

WINGTIPS



BLACK-NECKED STILT, photo by Chad Wilson

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APRIL 2024

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April 2024 Program

Tuesday, April 2nd at 7 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation

Beyond the Branches: Unlocking the Magic in Bird Photography

Roger Friedman



Join Northeast Ohio bird photographer Roger Friedman, as he takes you on a captivating journey from a novice bird watcher with limited photography knowledge, to a skilled artist who captures breathtaking bird photos. In this engaging lecture, tailored for bird and photography enthusiasts of all levels, Roger will share his personal story of passion, learning, and artistic growth, and allow you to discover the secrets behind transforming simple bird photographs into works of art. With stunning examples and valuable insights, Roger's presentation will increase your awareness as to what it takes to make a bird photograph unique, and inspire you to elevate your own bird photography to new heights.

Roger Friedman, a passionate nature and wildlife photographer, embarked several years ago on a never-ending quest for the perfect bird photograph. Beginning as a hobby capturing birds in his backyard, Roger's dedication and pursuit of perfection have earned him the admiration and respect of both photographers and bird enthusiasts alike.

Fascinated by the ordinary and driven to make it extraordinary, Roger finds joy in photographing local birds, seeking to illuminate their inherent beauty. Whether it's a familiar Cardinal perched nearby or a stunning Blackburnian on its migratory journey, he skillfully captures the essence of each bird, showcasing their unique personalities and behaviors. Through his bird photography, Roger strives to engage viewers, inviting them into a world where feathered subjects come to life, sharing glimpses of their captivating allure. The by-product of precision and patience, Roger's photographs reflect his remarkable artistry and unwavering passion for bird photography.

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

April 20th, 2024, 9:00 a.m.
Black River Reservation/Day's Dam
2720 E 31st St, Lorain, OH
Chad Wilson to lead

Wellington Christmas Bird Count 2023
By Paul Sherwood

December 23rd, 2023 was the date of the Wellington, Ohio, Christmas Bird Count. Compiler Paul Sherwood, and ten other birders, braved the elements (cool and drizzly most of the day) to count the birds within the fifteen mile diameter of the count circle. They spent 10 ¼ hours on foot and 19 hours by car for a total of 29 ¼ hours of birding. They walked 7 ¼ miles and drove 213 ¼ miles during the count. A total of 2260 individuals and 52 species of birds were found, including the following:

275 Canada Goose, 4 White-crowned Sparrow, 4 Trumpeter Swan, 11 White-throated Sparrow, 6 Mallard, 9 Song Sparrow, 7 Redhead, 59 Northern Cardinal, 10 Ring-necked Duck, 1 Red-winged Blackbird, 2 Greater Scaup, 7 Common Grackle, 56 Lesser Scaup, 7 House Finch, 5 Bufflehead, 26 American Goldfinch, 3 Common Goldeneye, 88 House Sparrow, 3 Hooded Merganser, 6 Ruddy Duck, 1 Bald Eagle, 4 Red-shouldered Hawk, 10 Red-tailed Hawk, 124 American Coot, 1 Ring-billed Gull, 33 Rock Pigeon, 110 Mourning Dove, 2 Red-headed Woodpecker, 23 Red-bellied Woodpecker, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 17 Downy Woodpecker, 4 Hairy Woodpecker, 12 Northern Flicker, 6 Pileated Woodpecker, 18 American Kestrel, 124 Blue Jay, 92 American Crow, 29 Black-capped Chickadee, 12 Tufted Titmouse, 29 White-breasted Nuthatch, 6 Carolina Wren, 2 Golden-crowned Kinglet, 28 Eastern Bluebird, 138 American Robin, 668 European Starling, 3 Cedar Waxwing, 3 Yellow-rumped Warbler, 24 American Tree Sparrow, 33 Dark-eyed Junco, and also 10 Blackbird (sp).

Thank you to all of the participants!

Black-necked Stilt
Himantopus mexicanus
By Chad Wilson



A Black-necked Stilt flying with its long legs trailing behind, photo by Chad Wilson

“Wow, that bird has some crazy-long legs!” is a likely reaction to seeing a Black-necked Stilt for the first time. In fact, Black-necked Stilts (along with a few other stilt relatives) have the second-longest legs in proportion to their bodies of any bird, second only to the famous American Flamingo!

Black-necked Stilts require wetland habitat, and they are among the most striking of all the shorebirds. In Ohio, these birds are very tough to find most places, with the exception of Howard Marsh, where they have happily been successfully breeding for years! As a side note, Howard Marsh now has two locations, the original location and a Howard Marsh West location that is a little further north on Howard Road. I saw multiple Black-necked Stilts at both locations in 2023.

For Lorain County, these are very rare visitors. Since 2018 I can only remember one at Sandy Ridge in 2018 and one at the Lorain Impoundment in 2022, and neither stayed very long. We tend to get American Avocets stopping by the Lorain Impoundment more often than the Black-necked Stilts.

Black-necked Stilts are amusing birds to watch – I put them in the “clown” category because you never know what kind of crazy antics they'll be up to. When they are rearing their young they are boisterously noisy and protective, so they end up yelling at everything around them. They sometimes group up with other stilts to do a “Popcorn Display”, which involves gathering around a predator and jumping, flapping, and mobbing it to drive it away from their nests. They often take flight, seemingly for fun, with their super-long legs trailing behind them. And their courtship displays (see front cover) are incredible to watch!

Interestingly enough, Black-necked Stilts and American Avocets are in the same family of birds, *Recurvirostridae*, and they can interbreed and have offspring! While these hybrid offspring are rare, they have the incredible nicknames of Avostilt or Stavocet! I now need to add seeing one of these to my bucket list.

So if you're interested in seeing one of these beauties for yourself, head over to either of the Howard Marsh locations and take a look around!

References: <https://www.allaboutbirds>; <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/merlin>; <https://peregrinefund.org/explore-raptors-species/owls/short-eared-owl/>; Birds of Ohio by Kennedy and McCourmac



Yet another crazy pose from a Black-necked Stilt, photo by Chad Wilson

Artificial Intelligence and, Birding?

By Chad Wilson and ChatGPT

Artificial Intelligence is booming these days, with many people using a website called ChatGPT to talk, help with research, or ask questions. Since I began birding I have always wanted to do a Big Year for the lower 48 states, so I decided to ask ChatGPT for advice and see how it did when asked birding questions. Our conversation follows:

Chad: *Hello ChatGPT! Do you know what a birding big year is?*

ChatGPT: *Yes, I'm familiar with the concept of a birding big year. A birding big year is a challenge undertaken by birdwatchers (or birders) to see or hear as many different species of birds as possible within a single calendar year, usually within a specific geographic area, often a country or a region. The goal is to break personal records or even set new records for the number of bird species observed during that year.*

Participants in a birding big year typically travel extensively to various habitats and locations to maximize their chances of encountering a diverse range of bird species. They might keep meticulous records of their sightings, and the competition can be both friendly and intense, with birders vying to spot rare or uncommon species. This can involve a lot of planning, dedication, and effort, as well as a deep knowledge of bird behavior, habitats, and migration patterns.

Birding big years are not only about the thrill of competition but also provide valuable data for ornithology and conservation efforts. By documenting the presence and distribution of different bird species, birders contribute to our understanding of bird populations and their movements, which can inform conservation strategies.

The concept gained widespread attention through books,

documentaries, and movies, like the book "The Big Year" by Mark Obmascik, which was later adapted into a movie starring Steve Martin, Jack Black, and Owen Wilson.

Chad: *Plan a big year for the lower 48 states to maximize the species of birds seen.*

ChatGPT: *Planning a birding big year for the lower 48 states of the United States to maximize the number of bird species seen involves careful consideration of timing, habitats, and key locations for birdwatching. Keep in mind that actual birding conditions can vary due to factors like weather, migration patterns, and unexpected bird movements. Here's a general plan to get you started:*

January:

- *Start in southern Florida to catch wintering and resident species.*
- *Visit the Everglades for wetland and waterfowl species.*
- *Move to the Gulf Coast for shorebirds and seabirds.*
- *Explore the Texas coast for additional shorebirds and early migrants.*

February:

- *Head to Arizona for desert and southwestern species.*
- *Visit Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico for waterfowl.*
- *Explore southern California for a variety of habitats and resident birds.*

March:

- *Move up the California coast for migrating seabirds and waterfowl.*
- *Visit Central Valley in California for spring migrants.*
- *Head to the Pacific Northwest for coastal and forest species.*

April:

- *Explore the Rockies and Great Basin for mountain and western species.*
- *Head to the Plains for grassland birds.*
- *Visit the Dakotas for early spring migrants.*

May:

- *Focus on the Upper Midwest for warblers and other songbirds.*
- *Visit the Great Lakes for waterfowl and shorebirds.*
- *Explore the Northeast for migrating songbirds.*

June:

- *Head to the Appalachian Mountains for forest and highland species.*
- *Visit the Mid-Atlantic region for coastal and estuarine birds.*

July:

- *Explore the Southeast for southeastern specialties.*
- *Focus on Florida for late migrants and resident species.*

August:

- *Visit the Gulf Coast for shorebirds and early fall migrants.*
- *Explore the Mississippi River corridor for a variety of species.*

September:

- *Head to the Rocky Mountains for fall migration.*
- *Visit the Prairie Pothole region for waterfowl.*

October:

- *Explore the Southwest for lingering migrants and resident species.*
- *Head to the southern Texas coast for neotropical migrants.*

November:

- *Visit southern Arizona for southwestern species.*
- *Focus on California for late migrants and wintering species.*

December:

- *Return to southern Florida to close the year with additional species.*
- *Visit the Everglades and coastal areas for wintering birds.*

Remember that this plan is just a starting point and can be adjusted based on personal preferences, birding reports, and unforeseen circumstances. The key to a successful big year is to stay informed about birding hotspots, recent sightings, and migration patterns, and to be flexible in adapting your plan as needed. Additionally, respecting bird habitats and following ethical birding practices is crucial for both the birds and the environment.

All in all, I was pretty impressed by ChatGPT. Although it did a good job, I kind of see it as a novelty for now. It was fun to play with. Just to keep with the theme, I generated an AI photo using Microsoft's DALL-E-3. I asked for “a bird talking to a computer”, and this is what it came up with.



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Send your check to: National Audubon Society,
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Attention: Chance Mueleck

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

The Common Raven's Triumphant Return!

By Chad Wilson



A Common Raven sparring with a Bald Eagle, photo by Chad Wilson

Common Ravens have been missing from Lorain County for as long as 120 years. Then, last year, James Kerner saw two of them flying over Avondale Avenue. They were presumed to be just passing through. But at the end of last year, on December 26th, Gabe Leidy was kayaking by the Avon Lake Power Plant and saw two ravens sitting on some power equipment there.

They quickly disappeared, but then on January first I was chasing a Fox Sparrow that Matt Hall found at Cromwell Park. As I was looking around I heard the distinctive croaking of ravens! I quickly located them at the very end of the road that goes into Cromwell Park, and watched with awe as they sparred with an immature Bald Eagle! Cromwell Park strikes again!

Even more exciting, Sarah Taylor has recently seen them carrying nesting material over to the Steel Mill plant across the river from Cromwell Park. We could very well have nesting Common Ravens this year!

They are still very difficult to chase, as they cover a wide area daily. Mark Raven has seen them at the Oberlin Dump on the same day others have seen them at Cromwell Park, Ed Wransky has seen them at the Lorain County Regional Airport, and they still sometimes visit the Avon Lake Power Plant. You never know where they will turn up, but the fact that they are here after so many decades is simply amazing!



COMMON RAVEN, photo by Chad Wilson



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