

# WINGTIPS



MERLIN, photo by Chad Wilson

JANUARY 2024

**Or Current Residents**  
**ADDRESS LABEL**  
**HERE**

**Editors:**  
**Chad Wilson**  
**Marty Ackermann**  
**Danielle Squire**  
  
**Webmaster:**  
**Rob Swindell**

**Non-Profit**  
**U.S. Postage**  
**Paid**  
**Elyria, Ohio**  
**Permit No.**  
**50**

# January 2024 Program

Tuesday, January 2<sup>nd</sup> at 7 p.m.

French Creek Reservation

**“Oh! The Places We Can Go!”**

**Paul Sherwood**



**Paul Sherwood pointing out yet another bird**

Description of Program: A birder’s guide of places to go birding in and around Lorain County. Where to go, when to go and what to expect to see when you get there!

*Bio:*

*Education-* *B.S in Natural Resources, The Ohio State University* 1993.  
*Masters in Public Administration, Akron University* 1998.

*Employment:* *Huron National Forest, Tawas City, MI*  
*Columbus/Franklin County Metroparks, Columbus,* *Ohio*  
*Logoly State Park, McNeil, Arkansas*  
*Erie MetroParks, Huron, Ohio*  
*Magee Marsh State Wildlife Area, Oak Harbor, Ohio*  
*Black Swamp Bird Observatory, Oak Harbor, Ohio*  
*TRC Environmental, Columbus, Ohio*  
*BHE Environmental, Ann Arbor, MI*

Paul is the former President of Firelands Audubon Society and is currently the Field Trip Coordinator for Black River Audubon Society.

“I SLEEP WITH BINOCULARS UNDER MY PILLOW!”

**January Field Trips**  
**All trips are on Saturdays**  
***Guests Are Always Welcome!***

**January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, 9:00 a.m.**  
**Huntington Reservation/LENSC**  
28728 Wolf Rd, Bay Village, OH  
Meet by the Lake Erie Science and Nature Center Building  
Chad Wilson to lead

**Notes from the President**

By Rob Swindell



“Flying Together for Birds” is the new maxim for Audubon.” Their strategic plan, “Flight Plan,” focuses on a number of objectives but can be summarized into three ideas: Hemisphere, Climate Change and Community.

To learn more about their conservation plan, I attended the National Leadership Conference in Estes Park, Colorado in early November. It was their first conference since 2019. I received a scholarship from National Audubon to attend and was one of three volunteer chapter leaders from Ohio. Total attendance for the conference was around 400.

Their approach is known as “Local Action. Hemispheric Impact.” It depends on local communities embracing these principles and engaging in conservation.

The conference was a tremendous amount of work, and the staff of National Audubon deserve a lot of credit for their work to pull off a conference of this size.

At the conference, Marshall Johnson, Chief Conservation Officer for National Audubon, gave an inspiring speech on our future conservation challenges and responsibilities. “You are what hope looks like to a bird,” he proclaimed. “We work, sacrifice and struggle to ensure future generations can gaze on our feathered friends.”

I invited him to speak locally when his schedule permits and he seemed excited to do so.

I met numerous chapter leaders from around the country—and it was interesting to learn from their challenges and successes. We shared our thoughts through a variety of meetings and focus groups. In addition to National Audubon sharing the details of the strategic plan, they wanted to learn how they could support local chapters.

The conference rejuvenated me as our work as volunteers with Black River Audubon, serving as ambassadors and advocates, can be exhausting and frustrating. But as Johnson said, “Let passion be our fuel. If not us, then who; if not now, when?”

The next conference is scheduled for summer 2025.



Marshall Johnson speaking in Colorado, photo by Rob Swindell

# Merlin

*Falco columbarius*

By Chad Wilson

My favorite falcon is the Merlin. They are small but mighty, cute but terrifying, and local but unpredictable.

Let's start with their unusual name. The name "Merlin" comes from *esmerillon*, the old French name for the species. Merlins also used to be called "pigeon hawks" because in flight they look a bit pigeon-like. Their species name, *columbarius*, is also a reference to pigeons.

Merlins can be found in Lorain County at any time, anywhere, but I've had more luck seeing them in the winter months. It is also very unusual to see them during the summer, but a couple local birders have seen them. They absolutely love cemeteries; I've said before that if we could split all the birders up so they each take a cemetery in the winter, at least one of them will find a Merlin!

Although they are a small falcon, just a bit bigger than the American Kestrel, they don't have many equals on the wing. While birding with another Black River Audubon board member, Danielle Squire, we stumbled across a Merlin at the Lorain Impoundment that was fighting two American Crows. Although the crows were much bigger, the Merlin was kicking tail feathers and taking names. He repeatedly struck both crows and drove them away, then proceeded to land on a telephone pole and calmly lick the crow blood from his talons.

Merlins don't build their own nests, instead taking over the nests of magpies, raptors, and crows. They breed north of us, mostly in Canada and Alaska, and lay 4-5 eggs, which take about a month to hatch and another month to fledge. They hunt small birds, large insects, bats, rodents, and reptiles. Keep your eyes open for this beautiful falcon at cemeteries or the Lorain impoundment!

References: <https://www.allaboutbirds>; <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/merlin>; Birds of Ohio by Kennedy and McCourmac

## Galapagos Islands – Part III

By Charlie Weil



Great Frigatebird, photo by Charlie Weil

No trip to the Galapagos Islands would be complete without at least one opportunity to snorkel or skin dive. We were fortunate enough to have two such chances, first on Isabela Island and later off Sante Fe Island.

In my case it was a relearning experience as the last time I snorkeled was almost 20 years ago. Armed with my new AKASO waterproof action camera, I carefully navigated between sunning marine iguanas to enter the somewhat cloudy water of the bay on Isabela Island. The bay did not have a coral formation but was quite rocky. The water was rich with various species of colorful tropical fish and starfish. Learning on the fly with the camera added to the challenge. Despite this I got a good picture of a hawksbill sea turtle swimming beneath me as well as a small spotted ray. I also was able to shoot a small video clip of a sea lion swimming nearby.

Sea lions are numerous all over the Galapagos Islands and can be seen sunning themselves on piers, benches, and anchored boats. Perhaps the biggest treat of the snorkeling at Isabela Island was swimming with two young playful sea lions. They seemed to enjoy swimming with you at full speed and at the last-minute diving underneath you. To say the least, this was an unnerving experience the first time I experienced this behavior by such a large animal. The other thing they seemed to enjoy doing was coming up to you and blowing bubbles. Our guide said this is a common playful practice. My son-in-law had one of the young sea lions gently nip his leg which gave him a memorable experience.

The other snorkel opportunity was in two areas just off the coast of Sante Fe Island. Again, the ocean bottom topography was like that on Isabela Island, with rocky underwater structures. This island featured many green sea turtles with which we enjoyed swimming. We also got to see a small reef shark. Later, in Tortuga Bay on Santa Cruz Island we also saw a young hammerhead shark in the surf where we were swimming.

Of course, a trip to the Galapagos Islands would not be complete without the opportunity to see some unusual birds as well. As mentioned in the previous section, Beth got a good look at a Blue-Footed Booby colony and I got to see some young Galapagos Penguins. Several other birds were spotted during our travels. Frigate birds were common with several of them soaring over the harbor on Santa Cruz. Some of the other species that were spotted were Common Cactus Finch, Lava Heron, Common Gallinule, Yellow Flycatcher, and a Brown Pelican.

Like most of the world, the Islands are threatened by invasive species such as rats and feral cats. This has put 50% of the archipelago's land birds at risk of extinction. We were made aware of another threat from an invasive species, the yellow paper wasp. This insect competes with species like the Darwin Finch for food and efforts to stop its spread and control its population have not been successful. The insect is attracted by bright colors, and I



almost had a bad experience during a several miles walk to Tortuga Bay when I unknowingly wore a bright green swim shirt, a known attractive color for the bees.

The Galapagos Islands and the Pacific Ocean coast of Ecuador is only one of the three biodiverse regions of Ecuador. Next month I will talk about the second zone of Ecuador the high mountain region around the capital Quito and the Mindo Cloud Forest.

## **A Finch of a Different Color**

By Chad Wilson



**“Yellow” House Finch, photo by Chad Wilson**

As I glanced out my window into the back yard on November 21<sup>st</sup>, I saw something I had never seen before...a House Finch that, instead of having red coloring, was yellow! I had heard of these birds before, but they are typically seen in the American Southwest or Hawaii, and it is very unusual to see them in Ohio.



So why are they yellow? In the wild, three carotenoid pigments found in natural foods give House Finches their color. Beta-carotene produces yellow to orange colors, isocryptoxanthin produces orange colors, and echinenone produces red colors. Yellow House Finches are frequently seen in the southwest and Hawaii where natural foods are low in some of these carotenoids. In the east birds often feed on the high-carotenoid fruits of ornamental plants.

Despite the known influence of diet on the coloration of male house finches, the genetic basis for this phenomenon remains uncharted territory. Current research has not yet determined the potential implications of genetic factors on the color variations of yellow house finches.

The lack of information on this topic leaves room for further exploration and discovery, as understanding the relationship between genetics and environmental factors could shed new light on the captivating world of these striking birds.

I polled my birding friends if they have seen yellow or orange House Finches in Ohio. Only a few had, and only very rarely. So it seems like the fact that this is the first one I've seen in my five years of birding is not unusual for Ohio! That's one of the things I love about birding, there is always something new to see and learn!

References: [https://feederwatch.org/color\\_variant/yellow-house-finches/](https://feederwatch.org/color_variant/yellow-house-finches/); <https://mybirdsheart.com/yellow-house-finches-all-you-need-to-know/>



Yellow vs Red House Finches, photo by Chad Wilson

**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 Only**  
(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, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10014  
Attention: Chance Mueleck

---

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

Black River Audubon is proud to present:

*“Purple Haze: A Conservation Film”*

February 4, 2024

French Creek Nature Center and Theater

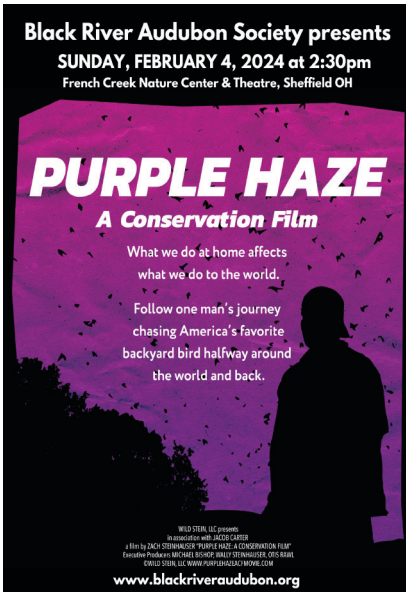
2:00pm-5:00pm

Admission \$5.00. Tickets can be purchased at  
[www.blackriveraudubon.com](http://www.blackriveraudubon.com).

## Purple Haze: A Conservation Film

After millions of years of evolution, treacherous migrations, and forming a unique relationship with humans, North America’s largest swallow species, the Purple Martin, has managed to become almost completely dependent on man-made nesting structures to nest & rear their young. Captain Zach Steinhauser has taken it upon himself, after spending years guiding folks to North America’s largest Purple Martin roost, to chase these birds across their range to understand exactly how this species put themselves in this position and discover a lost culture of bird-loving enthusiasts across the Purple Martin’s range. Zach’s journey takes him across the western hemisphere from the Great Lakes to the Amazon Rainforest, all the way to the Sonoran Desert, making unexpected connections at every turn.

More information: <https://www.purplehazeacfmovie.com/>



**Black River Audubon Society presents**  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024 at 2:30pm  
French Creek Nature Center & Theatre, Sheffield OH

# PURPLE HAZE

**A Conservation Film**

What we do at home affects  
what we do to the world.

Follow one man's journey  
chasing America's favorite  
backyard bird halfway around  
the world and back.

WRITTEN BY JACOB CARBER  
in association with JACOB CARBER  
A film by ZACH STEINHAUSER PURPLE HAZE: A CONSERVATION FILM  
Executive Producers MICHAEL BRONF, BRADY STEINHAUSER, JOSH HARRIS  
CREATED BY STEIN, LLC WWW.PURPLEHAZEACFMOVIE.COM

[www.blackriveraudubon.org](http://www.blackriveraudubon.org)





LAVA HERON, photo by Charlie Weil



## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

*"Birding Since 1958"*

**P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036**

**Email: [blackriveraudubon@gmail.com](mailto:blackriveraudubon@gmail.com)**

**440-541-9170**

**[www.blackriveraudubon.org](http://www.blackriveraudubon.org)**