

WINGTIPS



BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE, photo by Debbie Parker

Or Current Residents
ADDRESS LABEL
HERE

DECEMBER 2021

Editors:
Jim Jablonski, Chad
Wilson, Marty Ackermann,
Tammy Martin,
Webmaster:
Rob Swindell

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

December 2021 Program
Tuesday, December 7 at 7 p.m.
Sandy Ridge Reservation, Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center
Note that meetings are subject to local Covid regulations
Birding Game Night at Sandy Ridge
Tim Fairweather



Tim Fairweather during a “Big Sit” at Sandy Ridge Reservation

Tim Fairweather has been a naturalist with the Lorain County Metro Parks for 32 years. He started as a seasonal worker with summer camps in 1989. Later, he worked full-time at French Creek Nature Center for 10 years before being appointed Park Manager and Senior Naturalist at Sandy Ridge Reservation prior to its opening in October 1999.

Tim credits the local birding community for its enthusiasm over the difficult last two years. The spots have been filled despite the challenges and limited numbers allowed for bird walks due to Covid restrictions. His annual Big Sit event at Sandy Ridge helped him raise \$2,000 for Second Harvest Food Bank.

His December program will once again be about having fun with birding knowledge and trivia. It will also focus on some of the highlights from the past two years at Sandy Ridge through a short photo program.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT PLANS

Black River Audubon Society will again offer Christmas Bird Counts (CBC) this year to its members and take a cautious approach with COVID-19 still a concern.

Specifically, this means 1) count areas will be assigned by the count organizer through email; 2) participants will submit their count data by email or phone to the organizer; 3) participants are encouraged to count or carpool with others they know and to use masks and/or social distance as they judge appropriate.

All who wish to take part must first contact the organizer for the area that they wish to count. To take part in the Elyria area count on Saturday, December 18, contact Marty Ackermann at 608-334-2552 or at martin.ackermann@oberlin.edu.

For the Wellington area count on January 2, 2022, contact Paul Sherwood at 419-202-6080 or at pdsstrix@aol.com.

In the event local pandemic conditions lead to tighter restrictions or bans on gatherings, call the organizer of your count for updates.

OCTOBER FIELD TRIP REPORT

Lights Out Cleveland

By Paul Sherwood

The October 16th downtown portion of the planned field trip to learn about the Lights Out Cleveland program was cut short due to bad weather. However, Tim Jasinski, Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist of the Lake Erie Nature and Science Center, gave us a tour of the Center's rehab unit.

Lights Out Cleveland volunteers collect injured birds that have hit downtown buildings and bring them to the Center for rehabilitation. Jasinski showed us birds that were being fed and cared for prior to their release. During the tour, birds arrived from the morning's collections. Live birds were weighed and assessed while the dead were set aside for later processing. Hopefully, we will be able to follow the entire process of this important program in the future.



BARRED OWL

Strix varia

By **Barbara Baudot**

Barred owls may be the most common species of owls in North America. Often called “hoot owls,” they are strong vocalists. Their sonorous “*who cooks for you*” call is familiar throughout the eastern half of the USA and southern Canada.

It is believed that anti-slavery activist Harriet Tubman, an avid naturalist, used different calls of barred owls to communicate with people seeking to use the Underground Railroad. Depending on the call, freedom-seekers would know whether it was safe to come out of hiding.

Although primarily nocturnal, these owls can be seen hunting at dusk and dawn. In suburban New Hampshire and Ohio, I’ve heard these distinctive calls coming from the old growth woods and tree-lined swamps behind our homes. In suburban areas of Ohio, statistics indicate that 41% of the barred owl range is forested, 29% is low-density residential, and less than 15% is pasture.

These attractive owls, with penetrating dark brown eyes and brown-striped plumage, are usually unnoticed when flying noiselessly over clearings or under thick woodland canopies. Generally sedentary, they spend their days roosting on old tree branches where they perch to wait, scan the ground, and listen for prey. Pinpointing a meal, they swoop down to clutch their talons around small mammals, mice, voles, or sometimes small birds and amphibians.

Pairs mate for life, raising one brood each year. Barred owls become ferociously territorial once they establish nests and rear two to three chicks. Even when able to fly after twelve weeks, the chicks don’t venture far, remaining to be nurtured by their parents for two more months. Should they fall from their ‘nest tree,’ chicks can climb back up, using their bill and talons to hold on to the bark, flapping their wings for balance. Once chicks finally fly away, females establish their own territories next to their mate.

Barred owls are both predators and prey. Birds recognizing barred owls as predators include small songbirds, crows, and woodpeckers which merge to mob them. As prey, the barred owls’ most dangerous predator is the great horned owl. Barred owls are a species of low conservation concern. Their breeding population is estimated to be 3.4 million.



Barred Owl

(Photo courtesy of Cynthia Rand, Audubon Photography Awards)

Until the 20th century, the sedentary, non-migrating barred owls remained in their own territories in eastern North America. With the return of woodlands and the extensions of suitable habitat, these owls gradually spread across North America and down the Pacific coast. This expansion has been to the peril of the spotted owl [*Strix occidentalis*] which is being displaced by or hybridized by the barred owl. Spotted owls cannot exist without old-growth forest, but with the invasion of barred owls, the two species are competing for the same space. Only slightly larger, barred owls are more aggressive, multiply four times faster, and live more densely in small forest spaces.

In a controversial action to prevent the annihilation of spotted owls, 1,700 barred owls in Oregon were culled by U.S. Fish and Wildlife officials. The success of this policy was measured in increasing numbers of spotted owls in selected areas. The hope is to forestall further declines in spotted owl populations and gain time for these owls to defend their territory.

References: Barred owl in Wikipedia; Barred owl in All About Birds; [audubon.org/news/10-fun-facts-about-barred owl](http://audubon.org/news/10-fun-facts-about-barred-owl); Barred owl; Audubon Ornithological Biography, Vol. 1, p. 242, Vol. 5, p. 386; animaldiversity.org/accounts/Strix_varia; fws.gov/oregonfwo; animaldiversity.org/accounts.

The 10 Most Exciting Ohio Birds of 2021

By Chad Wilson

We have had another incredible year of birding in Ohio. The Ohio Big Year record was shattered by Josh Yoder (more on that in our January issue), and many other birders (including me) had their best year ever!

Here are some of the birds that had Ohio birders buzzing with excitement this year! (Editor's note: it is actually very difficult to figure out how many sightings a bird has had in Ohio, so take these numbers as an estimate.)

- 1) **Magnificent frigatebird** - Theo Bockhurst was doing a lake watch on September 22nd at Lakewood Park in Lakewood. It was getting late in the day and started to rain, so he thought about packing it in. But the rain ended quickly, and he went back to take one more look and found Ohio's fifth record of a magnificent frigatebird! He got the word out and miraculously the bird stayed put for almost an hour in one spot. Many birders who lived nearby were able to add it to their Ohio life lists. This was the first magnificent frigatebird in Ohio that was seen by more than one person. Way to go Theo!
- 2) **Brewer's sparrow** - For those of you that are not familiar with Jen Brumfield, she is a Cuyahoga County birder and one of the best in Ohio (if not THE best). She finds rare birds at a staggering pace, and this year was no exception. While birding in Wendy Park on May 11th, Jen heard an unfamiliar call. She tracked it down and bagged Ohio's second record of a Brewer's sparrow! Many, many birders were able to see it as it stayed put for days.
- 3) **Green-tailed towhee** - Leah Kmiecik found the fourth Ohio record of a green-tailed towhee at Hueston Woods State Park on September 25th. It showed well for the first day then was a tough bird to find afterwards, although a few hardy birders managed to see it.
- 4) **White-tailed kite** - Mary Gray and Larry Helgerman recorded the second state sighting of a white-tailed kite along Cadiz-Flushing Road in Harrison County on June 1st. The kite put on dazzling aerial displays and stayed around for most of June, to the delight of all who saw it.
- 5) **Anhinga** – Rich Kassouf, Nancy Howell, and Mary Anne Henderson were startled to find an anhinga at Lake Isaac in Cuyahoga County on May 2nd. It was just the second or third Ohio record. Unfortunately, it only stayed a couple of hours before flying off to parts unknown.



Anhinga
(Photo by Chad Wilson)

- 6) **Snowy plover** – Warren Leow found an amazing snowy plover on September 10th. This bird was nice enough to stick around all day, but it was a one-day wonder. It appears to be the fourth state record.



Snowy Plover
(Photo by Chad Wilson)

- 7) **Prairie falcon** – Don Bodle found and photographed a handsome prairie falcon on September 30th at Huffman Prairie Flying Field. Scattered reports are still occurring as of this writing in early November! There have been a handful of Ohio records of this bird.
- 8) **Wood stork** – A few wood storks graced Ohio this year, the most famous being a juvenile that hung out along Martin's Point Road in Sandusky from July 25th through August 30th. It was a dangerous bird to try to photograph as the road has no place to park and the locals drive very fast on it! There have been about a dozen wood storks recorded in Ohio.
- 9) **Gyrfalcon** – John Guy Petruzzi found a gyrfalcon on Calla Road in Mahoning County on February 25th. It stayed for a few weeks and covered a lot of ground, so chasing it was difficult. There have only been a handful of Ohio records, and this was the first gyrfalcon seen since the 1990s.
- 10) **Northern wheatear** – Karen Ritterspach started the new year right when she came across a northern wheatear at Upper Sandusky Reservoir on January 10th. This super-friendly bird remained in the area for at least six weeks and was seen by hundreds of chilly birders! There have been a handful recorded in Ohio.

As a special bonus, let us celebrate the top bird superstars of Ohio, the nesting piping plovers Nish and Nellie, and their four chicks Erie, Kickapoo, Maumee, and Ottawa! They made their nest on the inland beach at Maumee Bay State Park; the first time in over 80 years that Ohio has had nesting piping plovers! Hooray for the birding of 2021 and bring on 2022!

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

Parus atricapillus

By **Jim Jablonski**

One day, while working at my computer beneath an open window, I heard a 'tsee' sound repeated frequently. The call took a while to sink in, but I eventually realized that it was an alarm warning of a hawk in the area.

I quickly looked at the large bush beneath the window and, sure enough, there was a lone black-capped chickadee perched at the end of a branch, looking upward, repeating its call. I glanced into the nearby silver maple tree for the reason—a Cooper's hawk looking very frustrated.

It was a fascinating scene, a hawk and brave little chickadee in a staring contest without another bird to be seen. I learned that's what chickadees do; they protect their fellow songbirds from predators.

There's really no wonder why humans love this small black, gray, and white backyard bird. The chickadee is admired for its hyperactivity, interest in everything, all-around cuteness and, yes, even its courage to confront predators for the good of the passerine community. Species without alarm calls of their own know and respond appropriately to the chickadee's warnings.

Although they don't migrate, chickadees play a role in it as migrating songbirds, such as kinglets, warblers, and even woodpeckers, associate temporarily with them. Perhaps the affinity of others for them may be for the protection their alarm calls provide or the knowledge chickadees have of good feeding areas. Cornell Lab's **All About Birds** website even suggests that birders look for chickadees in hope of seeing migrants.

Known for its intelligence, the chickadee has a strange way of maintaining it. Every autumn, some of its information-carrying brain neurons die. They are replaced with new ones that enable them to adapt to changes in their flock and environment.

Northern Ohio's black-capped chickadee has certainly adapted to a wide variety of habitats. Its range extends from the southern borders of Colorado and Utah into Alaska and across North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Its range overlaps that of its cousin the Carolina chickadee in central Ohio.

Ten species of chickadees and their titmouse cousins live throughout North America, surviving the worst of winter weather. Their habit of storing seeds and dead insects in holes or tree bark and sleeping in cozy tree cavities help explain their endurance.

The black-capped chickadee's numbers appear to be stable throughout its widespread range. This tiny, intelligent, feisty bird has certainly proven its adaptability.

References: All About Birds, "Black-capped Chickadee," The Cornell Lab; Kenn Kaufman, "Black-capped Chickadee," Lives of North American Birds.

Black River Audubon Membership Only
(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.”

*****OR*****

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, 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

The Scarlet Macaw: Central American Icon

By Jim Jablonski



Scarlet Macaw, Costa Rica
(Photo by Jim Jablonski)

Five years ago, I traveled to Costa Rica with a tour group. Among many reasons for the trip, I wanted to see the two most iconic animals of Central America--the scarlet macaw and the red-eyed tree frog. I missed the latter but the macaw I saw on my second day in the country.

The group stopped for lunch and as soon as we got out of the bus, I spotted the macaws. They were every bit as spectacular as I expected. But they were in a tree above a parking lot! Naïve as I am, I thought the bird must be so common that some even hang out in unlikely places. Not so. I never saw another over the two-week trip.

It turns out the gorgeous bird's numbers are sadly declining in Central America, where it is widely pictured in tour brochures, due to habitat loss to agriculture and urban development. Fortunately, they are still widespread and considered to be of "least concern" for extinction in the Amazon basin of South America. At least for now.

Perhaps the pair I enjoyed and photographed were semi-feral. Nonetheless, they were still a treat to see--even in a parking lot.

Reference: "*Ara macao*," IUCN Red List of threatened species as referenced.



BARRED OWL, photo by Chad Wilson



BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

"Birding Since 1958"

P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036

Email: blackriveraudubon@gmail.com

440-541-9170

www.blackriveraudubon.org