

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

September 2016



BONAPARTE'S GULL photo by Debbie Parker

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe
Photographer Emeritus: John Koscinski
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Program
Laurie Chachko and Renee Hiles
Windsor School, Elyria
Hog Island Adventure
September 6, 2016, 7:00 pm
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center



Laurie Chachko and Renee Hiles have been educators for a combined total of more than thirty years. They have worked together as the science and special education teachers for grades three and four for the past three years at Elyria's Windsor School. They strive to maintain a hands-on science classroom, which includes meeting the needs and modalities of all learners. They recently traveled to Hog Island, Maine for the "Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week" program with the help of a grant from Black River Audubon Society. They will share with us a power point presentation depicting their experience as well as their plans to incorporate ideas

gained from the camp into lesson plans for the coming year. This will include plans to utilize the schools' courtyard to introduce the third and fourth grade students to the wonderful world of birding. They are looking forward to meeting the BRAS members!

September Field Trip
Sandy Ridge Reservation
Saturday, September 17, 9:00 a.m.
Larry Wilson and Arlene Ryan will lead.
Meet at the park's Nature Center

Summer Field Trips

Since the last Wingtips, several monthly field trips have transpired. Sit back and relax as I give you the "Cliff Notes" version of these trips.



In April, sixteen BRAS members rendezvoused at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. We met Courtney Brennan, collections manager for ornithology, for a 'behind-the-scenes' tour. First stop was the preparator's room where Courtney explained the process of making bird study skins. Next, we quickly paused in the genetics lab, where feather DNA was being processed. Finally, we arrived at the storage area for the ornithology collection. Here, rows of compact mobile shelving organize the Museum's eggs, nests, and study skins. Highlights included the extinct ivory-billed woodpecker, passenger pigeon, and Carolina parakeet; a cackling goose prepared by John J. Audubon; and, a large, smelly albatross. Fascinating tour!



Patty McKelvey, a local Audubon member, displays an albatross

May found us at Magee, of course! At least eight BRAS members made their way up-and-down the boardwalk (with thousands of other anxious birders) to find and view as many spring migrants as possible. Although it wasn't a heavy birding day, numbers were good. I actually met and birded with an old family friend, who added many 'lifers' to her list. Think we ended the day with 70+ species. Not bad for Magee in early May. Join us next year!

Alas, I missed the June field trip, as I was biking in the New Madrid Fault Line in Missouri. But, Mike Smith provided a tour of his Bluebird Trail at the Equestrian Center of the Carlisle Reservation. Joined by seven BRAS members, Mike led the group around the vast meadow where Bobolinks nest yearly. Notable sightings included rose-breasted grosbeak, yellow-billed cuckoo, American redstart, Baltimore and orchard orioles, eastern meadowlark, eastern bluebird, bobolinks, and the best bird...least flycatcher, singing it's 'che-bek, che-bek' song. What a great song!

Finally, on a hot July morning, we toured Peak Preserve with our friends from Western Cuyahoga Audubon. Led by Patty McKelvey, twenty-five birders tramped through the preserve, seeing 40+ species. Early on, Patty directed us to a calling yellow-billed cuckoo. [BTW: Feeding on this summer's 17-year cicadas, this secretive cuckoo sure was visible in northern Ohio. Hope you saw one.] With shorebird migration on our minds, we

excitedly found a short-billed dowitcher and a semi-palmated sandpiper. Spotted sandpipers obviously nest at Peak, as we counted well over a dozen! Finally, a group of juvenile or female bobolinks also gave us great views.

A Birder's Diary: Red Knots and Horseshoe Crabs

By **Carol Leininger**



One of my dreams has been to witness a red knot feeding frenzy as horseshoe crabs come ashore to lay their eggs on the beaches. If not for the food provided at this May migration stopover in New Jersey, the red knots might not be with us today. Recently, I read *The Narrow Edge* by Deborah Cramer, a book about “a tiny bird, an ancient crab, and an epic journey.” Cramer traveled the red knot’s entire migration route and that certainly wasn’t easy. These birds like the most harsh and isolated spots imaginable to winter and to breed. Cramer’s discoveries and her alarm calls regarding this bird have caused some to call her the Rachel

Carson of the twenty-first century.

In the winter, red knots can be found feeding on the isolated shores of Tierra del Fuego in South America. Here they feed on mussels and tiny clams that are also declining due to the growing acidity of ocean water. Since they have such a long journey to their breeding grounds in the arctic, a stopover in New Jersey to replenish their energy is critical. They must stop and feed on the horseshoe crab eggs, which are left on the beaches in May at the times of the new and full moons when tides are rising.

Populations of red knots, semipalmated sandpipers and ruddy turnstones are all declining as the coasts of North and South America are disappearing. It’s also difficult to find red knot nests and eggs on the arctic breeding ground. They seem to prefer the most isolated places far in the north.

Foxes and jaegers feast on red knot eggs and young. The female knots depart south as soon as the eggs hatch while the male leads the young to insect food and then also leaves. The young birds somehow find their way south on their own.

Red knots flying south often feed at James Bay for a few days, but with loss of summer ice, there are fewer months of seal hunting for bears. This forces the bears ashore earlier and shorebirds are starting to provide food for bears. Later, hunters in French Guiana, Guadeloupe and Suriname greet the red knots in tropical stopovers.

Horseshoe crabs (also known as king crabs) are unique in many ways and more closely related to spiders than other crabs. During their mating season they come ashore in huge numbers to lay their eggs during the high tides of May.

These crabs are truly living fossils – they have been around for 445 million years and have lived through several mass extinctions. However, their population has been nearly decimated several times in the U.S. First, humans harvested them to use as fertilizer; then they used them as bait for fishing; now they catch them for medical purposes. Due to their unique blood clotting agents, the crabs are caught, drained of large amounts of blood, and tossed back to hopefully survive another adventure.

BONAPARTE'S GULL

Larus Philadelphia

By Cathy Priebe



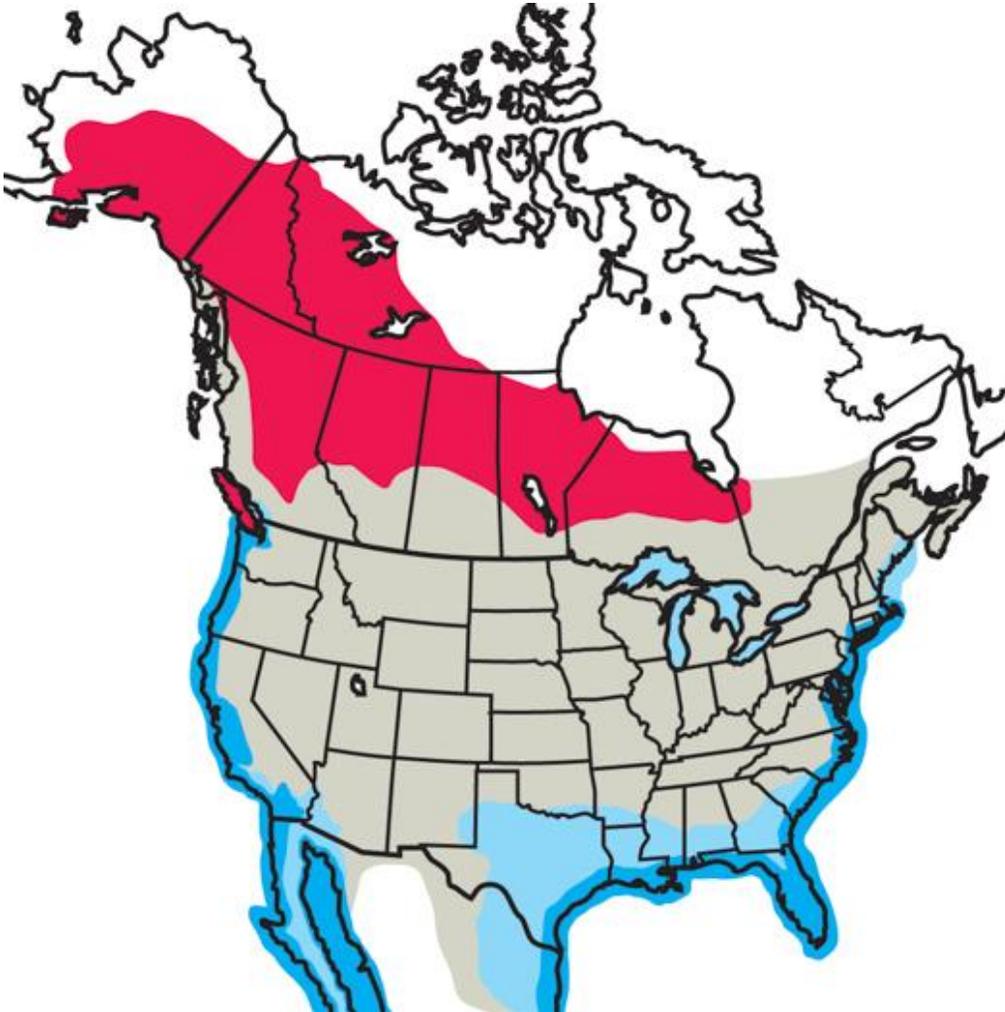
The Bonaparte's gull is a common migrant on the Lake Erie shoreline, especially in the fall and winter months. Sometimes numbering in the thousands, these small agile gulls are fishers (not parking lot or landfill divers) and they swoop gracefully on the water to catch their meal.

In the winter, the non-breeding gull has a white head with a well-defined black dot over its ear, thin black bill, bright white breast, and pale gray above. An adult breeding gull has a black head with a white nape and a rosy blush on the breast. Bonies (nickname) are often recognized in flight by the large white triangular wedge on the edge of the outer wings.

Bonaparte's gulls nest in conifers in the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska along large lakes, rivers or marshes. The female lays 1 to 4 buffy green eggs with dark splotches. The young are able to stand one day after hatching!

Presently, this bird is not on any conservation watch lists as their population is steadily growing.

Range map from Audubon.org;
Guide to North American Birds



Their food is generally aquatic such as small fish and tadpoles but they will glean the earth for small invertebrates and also catch insects in flight.

Arriving in Ohio in the fall, Bonaparte's will often linger along the lake into early January and smaller numbers may stay through March if the winter is not too severe. Individuals will also venture inland and gather in flooded farm fields or reservoirs.

According to Pete Dunne, Bonaparte's gull flocks often

contain a few rare individuals like the little gull or black-headed gull. Gull aficionados should carefully scrutinize these flocks for occasional rare visitors.

Here are just a few Lake Erie locations where you can find these spectacular birds: Lorain Harbor, Avon Lake Power Plant, Cleveland Lakefront SP, and Huron Municipal Pier.

Some fun facts about the Bonaparte's gull:

- The Bonaparte's gull is the only gull that regularly nests in trees.
- They were named after Charles Lucien Bonaparte, who made important contributions to American ornithology while an active member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia in the 1800s.
- During the breeding season, they usually eat insects while flying.
- Unlike most gulls, they do not eat garbage or carrion.
- Described as a tame bird, they often allow humans to get quite close.

References: *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *Birds of North America* by Kenn Kaufman; *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne. *All About Birds*, Cornell Ornithology.

Laughing Gull

Leucophaeus, atricilla



LAUGHING GULL photo by H. Spencer

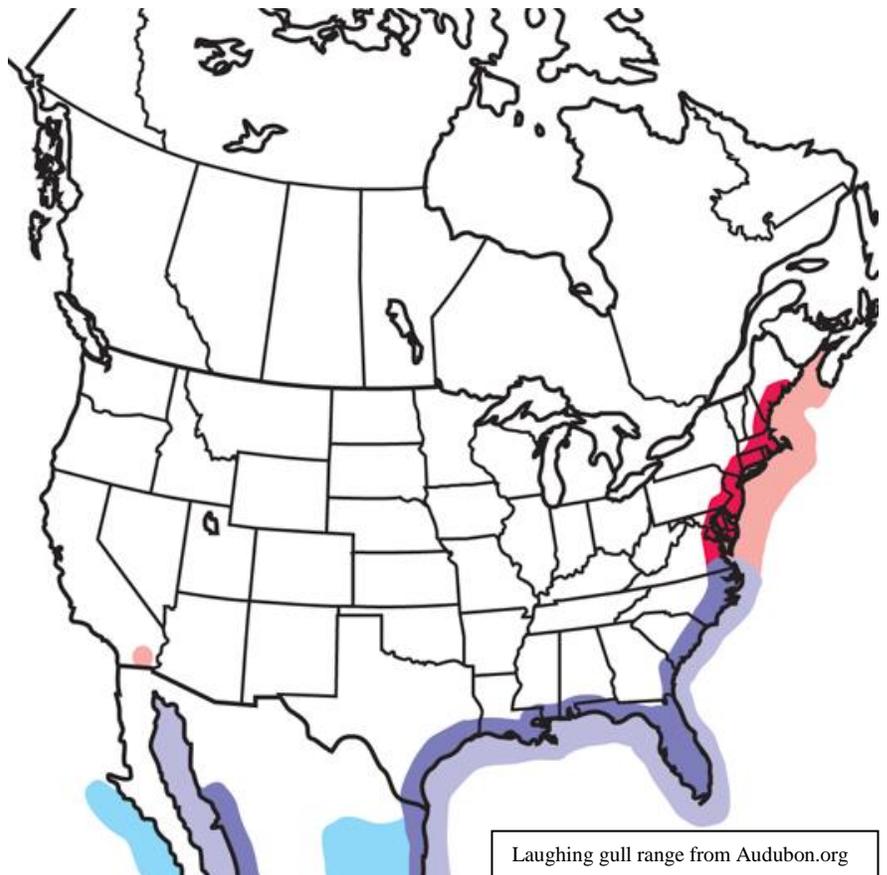
By **Barbara Baudot**



For those of us folks who enjoy the warm summers soaking in the sun along the Atlantic and Gulf Coast beaches, the laughing gull is a familiar, distinguished visitor to trashcans and picnic baskets. Fascinated by them, we would lure them to our place in the sand by offering them various bits of bread left over from our sandwiches. They would draw near warily, then suddenly, neck extended; their beaks abruptly seized these morsels. Then they would retreat, only to meet competing gulls in a brutal struggle to protect their scraps. For beach goers the laughing gull's raucous *kee-agh* call, sounds like a high-pitched laugh "ha... ha... ha..." The English name 'laughing gull' derives from these strident calls.

Laughing gulls are described as a warm-weather coastal species, being summer visitors to the Northeast and year-round residents on the coasts of the southeast Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, the majority departing from Atlantic coastal areas north of Florida in the winter. Some birds, however, travel several miles inland seeking food and shelter.

This gull's numbers were seriously depleted during the 19th century, as victims of the feather trade. But by the early 20th century, their numbers recovered. Currently some colonies face threats, but the overall population of laughing gulls is abundant and widespread. Their IUCN conservation status reads; least concern. However, some experts see a real danger to the species because of climate change.



This slender, medium sized bird (14–16 inches long], has a broad wing span (39–43 in), thickset red beak that tips down at the end, and long reddish- black or black legs. These contours impart a graceful look whether these gulls are flying or walking. These birds wear different suits of feathers depending on the season and stage in life. In the summer the adult breeding gull, whether male or female, sports a black hood, white crescents above and below their eyes, slate-gray wings with thin white edges, and snow-white undersides. In winter, the hood becomes a blurry gray mask on a white head. It takes three years for this gull to grow into this distinctive plumage. Their snowy undersides are acquired only when they become adults

Able to ingest almost anything, including what they catch or steal, these gulls are omnivores. Their diet varies with location and season. They forage while walking, wading, or swimming, or may hunt in flight by plunging into water or dipping in surface waters. A gregarious species, they congregate in large numbers on sandy beaches, mud flats, and salt-water marshes where they feed on crustaceans, insects, snails, and small fish, even

earthworms. Some may even snatch fish from pelican's pouches. In late spring, they are observed gathering to eat the eggs of horseshoe crabs.

The laughing gulls breed in large colonies in coastal salt marshes, or on islands near the shore, safely isolated from terrestrial predators. Their nests are constructed on the ground among grass and bushes. They lay on average three olive to buff or brown eggs, blotched with brown. The parents take turns incubating for about 20 days, until the chicks hatch. The fledglings remain in the nest for only a few days, then wandering nearby, hiding under vegetation. Both parents follow their young, taking turns feeding them. The fledglings are ready for flight in about 5 weeks. And another generation of laughing gulls mounts with the sea winds.

References: wikipedia.org/wiki/Laughing_gull; audubon.org/field-guide/bird/laughing-gull; allaboutbirds.org/guide/Laughing_Gull/id

Wednesday Morning Birding
Sandy Ridge Reservation
Every Wednesday
September 7th through October 26th
8-10:30 a.m.

Sandy Ridge's senior naturalist and park manager Tim Fairweather will lead the walks and provide the birding expertise. The location is Sandy Ridge Reservation of the Lorain County Metroparks, 6195 Otten Road, North Ridgeville.

Participants of all birding experience levels are welcome. There will be coffee, tea and snacks afterward as the birders go over their checklist.

Go Wild for Birds!

Audubon Adventures theme for the 2016-17 school year is *Go Wild for Birds!* Specific topics are **Wild about Birds, Water Birds, and Owl Prowl**. Audubon Adventures is an environmental education curriculum product of the National Audubon Society for grades 3-5. It introduces young people to the fundamental principles by which the natural world functions. Included in each kit is a student newspaper for each of the three topics, teacher guides with suggested hands-on activities and other topic-related resources. Over 7 million youngsters have participated in the program. Audubon Adventures is correlated with the Core Curriculum. Black River Audubon Society provides Audubon Adventures to all educators of 3rd to 5th grade students at no cost. Topics from past years are also available.

Several thousand Lorain County students learned about **Habitats, Energy** and **Water** using Audubon Adventures last year.

To receive this valuable resource contact Dick Lee at leedck@windstream.net or call 440-322-7449.

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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.

National Audubon Membership Application (Includes membership in Black River Audubon and subscriptions to WINGTIPS
and AUDUBON magazine): _\$20/year, __\$30/2 years, __\$15/year Student/Senior

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Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8

Send your check to: National Audubon Society, Inc.

225 Varick Street, 7th Floor

New York, NY 10014

Attention: Chance Mueleck

Jeannie Williams photos from the July 16 Field Trip at Margaret Peak Nature Preserve



Jorgan Brill's photo of one member of a Northern BOBWHITE family that nested this year near her home on Oberlin Road.

