saw more than 30 male and female scarlet tanagers dropping down into the trees in front of us.

Wow, that was a spectacular sight!

If you have not had the pleasure of seeing this bird, get out on the park trails early next spring, or better yet, take up golfing!

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

## More understanding about how some birds navigate during migration

By **Harry Spencer**

A German-Russian team headed by Henrik Mouritsen identified one piece in the complex puzzle of how birds navigate during migration. They studied Eurasian reed warblers (*Acrocephalus scirpaceus*), a medium-sized migratory warbler about the size of many warblers, such as the yellow warblers that nest in our area.





EUROPEAN REED WARBLER photo  
from WIKIPEDIA

European reed warblers breed across Europe into temperate western Asia and winter in sub-Saharan Africa. Some regularly migrate through Rybachy, Russia on the Baltic Sea, before flying northeast to their nesting territory in southern Finland and northwestern Russia. Previous studies showed that night-migrating songbirds, such as reed warblers, have a magnetic sense involving nerves connecting certain parts of the head with the brain (ophthalmic branch of the trigeminal nerve, V1).

Using standard techniques, Mouritsen's team captured 57 birds at Rybachy and determined that the birds attempted to depart for their nesting grounds in a northeasterly direction. Subsequently the researchers surgically severed the V1 nerve in about half of the birds, while treating the remaining birds in a similar way but without severing the V1 nerves. This latter group served as the control for the experiments.

After the surgery, all birds were transported 1000 km (approximately 600 miles) due east to the vicinity of Moscow, east of any nesting areas of Eurasian reed warblers in either Finland or Russia. There the team again measured the migration directions that the birds tried to take for completion of their trip to their nesting grounds. The birds without severed nerves tended to adjust their intended departing direction to the north-northwest towards their traditional nesting grounds. Birds with severed nerves, however, tended to continue in a northeast direction, away from their nesting grounds. This latter portion of the birds tended to take the same direction that they would have taken upon leaving Rybachy before severance of the trigeminal nerves.

Mouritsen's team suggested that the birds with the intact V1 nerves compensated for the magnetic changes produced by their 1000 km displacement. The birds with the severed nerves, however, could not detect their changed geographical position, indicating the importance of the V1 nerve contribution to the birds' navigational abilities.

This work increases our understanding of how birds migrate, but much more experimentation is required before attainment of full understanding.

**Reference** (June 2013 publication): <http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi/10.1371/journal.pone.0065847>

## **Backyard Birding Notes**

**By Angie Adkins**

September is a good birding month at my Strongsville yard. Replacing some summer visitors are migrants from the north on their way to their southern winter home. Over the years I have spotted many species visiting during September, such as ruby-throated hummingbird, rufous hummingbird, yellow-bellied sapsucker, eastern wood-pewee, red-eyed vireo, red-breasted nuthatch, Carolina wren, house wren, winter wren, golden-crowned kinglet, and ruby-crowned kinglet.

Also Swainson's thrush, brown thrasher, eastern towhee, grey catbird, cedar waxwing, Nashville warbler, magnolia warbler, American redstart, black-and-white warbler, ovenbird, common yellowthroat, palm warbler, scarlet tanager, chipping sparrow, Lincoln sparrow, song sparrow, white-throated sparrow, and rose-breasted grosbeak.



FEMALE RUFOUS HUMMINGBIRD photo by Dane Adams

Hummingbirds may linger through October, so your feeders should be kept full. The idea that the availability of feeders causes the hummers to linger is only a myth, because the instincts of the birds tells them when to leave. A possible bonus is the appearance of a rufous hummingbird, such as the one that visited my feeders some eleven years ago. Recently rufous hummingbirds have been documented at numerous Ohio sites during fall migration.

### **Thanks, Harriet, for your contributions to Black River Audubon!**

For many years, Harriet Alger has served Black River Audubon in several capacities, most recently as Chair or Co-chair of the Conservation Committee. With the help and cooperation of others, most notably the late Wayne Shipman, the late Jack Smith, Dick Lee, and Joe Strong, Harriet has led the Conservation Committee to an impressive record of upgrading existing activities and establishing new ones, particularly in cooperation with the Lorain County Metro Parks and



with the Lorain County Community College.

For personal reasons, Harriet has retired from this volunteer activity, and in this issue of WINGTIPS, we publish some short tributes to Harriet as our way of expressing appreciation for her devotion to birds, conservation, and wildlife. We will publish more tributes in the October issue, and we invite anyone to submit a paragraph about any noteworthy personal experience with Harriet. Send your contribution to [meshes@frontier.com](mailto:meshes@frontier.com) or to Harry Spencer, 374 N. Prospect St., Oberlin, OH 44074.

**By Cathy Priebe,**

I met Harriet at Sandy Ridge. We always seemed to be either going in or out, but on one memorable occasion, we were both walking the same way. We had a nice chat about birds and she casually mentioned that Black River Audubon would be interested in having me join their group. It took a little persuading, because we are always too busy to consider giving up even an hour of our precious time, but I am now a lifelong member and I will always value my friendship with Harriet.

Thank you, Harriet for always being so kind and supportive. You are one of a kind and we will miss you!

**By Marty Ackermann,**

Harriet is a great recruiter for getting people involved with Black River Audubon. I experienced this just a few months after joining when there was a need for a new program chair. Harriet was BRAS president and she, with the help of others, was soon lobbying me to take the position despite my inexperience in the birding world. I accepted against what I thought was my better judgment, but with much help from Harriet and the outgoing chair, Carol Leininger, I managed to get my first program together. Harriet was supportive and patient with my many questions, and a long meeting at her home was important in settling me into the task. I have been doing programming ever since!

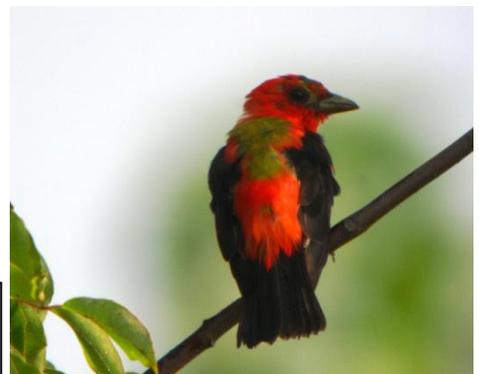
**By Harry Spencer**

Some years ago when I was President of Black River Audubon, I learned that Harriet is a doer, one who gets things done. Someone brought to my attention a conservation-related problem in Amherst that might profit by Black River Audubon's attention. Since she was our new Conservation Chair, I called Harriet about the problem, fully expecting that she would follow up with a telephone call. Instead of calling, she visited the site and talked at length to the homeowners concerning the problem. I then knew that Harriet was a hands-on conservation problem solver. Since then she repeatedly practiced this method of getting at the heart of problems.

<p><b>Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance.</b> George Bernard Shaw, Irish Playwright and Essayist</p>
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FEMALE SCARLET TANAGER  
photo by DANE ADAMS



MOLTING FALL SCARLET  
TANAGER, MALE photo by  
DANE ADAMS