

WINGTIPS



COMMON NIGHTINGALE, photo by Barbara Baudot

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APRIL 2021

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April 2021 Virtual Program
Tuesday, April 6 at 7 pm, Via Zoom
The Story of Two Strange Warblers
Courtney Brennan



Courtney Brennan
Photo by Laura Dempsey, CMNH

An old, but young, friend returns to speak to Black River Audubon Society (BRAS) on April 6. Courtney Brennan, a former BRAS board member ten years ago, also spoke to the general membership on her research into the songs of veerys while still a graduate student. Now senior collections manager for Cleveland Museum of Natural History (CMNH), she will speak on newly discovered hybrid birds with redstart and magnolia warbler parentage.

In her museum work, she oversees the maintenance and development of the zoological collections. Her current research interest involves bird hybridization and migration studies in the Great Lakes regions.

Courtney met former BRAS president Harriet Alger while on a bird walk and through that connection became involved in the chapter's purple martin project at Lakeview Park. She then served as a board member until graduate work began to consume too much of her time. She received her master's degree from Cleveland State.

In addition to her work at CMNH, she is involved with Lights Out Cleveland, studying bird-building collisions in the city and processing bird casualties associated with the program.

*For this and future Zoom meetings, go to blackriveraudubon.org and register at the bottom of the first page under **Subscribe**. A Zoom link will be sent to you.*

Wingtips Delivery Delays

The *Wingtips* editorial staff apologizes for the delays in receiving recent issues. Postal delivery of the newsletter generally takes 4-5 days but has taken up to three weeks in recent months. This creates an obvious problem when the meeting advertised in the late-arriving issue has already been held.

To resolve the problem, this issue has been mailed nearly a month before the meeting and we plan to do the same with the May *Wingtips*. In the future, please remember that, if you have internet access, digital copies can be found at *blackriveraudubon.org*.

BRAS Board Member Applications Requested

Black River Audubon Society, which serves the Lorain County area, is seeking passionate and energetic board members to help protect all wildlife and their habitats through science, education, advocacy, and conservation.

The BRAS board provides nature speakers, conservation programming, wildlife field trips, and other opportunities to its members and the community. Specific skills that we are looking to add to our board include previous nonprofit or board experience, fundraising, event planning, strong community connections, and a passion for birds and conservation.

If interested, please contact *blackriveraudubon@gmail.com* or send a text to 440-610-8626 for a Black River Audubon Society Board Member Application. BRAS welcomes applicants of all races, ethnicities, religions, nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, ages, and abilities.

BRAS is a local chapter of National Audubon Society. Located in the United States and incorporated in 1905, National Audubon is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the world.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology

By Charlie Weil

Several years ago, I was introduced to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology when I volunteered to enter bluebird and other secondary cavity nesting data into the *NestWatch* database. This is a “citizen scientist” digital archive operated by the Cornell Lab. The data is used by scientists to study the current condition of breeding populations as well as trends that are occurring in real time. The BRAS bluebird group led by Penny and Fritz

Brandau alone contributes data for several hundred nesting attempts each year.

NestWatch is only one internet based (nestwatch.org) resource of the many available from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, a member- supported unit of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Its 75,000 members help support approximately 250 scientists, professors, staff, and students who work in a variety of programs to study birds and other wildlife.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology was founded by Arthur A. Allen as the country's first graduate program in ornithology in 1915. Initially, it was housed on the main campus of Cornell but, in the 1950's, farmland, now named Sapsucker Woods, was donated to house the research lab. The area was named after the discovery of the first breeding yellow-bellied sapsucker ever reported in the Cayuga Lake Basin. In 2003, the Imogene Powers Johnson Center for Birds and Biodiversity was opened as the lab's present-day home.

If you are a birding enthusiast or just interested in nature in general, you would enjoy a visit to the lab, located in the Finger Lakes region just northeast of Ithaca, New York. The Sapsucker Woods Sanctuary is comprised of 226 acres with more than four miles of hiking trails through wetlands and forests surrounding Sapsucker Pond. More than 230 species of birds have been recorded in the sanctuary.

Normally, the visitor center is open daily from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, but currently is closed due to the pandemic. Hopefully, tours can eventually be scheduled again through the research facilities that lie behind the visitor center. Two years ago, my wife and I took this tour in the fall and got to see and hear the latest in their research efforts. One of the hot topics at the time was development of voice recognition software for bird songs. The goal was to develop an app that would provide recognition software to identify birds.

Not all the research in the lab is oriented toward birds. Work was also in progress studying animal communication and patterns of movement for other animal species. One of the studies underway even involved elephants. Another fascinating stop on the tour was a taxidermy lab with a spectacular collection of rare as well as common bird species.

A major purpose of the lab is to collect and analyze observations of everyday birders for scientific use. Nearly 600,000 "citizen scientists" participate by collecting data to support this research. The previously mentioned *NestWatch* is one tool for collecting this data. Another, eBird, is a free phone app, which allows you to list the bird species and locations that you have observed. This data is then uploaded to a master database which allows birders to track any of the earth's 10,585 bird species to a single scientific database.

I encourage you to go to birds.cornell.edu to explore the large number of free resources that are available. In subsequent articles I will explore the *eBird* and *Merlin* birding apps that are available from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

RED JUNGLEFOWL

Gallus gallus

By **Gina Swindell**

I was lucky enough to spend Dec. 24-28 in the Florida Keys this past year. The first bird that I saw as I walked out of the airport in Key West was a beautiful rooster that I discovered by following his cock-a-doodle-do call. What a stunning bird! He looked as if he spends hours a day beautifying his feathers— full, shiny, and very well maintained. I soon noticed that he had several friends.

The red junglefowl is a breed of wild chicken that is native to parts of Asia. They were domesticated around 5,000 years ago for meat and eggs. According to Andrew Lawler in “Stalking the Wild Ur-Chicken” in Audubon magazine’s November 2014 issue:

“Twenty billion. That’s the minimum number of chickens pecking at the earth’s surface on any given day. And every one of them is descended directly from the Red Junglefowl. Most of the domesticated birds live in vast warehouses designed to feed the world’s fast-growing urban population.”

Key West has had a feral junglefowl population since the mid-1900s. While there are differing stories of how they came to be there, the most common is that they were brought over by Cuban settlers for food and cockfighting. Once cockfighting was outlawed and food became easily attainable and economical at grocery stores, people just turned them loose.

Their popularity is another matter. You can well imagine their crowing at all hours of the day and night. And the poop!

However, these “gypsy chickens,” as the locals call them, captivate tourists. Most of us are not used to seeing chickens unless we live on or near a farm, let alone walking around freely on the streets and roosting naturally in trees. That’s right, they roost in trees when not crammed into coops! Despite everything, some locals do find them endearing.



Red junglefowl roosting in a tree
(photo by Gina Swindell, Key West)

However, there is a fair share of residents that find them to be an annoyance. While I loved hearing their calls, I can imagine that their crowing might be intolerable if I were trying to get some rest.

There is controversy on the island over possibly removing the birds. A compromise is in effect to reduce the population. With help from the Key West Wildlife Center, many of these birds are captured and safely removed to farms where they will live out their lives. According to Gwen Filosa of the Miami Herald, “*since 2009, nearly 15,000 birds have been relocated to the mainland.*” Though these birds are protected, it is okay for residents to remove eggs should they find them. Relocation, egg management, and hawks all help to keep the numbers in check.

When I returned from my holiday getaway, I began posting my sightings to Facebook. It never occurred to me to mention that the red junglefowl was a lifer, since it is a chicken (which I assumed was not countable.) However, a local birder informed me that these birds are on the ABA list of birds. What? Yep, it’s true.

If you’re interested, a good explanation of when an introduced species can be counted is available at aba.org/aba-area-introduced-species. Other similar birds, in case you are wondering, include the Muscovy duck

in Florida, the wild turkey in Hawaii, green parakeet in the lower Rio Grande and, most notoriously, the house sparrow.

I hope you make it to Key West or one of the other places in the U.S. that have feral red junglefowl populations so that you too can add them to your list. Happy Birding!

References: chickenandchicksinfo.com/why-are-so-many-chickens-in-keywest/; Floridarambler.com/funky-florida/key-west-checken-key-west-roosters/; Miamiherald.com/news/local/community/floridakeys/article246063495.html; 10000birds.com/count-your-chickens-in-the-florida-keys/html; Audubon.org/magazine/November-december-2014/stalking-wild-ur-chicken; Key West Chickens, Key West Wildlife Center; animalia.bio/red-junglefowl.

COMMON NIGHTINGALE

Luscinia megarhynchos

By **Barbara Baudot**

Few people have seen nightingales. Yet, millions, world-wide, are familiar with the many stories, legends, poetry, and music inspired by the powerful songs of these birds. From the time of the ancient Greeks, and through subsequent periods of history, people have been enraptured, even healed, by the 1,000 different trills, whistles, gurgles, chirps, and streams of notes strung together in more than a hundred songs.

The Facts

Nightingales are unassuming, small brown songbirds with broad rusty tails and buff undersides, long legs, and thin yellow beaks adapted to catching insects on the wing. Aside from females being slightly smaller than males, they are indistinguishable, and both always wear the same cloak of feathers. They belong to a subfamily of chats in the Old World flycatcher family. Solitary birds, they form new monogamous pairs annually for the purpose of breeding and raising their young.

In the spring, millions of pairs breed from southern England across the lower reaches of Western Europe, North Africa, and Asia north of the Himalayas. In July and August, the pairs separate and make solo flights to sub-Saharan Africa where they remain for the winter.

By the end of March, they leave their winter quarters bound for their breeding grounds in the north. The males arrive first, the females arrive a week or two later.

On arrival the males begin singing in earnest, day and night, to attract mates and defend their territory. Pairs form when discriminating females choose their mates from among the most vocal and strongest singers. Older males with the richest repertoires are preferred.

Shy and secretive, the birds perch on the inner branches of thick leafy trees, such as in a hazel copse or in twisted twigs of undergrowth, preferably near water.

The female builds her small, cup-shaped nest with twigs, leaves and grasses and lays 4 or 5 eggs. Then the highly territorial male ceases his night-time musical performances and ferociously defends the nest and feeds his mate for the 13 days she incubates her eggs. The hatchlings fly off after 15 days of joint parental feeding. They mature fully in a year. The breeding season ends in mid-June.

Nightingale as Muse

The phenomenal collections of music, stories, myths and legends inspired by nightingales date back more than 2,500 years and continue to be produced today. Nightingale mythology first appeared around the 8th century BCE in the works of Homer, and later were retold by Ovid in *Metamorphoses* in the first century AD. The latter work tells of Philomena, whose voice was destroyed by Tereus, King of Thrace, to silence her. The gods, in sympathy, transformed Philomena into a nightingale. She is immortalized in a Shakespeare sonnet and in the French common name for the nightingale, “rossignol philomene.”

“The Nightingale,” by Hans Christian Anderson, includes themes of love and nature trumping the ravages of greed characteristic of the industrial revolution. It was written in 1842, when nightingales, netted by the thousands and sold as cage birds, died trying to escape by throwing themselves against the sides of their cages. Andersen’s nightingale is saved because the emperor’s court substituted a jewel-bedecked mechanical bird for the nightingale, which was returned to nature. In the end, the mechanical bird fails, and the nightingale’s song heard from a nearby branch heals the dying emperor. Andersen’s story inspired Stravinsky’s opera *The Nightingale* and his symphonic poem the *Song of the Nightingale*, as well as a number of ballets. Many other great composers were inspired by the songs of nightingales, including Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Respighi.

Poets— Shakespeare, Shelly, Keats, and Coleridge— characterize the songs of the nightingale as laments for human failings and mortality, messages of happiness and healing, and of virtue and goodness. During the Romantic era poets viewed the nightingale as possessing the qualities of the muse, a “*master of a superior art that could inspire the human poet.*” Shelly wrote “*a poet is a nightingale...*”

My Experience

Seated in the garden under a ripe plum tree, I heard rustling above my head and turned the camera toward the sound. I took the picture on the cover of this issue of *Wingtips*. It was in a similar setting 200 years ago “*while sitting beneath a plum tree in the garden,*” that John Keats wrote his “Ode to a Nightingale.”

References: rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/nightingale/; a-z-animals.com/animals/nightingale/; Wikipedia, The Common Nightingale; see also three hours of nightingale songs recorded on Youtube.

Audubon Avian Quiz (This one is particularly difficult!)

1. The _____ has the most feathers of any bird with up to 25,000.
a) Andean condor c) whistling swan
b) bald eagle d) Canada goose
2. The large wandering albatross can live up to _____ years.
a) 20 c) 60
b) 40 d) 80
3. Approximately _____ percent of birds live less than year.
a) 75 c) 25
b) 50 d) 15
4. Weighing in at 1,000 pounds, the _____ bird is the largest to have ever existed on earth.
5. The _____ spends more time in the air than any other bird.

Answers are at the bottom of the next page.



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

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Email address _____

Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon
P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036

“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: \$25/year)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8
Send your check to: National Audubon Society,
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Attention: Chance Mueleck

To pay online, go to blackriveraudubon.org/membership and select the type of membership you prefer.

Quiz answers: 1) c, 2) d, 3) a, 4) elephant, 5) sooty tern

Black River Audubon Society Spring Raffle

Proceeds to benefit Audubon Adventures

Black River Audubon will be selling raffle tickets for two bird-themed prize packages beginning April 1. Tickets are \$10 with the proceeds benefiting expansion of our Audubon Adventures program for children.

The packages feature fun things like bird seed, *A Season on the Wind* by Kenn Kaufman, bird houses, *Monty and Rose* documentary DVD, a bird lamp, and the popular *North American Life List* book. (Please check online on April 1 for the complete list of prizes.)

The winning tickets will be drawn on May 8, 2021, International Migratory Bird Day. The tickets will be sold only at www.blackriveraudubon.org.



A sample of the prizes. Full list available April 1 at blackriveraudubon.org.

About Audubon Adventures

Audubon Adventures is an environmental education curriculum product created by the National Audubon Society for grades 3 - 5. Developed by professional environmental educators, Audubon Adventures presents standards-based science content about birds, wildlife, and their habitats. It can be used in classrooms, home schools, after school programs, ESL classes and more.

Audubon Adventures introduces young people, their families, and their teachers to the fundamental principles by which the natural world functions. The print publications and website offer an exciting, science-based exploration of those principles at work anchored in nonfiction reading and outdoor and classroom activities that help kids to care for our planet by helping birds and other wildlife.



RED JUNGLEFOWL, photo by Gina Swindell



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"Birding Since 1958"

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