

WINGTIPS



BLACK VULTURE, photo by Chad Wilson

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OCTOBER 2022

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October 2022 Program

Tuesday, October 4th at 7 p.m.

Sandy Ridge Reservation Visitor Center

Do Dung Beetles Feed on Bird Droppings?

Dr. Nicole Gunter



Dr. Nicole Gunter in the field

Dr. Nicole Gunter is the Curator of Invertebrate Zoology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Nicole received her PhD from the University of Queensland, Australia, for her research on the evolution of parasites of Great Barrier Reef fishes but transitioned to the field of entomology, where her research has since focused on the evolution of beetles. Dr. Gunter completed postdocs at the Australian National Insect Collection, CSIRO, Australia and Palacky University, Czech Republic, before moving to Cleveland in 2014 for her position at the museum.

Today Dr. Gunter balances two research programs at CMNH, one focusing on the systematics and evolution of Australian dung beetles and the other examining food preference in Ohio's local dung beetles. She is a prolific taxonomist and has described almost 100 species in her career so far and is also a passionate science communicator. Nicole was recently awarded a prestigious National Science Foundation grant that integrates her research with public education that will bring research and museum collections to planetariums.

Dung beetles are some of the most charismatic and under-appreciated insects on the planet. Their unique feeding and breeding biology centers around dung and as such they provide critical ecosystem services through nutrient cycling and more. They are most well known for their association with mammal dung and their evolutionary success has been attributed with co-diversification with mammals. This program explores the origin of dung feeding, and food preferences of Ohio and Australian dung beetles to answer “*do dung beetles feed on bird droppings?*”

October Field Trip
All trips are on Saturdays
Guests Are Always Welcome!

October 22, 2022, 9:00 a.m.
Sandy Ridge Reservation
6195 Otten Rd, North Ridgeville, OH
Meet in the parking lot.
Buster Banish to lead

Black Vulture

Coragyps atratus

by Chad Wilson

Halloween season is upon us, so let's talk about a spooky bird! Living on the northern coast of Ohio, when we look up and see vultures soaring overhead, 99% of the time they are Turkey Vultures. However, in recent years, Black Vultures have been expanding their range all the way up to the shores of Lake Erie!

When I started birding in 2018, there were a handful of Black Vultures in Lorain County, but birders had to go down to the Wellington area and hike Wellington Reservation or the Wellington Upground Reservoir until they got lucky and a Black Vulture flew overhead. If I ever chased birds in southern Ohio I would often see Black Vultures and Turkey Vultures sharing the sky, but the Blacks were scarce up north. Fast forward to 2022 and we now have at least one Black Vulture that hangs out on the Sheffield Lake Recreational Trail, which is about as far north as you can go in Ohio. Their journey northward is complete!

Black Vultures are a bit smaller, and are known to be more aggressive than Turkey Vultures. In fact, the ODNR (Ohio Department of Natural Resources) website lists Black Vultures as a nuisance species. This designation comes from farmers reporting that the Black Vultures sometimes attack and injure or kill newborn calves. There is a Livestock Indemnity Program administered by USDA Farm Service Agency to compensate

producers for loss due to avian predators, and in extreme occasions they actually permit the killing of up to five Black Vultures on their property. Non-lethal deterrence measures must be taken first, however.

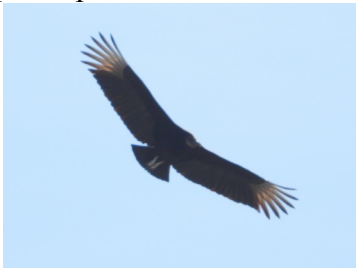
But I choose to believe that these nuisance Black Vultures are not representative of the group as a whole, and that most of them stick to carrion as their main food source. Black Vultures are not quite as adept at finding the carrion through smell as the olfactorily-gifted Turkey Vulture, so they often hang out with the Turkey Vultures and then use their bossiness to get first dibs on the feast when it is discovered.

Black Vultures nest in caves, hollow logs, abandoned buildings, or bare ground surrounded by boulders. They typically lay their eggs in March, the eggs hatch after 39 to 41 days, and the young birds leave the nest in July.

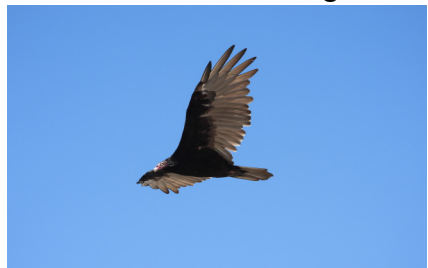
Interestingly, Black Vultures lack a voice box, so they can only make hissing and grunting noises. They are outnumbered by Turkey Vultures in the United States, but they have a larger range than the Turkey Vultures, making Black Vultures the most numerous vulture in the Western Hemisphere. The longest-living Black Vulture ever recorded was more than 25 years old, but they may live even longer!

Not every vulture with a black head in Ohio is a Black Vulture. Young Turkey Vultures also have black heads! Black Vultures have more wrinkly skin on the head, a smaller bill, and they don't have giant obvious nostrils like the Turkey Vultures do.

In flight, Black Vultures can be differentiated from Turkey Vultures by their white “fingers” and broad, short tail. They also flap their wings more often than Turkey Vultures. Here are a couple of pictures to see the difference between them in flight.



Black Vulture (photo by Chad Wilson)



Turkey Vulture (photo by Chad Wilson)

So, even though not everyone is a fan, Black Vultures are here, and I for one am glad! Trying to find one in the sky in Lorain County is actually doable now, so have at it!

References: allaboutbirds.com; Kennedy and McCormac, *Lone Pine's Birds of Ohio*; PeterJohn, Bruce: *The Birds of Ohio*; ohiodnr.gov; farmprogress.com' avianreport.com

Phenology in the Park

By Danielle Squire



Black River Audubon Park (photo by Danielle Squire)

Last year, the Black River Audubon Society took a vote and agreed- our little wildlife area, donated by our founder Jack Smith, needed a fueling station for pollinators. The Black River Audubon Park is located at 260 West Bridge Street and was created to be a resting and feeding area for local wildlife among the bustling city. A Pollinator Patch was just the thing it needed! This past spring, our board members Larry Wilson, Kate Pilacky and Danielle Squire gathered to make this possible. Several other board members came later in the season for a big cleanup day to eradicate the undesirable plants around the perimeter, prune the young trees, and lay down fresh mulch. Jim Jablonski has also visited the park regularly to clean up any wandering litter. Many hands make light work! Once summer arrived, the garden work was largely paused except for necessary watering. Meanwhile, the seeds of 20+ native plant species that were sown just before last winter's first snowfall continued to stretch into their beauty, searching at once for water below and sunlight above.

“Phenology is defined as the study of the timing of

recurring biological events, the causes of their timing...and the interrelation among phases of the same or different species (Leith 1974)”, especially regarding animals and plants. The pioneering species that were most robust in spring were orange coneflower *Rudbeckia fulgida*, hoary vervain *Verbena stricta*, butterflyweed *Asclepias tuberosa*, tall coreopsis *Coreopsis tripteris* and white snakeroot *Ageratina altissima*. Next in the race for space came summer’s rose milkweed *Asclepias incarnata*, white turtlehead *Chelone glabra*, Culver’s root *Veronicastrum virginicum*, Queen of the Prairie *Filipendula rubra* and little bluestem *Schizachyrium scoparium*. Before the finish line at the end of the growing season, we are expecting our asters, wild petunias, and liatris to catch up. Because early September is a superb time to plant perennials, we’ll be adding wild quinine *Parthenium integrifolium*, anise hyssop *Agastache foeniculum* and more milkweed species to thrive in the half full-sun/half part-shade patch. Once all of these species return for their second year and beyond, these timelines will change, as their developed root systems will fuel them forward much sooner and more quickly. By this time next year, the pollinator patch will be a dazzling display of nature’s color palette, bustling with insects of every design.

Staggered, or “successional”, growth rates and bloom periods are an important benefit when it comes to pollinators and their plants. Like plants, pollinators have periods of dormancy and activity, emerging at different times throughout the year. When they do, they are hungry and searching for the nearest sources of nectar and pollen. Having welcoming blooms from early spring into late Fall ensures that everyone gets what they need. Furthermore, postponing Fall clean-up by leaving the plants as they are provides winter refuge and nesting sites through the use of soft/hollow plant stems like that of purple coneflower *Echinacea purpurea* and flowering raspberry *Rubus odoratus*, as well as the thick crown masses of our native grasses such as prairie dropseed *Sporobolus heterolepis* and big bluestem *Andropogon gerardii*. Several bees such as bumblebee queens, mason bees and miner bees will leave their nests very early while other overwintering insects will not leave these plants and explore the world around them until temperatures are over 70 degrees for 7-10 consecutive

days. In other words, being helpful hosts to pollinators is a year-long job and one that is as simple as it is rewarding! The Pollinator Patch at the Black River Audubon Park will soon be a wonderful pocket of nature to witness this spectacular phenomenon!

A Giant Retirement

By Chad Wilson



It's never too cold for Tim Fairweather (photo by Tim Fairweather)

Tim Fairweather, the head naturalist at Sandy Ridge reservation, recently announced that he plans to retire at the end of October after almost 33 years as a naturalist for the Lorain County Metroparks. He's a very big guy (thus the title of the article), so there will literally be very big shoes to fill. I caught up with him for an interview before he rides off into the sunset:

What put you on the path to being a naturalist?

I grew up on the east side of Sheffield Lake. Spent a lot of time exploring the woods of what is now Aquamarine condos in Avon Lake, and the woods where the Ford plant is now in Sheffield Lake and Avon Lake. I was always interested in bugs, frogs, snakes, etc. My brothers started taking me camping up in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan when I was about 10, and the “nature gene” really kicked in then.

In high school, for the yearbook thing when they ask you what you are going to be in 10 years, I said working at a nature center.

You have been at Sandy Ridge since it opened, correct?

I started working as a seasonal naturalist in June of 1989 at Carlisle for the summer camps.

Then I went into full-time at the French Creek Interpretive Center in 1990. And then I got the park manager position at Sandy Ridge in summer of 1999. So, I've been at Sandy Ridge since before it opened, ha ha! I got to work on some projects that summer.

We opened to the public on October 16th, 1999.

How has Sandy Ridge changed over the years?

The marsh had two stands of trees that followed the old farm ditches. Most of the dead trees have fallen now. The Black Willow stand by the south dike has exploded. This should be a very good area to check out in coming years. The native emergent plants like spatterdock, arrowhead, and pickerelweed have really spread, providing great cover and a food source for waterfowl and other wetland critters.

It was definitely more of a rural area back when we opened. All those farm fields are housing developments now.

The first few years, Sandy Ridge was kind of a secret, other than to birders. But in recent years, attendance has blown up.

I believe you worked with Perry F. Johnson...what was it like working with him, and I assume learning from him?

Perry was retired by the time I started working at LCMP. But luckily, he volunteered at the front desk once a month at the French Creek Interpretive Center (which was re-named the French Creek Nature Center because nobody knew what an Interpretive Center was! Ha ha!). His volunteer shift was usually when I was working, so I got to know him. And of course, probably asked him way too many questions. But I was amazed by how much knowledge he had. And when he was identifying birds in the parking lot just by hearing them, I thought "I want to be that guy someday".

Do you have any tips for anyone wanting to become a naturalist?

Anyone can be a naturalist. It's a way of life, really. A desire to learn as much as you can about natural history and share that knowledge with

others. Some park districts have volunteer naturalist programs. And OSU has OHIO CERTIFIED VOLUNTEER NATURALIST COURSES. As far as making a career out of that passion, get incredibly lucky!!! But the typical route is 4 years at a college for biology/environmental studies, then get a seasonal spot with a county or state park. And hopefully get in full-time.

What is your favorite place to hike in Lorain County?

I can't choose one but I love the Bacon Woods Trail in Vermilion, the dikes at the Lorain Impound, and of course, Sandy Ridge.

What was the best bird you ever had at Sandy Ridge over the years?

Again, I can't pick one. But here are a few favorites from my office window list over the years-

Dickcissel, Northern Shrike, Common Redpoll, Great Black-backed Gull, Least Bittern, American Woodcock, Pine Siskin, and a Bald Eagle killing a groundhog and carrying it towards the nest.

My window list stands at 93 species, guess I won't break a hundred.....

Do you have a favorite bird?

No, no favorites. So many birds with amazing songs, coloration, and habits.

A Prothonotary Warbler singing on a bare branch on a dark morning is pretty incredible.

What does retirement hold in store for you?

Take some time off, watch my daughter Maddie perform in the marching band at Kent State, get a new puppy, and drive my wife crazy, ha ha... ..and a program for Black River Audubon in December!



Tim's stomping grounds, Sandy Ridge Reservation (loraincountymetroparks.com)

Black River Audubon Membership Only
(but including Wingtips) is \$15/Year

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Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon
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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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To pay online, go to *blackriveraudubon.org/membership* and select the type of membership you prefer.

A Different Kind of Grebe

By Chad Wilson



An Eared Grebe enjoying the Lorain Impoundment (photo by Chad Wilson)

We typically get two species of grebe here in northern Ohio: Pie-billed Grebes and Horned Grebes. But every now and then one of the western species decides to explore to the east and visit us, as is the case with this Eared Grebe that visited the Lorain Impoundment September 2nd and continues through at least September 6th (the time of this writing).

I included our usual Horned Grebe below for comparison. As you can see, they look VERY similar. Eared Grebes usually have a more slender bill and if you can get a close look at a Horned Grebe you will see a little spot of white on the end of the bill, while the Eared Grebe's bill is dark throughout. Also, these are both in non-breeding plumage; they look very different and more beautiful in Spring!



Horned Grebe for comparison (photo by Chad Wilson)



EARED GREBE IN BREEDING PLUMAGE, photos by Chad Wilson



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