

# WINGTIPS



PURPLE SANDPIPER, photo by Chad Wilson

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FEBRUARY 2023

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## February 2023 Program

Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m.

\*\*\*\*French Creek Nature Center (new location)\*\*\*\*

### *“Northern Ohio Hawk Migration”*

Gary S. Gerrone



Gary S. Gerrone is a Naturalist, Writer, Musician, Bird Caller, Father of Twins, and a Relator of Things. He served as an award-winning Naturalist Supervisor for most of his 30+ year career with the Lorain County Metro Parks.

Gary’s writing resume includes nearly 400 published pieces including his long-running nature column in the *Elyria Chronicle-Telegram* and the authoring of the book *Lorain County Metro Parks: The First Fifty Years*. Gary is a highly regarded birder, and well-known for his bird calls, as well as his historical musical presentations. He recently added the title of Park Manager to his career as he currently manages both Geneva and Headlands State Parks.

Each spring tens of thousands of raptors soar overhead on the northern leg of their migration. Despite doing this in broad daylight, this amazing parade goes, for the most part, unnoticed. This program will not only describe the phenomenon of raptor migration but define the weather patterns and viewing locations that will allow for the best hawkwatching. Also, the basics of hawk identification will be covered in this presentation.

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

**February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 9:00 a.m.**  
**Rocky River Nature Center**  
24000 Valley Pkwy, North Olmsted, OH 44070  
Meet in the Nature Center.  
Bill Deininger to lead

**Reminder: Applications for Hog Island Scholarships**



Photo by Derrick Jackson, [hogisland.audubon.org](http://hogisland.audubon.org)

Black River Audubon Society is again offering Hog Island birding camp scholarships for two adult educators or naturalists and one teen birder. The successful adult applicant will acquire additional skills to educate students and the public about bird conservation and wildlife and the environment in general. Similarly, the successful teen applicant will broaden their knowledge of birds and the environment in general. The scholarship will cover tuition, room and board, plus up to \$600 in travel expenses.

The goal is that recipients will follow the examples of others who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors for conservation

and environmental education in our communities.

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine learning from accomplished naturalists, birders, and educators. In the off hours, they can explore the camp's natural surroundings and rustic buildings that have a long history with National Audubon. No one has ever returned with complaints about the quality of meals served during their stay.

Two reservations have been made for the BRAS scholarship winners for the **Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week** camp, although other camps might be possible. One reservation has been made for **Coastal Marine Bird Studies for Teens**.

**All application materials must be sent to Black River Audubon by February 12, 2023.** Individuals interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Charlie Weil at [BlackRiverAudubon@gmail.com](mailto:BlackRiverAudubon@gmail.com) or call 440-864-1617 for the application materials. Be sure to leave a message if calling.

For more details and description of the camping experience, go to [hogisland.audubon.org](http://hogisland.audubon.org)

## **Purple Sandpiper**

*Calidris maritima*

by Chad Wilson

*"It's February, for crying out loud! Why is there a shorebird on the cover of my February Wingtips! Shorebirds are summer birds!"* Well, dear readers, this is no ordinary shorebird. These hardy little fellows have the northernmost winter range of *any* shorebird. They come down from the Arctic Tundra to areas like northern Ohio and Maine for the winter because our weather is mild to them!

While they are difficult to find in Ohio, there was one on the Lorain Harbor breakwalls on December 5<sup>th</sup> of 2022. To see one up

close, the best thing to do is to ride one of the Black Swamp Bird Observatory's Cleveland Harbor boat tours. Sometimes the Jaegerboat.com folks tour the Cleveland breakwalls in winter as well. These boats will ride along next to the breakwalls in hopes of close looks at our purple friend.

These subdued, gray-and-white sandpipers like to explore algae-covered rocks as they search for mussels, crustaceans, and flies, flashing bright orange on the legs and bill. They are surprisingly good at blending into the rocky breakwalls, and can take quite a bit of searching, even if you know one is in the area.

Why are they called “Purple Sandpipers?” The Purple Sandpiper has been known variously as Rock-bird, Winter Rock-bird, Rock Plover, Rock Snipe, Winter Snipe, and Winter Peep. Those names should tell you that the Purple Sandpiper will be seen feeding among seaweed on rocks in the winter. All of those names are probably better than “Purple Sandpiper.” The name refers to a seldom-seen purple sheen on some of the wing feathers. They also look like they have a pot belly and are one of the more adorable, stocky shorebirds around.

Watching them out on the breakwall rocks in winter always makes me think they are a bit touched in the head. It's COLD out there, and they have winter waves crashing in on them. When an especially large wave hits the rocks, they simply hop or flutter up far enough to evade the incoming water.

Purple Sandpiper numbers seem to be steady or maybe even increasing, which is probably due to the fact that they breed far north in areas that are remote from humans. The longest-lived Purple Sandpiper was at least 20 years, 9 months old, and lived in Sweden. And it's good that they live that long, because unless you take a boat tour it might take you 20 years to get a good look at one!

References: [allaboutbirds.com](http://allaboutbirds.com); [audubon.org](http://audubon.org); Kennedy and McCormac, *Lone Pine's Birds of Ohio*; Peter John, Bruce: *The Birds of Ohio* <https://www.maine.gov/ifw/blogs/mdifw-blog/purple-sandpipers-enjoy-warmth-maine-winters> <http://tailsofbirding.blogspot.com/2008/03/purple-sandpipers-hardy-winter.html>

## 2022 Jack Smith Award Winner: Harriet Alger!

By Danielle Squire



On December 6<sup>th</sup>, the Black River Audubon hosted a member's gathering at Sandy Ridge to enjoy a timeline of musings from naturalist Tim Fairweather as a part of his recent retirement- but with an added surprise! All who attended were honored to witness the one and only Harriet Alger be presented with the well-deserved Jack Smith Award for her lifetime of unique and tireless nurturing of both wildlife and society, spanning several decades and enduring for countless more.

Born on a leap year in 1928, she's celebrating her 25<sup>th</sup> birthday soon but has been serving her community, both local and abroad, for over 90 years. As a young girl, Harriet would accompany her mother on her photography pursuits, learning to view people from an artist's perspective and tenderness. She noticed that her mom had a way of sympathizing with those she photographed and would portray stories in their portraits. On Harriet's living room wall hangs a captivating photo of a child's face, upon whose cheek a

single tear trickles. Noticing my intrigue, Harriet asked, “why do you think that child is crying?”. She has shown this photo to children over the span of decades and has asked them the same. Imagine for a moment the volume that a child’s simple answer may reveal of who they are. That’s what Harriet wanted to know the most- the essence of those she met and to learn in what way she may support them best. She would do this, as she’s told me, through the various use of storytelling.

Harriet’s own story is incredibly illustrious! Many of you may know her for her role in the Black River Audubon Society and local community. As a friend of our founder Jack Smith, Harriet helped pave the way for much of the positive work we’ve accomplished over the years and was pivotal in starting up Sandy Ridge Reservation! A mentor and friend to Tim Fairweather himself when he first started there, she says she remembers “his long legs running around the place making discoveries left and right”. She also spearheaded many acts of conservation, including the Purple Martin houses along the lakeshore and the LCCC Meadow Preserve. Harriet has led many walks at Sandy Ridge and other local parks to crowds who appreciated her calm and enthusiastic nature.

Before working with wildlife, Harriet made history as an advocate for human rights and welfare- particularly those with special needs and to mothers aiming to improve themselves through education. An accomplished educator herself, Harriet even testified before Congress regarding the reestablishment of the Higher Education Act. A Master’s degree in Elementary Education, a PhD in Early Childhood, and serving as director/Dean for several well-known innovative childhood educational programs, it is through her commitment that the National Coalition for Campus Child Care was formed, of which she was founder and president. Harriet is responsible for the first campus daycare in the country!

A humanitarian at heart, Harriet began her journey of interpretive healing as a champion of the arts. Undoubtedly influenced by her mother’s passion for social expression, she taught music as a

concert pianist after acquiring her Doctorate in piano and music theory. Music is, of course, another form of storytelling after all. Harriet's influence will echo far beyond these pages and has inspired the story of countless individuals and wildlife who have been nurtured by her energetic wisdom. We feel honored to have her as a model for our mission. Thank you for everything, Harriet!

## **The Little Vacant Lot that Could**

By Chad Wilson



**Red-throated Loon, photo by Sarah Taylor**

New parks usually excite me. West Shore Park, at first glance, did not seem terribly exciting, but it was a case that proved once again you should not judge a book by its cover.

West Shore Park is a new park in Avon Lake that looks exactly like a vacant lot. But now that I have visited it a few times, it turns out it has some of the best lakewatching for Lake Erie birds in the area. Especially if you are looking for loons. Many birders have seen all three loons: Common, Red-throated, and even the rare Pacific, at this park in the first week of 2023!

The warm weather has played a part, but driving up and down the shore to the other lakewatching spots has not yielded the same concentration of loons, so they definitely like this spot! I think the attraction is that the area is sheltered by the breakwalls and outflow of the soon-to-be-demolished power plant. (In fact, they were knocking down the west side of the power plant the last time I drove by.) But the breakwalls create a sheltered area from the waves coming out of the west in the winter. I am very curious to see what other birds turn up there....it might become one of the top spots to lakewatch in the area!

Where is it? 58 West Shore Road in Avon Lake, just behind Johnny's Boathouse. There's not a ton of parking but there are a few spots you can park on the side of the road. Unless you're lakewatching for birds don't bother, but if you are check it out!



**West Shore Park....vacant lot, or bird wonderland?**

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

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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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**Attention: Chance Mueleck**

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To pay online, go to *[blackriveraudubon.org/membership](http://blackriveraudubon.org/membership)*  
and select the type of membership you prefer.

# Gullhalla

By Chad Wilson

There is something strange going on in Cleveland. Some kind of wonderful convergence, turning Cleveland into the center of the birding universe in the course of one wonderful week. Three incredibly rare-for-Ohio gulls have shown up, all pretty much in the same spot, all within a week of each other.

First up, Todd Eiben found a Common Gull on December 30<sup>th</sup> at Wendy Park. This was a first state record for Ohio! The Common Gull is a fairly new species, as the former Mew Gull was split into American (Short-billed Gull) and European (Common Gull) species. So Todd found the more unlikely of the two, as his bird should be in Europe!

Next, on New Year's Day Anthony Rodgers found a Glaucous-winged Gull on the Cuyahoga River at Jacob's Pavilion, just down the river from Wendy Park. This bird hails from the west coast of Canada and was also a first state record for Ohio!

Finally, Kent Miller and Ben Meredyk found a Slaty-backed Gull at Jacob's Pavilion on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. This was Ohio's third record for the species, which hails from Japan!

As a result of all this madness, Anthony Rodgers decided that Cleveland in winter should be known as Gullhalla! It sure has my vote! Keep the crazy birds coming!



Common Gull, left. Slaty-backed Gull, right. Photos by Chad Wilson



GLAUCOUS-WINGED GULL (first Ohio record), photo by Chad Wilson



## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

*"Birding Since 1958"*

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