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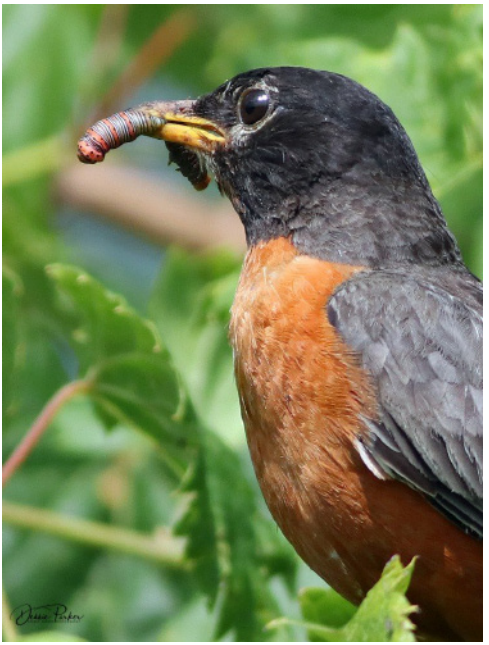

AMERICAN ROBIN, photo by Debbie Parker in Amherst

FEBRUARY 2021

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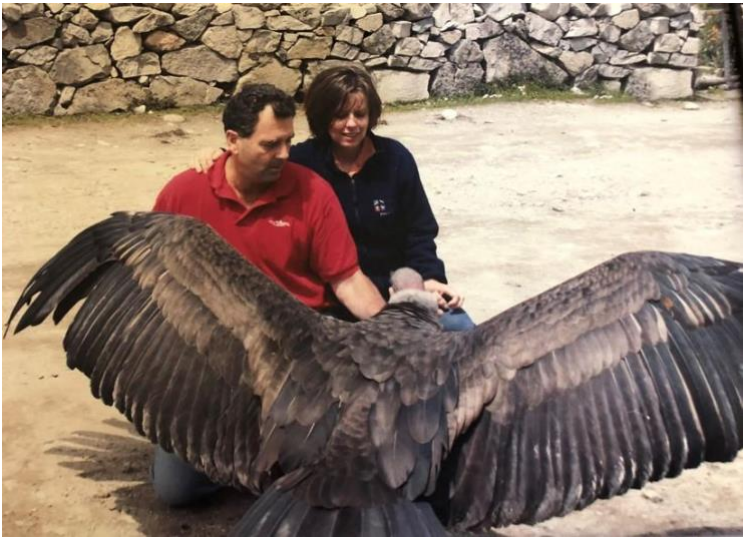
February 2021 Virtual Program

Tuesday, February 2, 2021, 7pm

Via Zoom

Fifty Years of Conservation

Stan Searles



Stan and Vicki Searles examining an Andean Condor (photo courtesy of Mr. Searles)

Stanley Searles, the founder and executive director of Global Conservation Connections, will discuss his widely varied conservation career. In his role as Curator of Birds and Aquatics at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, he collaborated with the Ohio Division of Wildlife in the reintroduction of the trumpeter swan to Ohio. In that project, he collected wild swan eggs in Alaska, oversaw the incubation of the eggs and rearing of the cygnets before placing them at a holding facility at The Wilds near Columbus. He then was involved with releasing the swans over a three-year period.

Later, he partnered with Bioandina, a Venezuelan conservation organization in reintroducing Andean condors back into the wild. Searles continued to work with governmental agencies in Venezuela to ensure the success of the program.

Since his retirement from Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, he has been involved with conservation programs on a local and international level with Global Conservation Connections.

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.

Elyria/Lorain Christmas Bird Count 2020

By **Marty Ackermann**

December 19 provided mild seasonal weather--overcast, with temperatures in the 30's. Thirty-nine people counted for 71 hours, covering 53 miles on foot and 296 miles by car. Another 8 counted at their feeders. The result was 81 species (76) on count day and 5 during count week (cw), the second highest species total since the Elyria count started in 1958. There were 47,330 individual birds reported, more than double the number of recent years, but not a record. There have been years when the number of individuals of one species, such as red-breasted merganser, alone have exceeded 100,000.

The species seen and the number of each are: mute swan 1, trumpeter swan (cw), Canada goose 2951, wood duck 4, mallard 379, American black duck 41, American wigeon 2, northern shoveler 26, green-winged teal 2, blue-winged teal (cw), long-tailed duck 3, bufflehead 20, red-breasted merganser 520, hooded merganser 52, common merganser 32, ruddy duck 151, double-crested cormorant 1, common loon 3, Bonaparte's gull 200, ring-billed gull 18147, herring gull 1598, great black-backed gull 23, lesser black-backed gull 5, glaucous gull 1, Iceland gull 1, gull (sp.) 16000, killdeer 1, great blue heron 8, American coot 2, sandhill crane 2, bald eagle 16, northern harrier 1, Cooper's hawk 9, sharp-shinned hawk 1, red-shouldered hawk 14, red-tailed hawk 25, rough-legged hawk 1, peregrine falcon 1, American kestrel 12, merlin 1, barred owl 1, great horned owl (cw), rock pigeon 396, mourning dove 120, belted kingfisher 3, red-headed woodpecker 14, red-bellied woodpecker 76, yellow-bellied sapsucker 2, downy woodpecker 93, hairy woodpecker 11, pileated woodpecker 5, northern flicker 13, blue jay 258, American crow 32, eastern bluebird 59, American robin 464, cedar waxwing 27, black-capped chickadee 97, tufted titmouse 94. white-breasted nuthatch 79, red-breasted nuthatch 8, brown creeper 6, Carolina wren 22, marsh wren (cw), golden-crowned kinglet (cw), yellow-rumped warbler 4, dark-eyed junco 211, field sparrow 1, American tree sparrow 47, song sparrow 33, swamp sparrow 2, white-throated sparrow 12, house sparrow 638, purple finch 2, house finch 141, American goldfinch 89, pine siskin 34, northern cardinal 111, European starling 3077, red-winged blackbird 718, common grackle 70, brown-headed cowbird 3.

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

On January 2, 2021, a cloudy, cool, and misty day, 15 birders spent 38.5 total hours counting birds in the Wellington area. A total of 4,466 birds of 57 species were recorded.

They were: Canada goose 775, mute swan 1, trumpeter swan 1, gadwall 6, mallard 41, northern pintail 2, canvasback 4, redhead 6, ring-necked duck 32, lesser scaup 5, bufflehead 24, common goldeneye 2, hooded merganser 35, common merganser 2, red-breasted merganser 3, ruddy duck 308, wild turkey 10,

pied-billed grebe 2, rock pigeon 94, mourning dove 324, American coot 52, great blue heron 1, northern harrier 1, Cooper's hawk 3, bald eagle 3, red-shouldered hawk 4, red-tailed hawk 32, great horned owl 1, short-eared owl 1, barred owl 1, belted kingfisher 1, red-bellied woodpecker 24, downy woodpecker 30, hairy woodpecker 7, pileated woodpecker 8, northern flicker 25, American kestrel 17, blue jay 107, American crow 72, black-capped chickadee 86, tufted titmouse 22, red-breasted nuthatch 5, white-breasted nuthatch 23, Carolina wren 11, European starling 1794, eastern bluebird 27, American robin 3, cedar waxwing 25, house sparrow 239, house finch 4, American goldfinch 28, American tree sparrow 19, dark-eyed junco 26, white-throated sparrow 2, song sparrow 15, swamp sparrow 2, yellow-rumped warbler 23, northern cardinal 25.

AMERICAN ROBIN

Turdus migratorius

By **Barbara Baudot**

"Your account of the Robin hardly leaves me anything to add . . ."
Dr. T.M. Brewer in a letter to J.J. Audubon

I agree with Dr. Brewer. After reading J.J. Audubon's beautiful description of the life and behavior of the American robin, I feel unable to add much more to the description of our celebrated harbinger of spring.

Audubon's first essays describing his paintings in Birds of America were published in 1840-1844. His study of the robin began with his trip to Labrador in 1833. What follows are a series of quotes drawn from that essay with a few of my added comments.

From his earliest years, Audubon was fascinated by birds. At 18 he left France for the U.S. He observed that it was the European merle that closely resembled the American robin. Both birds belong to the genus Turdus. The merle, by contrast, is all black with a yellow beak.

> *"... so much do certain notes of the Robin resemble those of the European Blackbird (merle) that frequently while in England the cry of the latter . . . reminded me of the former... in America the Robin has in the same manner recalled the Blackbird"*

However, 17th century European immigrants had already given the name 'robin' to this large red-breasted thrush since it reminded them of the red-breasted robin (a flycatcher or chat) from their homeland.

Although robins are migratory birds and are thought by many to be the first bird of spring, many reside year-round throughout the U.S. Those that do migrate return in the spring, often to their previous location, in woodlands, suburban backyards, parks, or wild prairies.

"…notwithstanding the snow and occasional severe winters of Massachusetts and Maine, flocks remain in those states…Thousands, however, migrate into Louisiana, the Floridas, Georgia, and the Carolinas…During the winter they feed on the berries and fruits of our woods, fields, gardens, and even the ornamental trees of our cities and villages…During summer and spring they devour snails and worms."

Their behavior differs according to the season. In winter, robins move about in nomadic flocks. In New Hampshire, I saw a flock in a snow-covered orchard where decaying fruit lay just below the trees. During one unusually snowy winter a thirsty robin visited our feeder.

The flocks disband in the spring and robins become territorial as mating begins. We were blessed for some years with a pair nesting under the gutter near the kitchen. The male would keep watch from the nearby fence when he wasn't finding worms for his mate and chicks.

"During the (mating) season, the male pays his addresses to the female of his choice…Sometimes he is seen with his tail fully spread, his wings shaking, and his throat inflated, running over the grass and brushing it, as it were, until he has neared his mate…he moves around her several times…She then receives his caresses."

"Many of these birds show a marked partiality to the places they have chosen to breed in, and…return to those loved spots each spring …the nest is large and…composed of dry leaves, grass and moss. The eggs are from four to six, of a beautiful bluish-green."

"The young are fed by their tender parents…The young, before they are fully fledged, often leave the nest to meet their parents, when coming home with a supply of food. The young obtain their full plumage by the first spring, being spotted on the breast."

Not always so beloved as by Audubon, many large wintering flocks of robins were once killed for their tasty flesh. It is forbidden to shoot robins today. In Europe, the merles and other related species are still hunted, and their numbers are declining. In the U.S., the estimated 320 million robins are protected to the delight of all and especially poets and songwriters. Emily Dickinson's poems are especially illustrative of the U.S. romance with its cheery harbinger of spring.

References: https://www.audubon.org/birds-of-america/american-robin; American robin, Wikipedia; American robin, allaboutbirds.org, TheCornellLab.

Birding, Lorain County and Lynds Jones

By **Jim Jablonski**

I'm rarely at the top of my game when taken by surprise. So, as always, I was at a loss for words when Chronicle-Telegram reporter Jason Hawk called for information about the local Christmas Bird Counts. After mentioning that the upcoming count would be the 121st, I wasn't quite sure what more to say. After rambling for a bit, I hit upon something, a quote about the origins of birding and bird counts from Kenn Kaufman's wonderful book **A Season on the Wing:**

> *"The history isn't widely known, but birding in a modern sense really began on the Lake Erie Plain, only a couple of counties east of Magee Marsh."*

When I first read that passage, I visualized a map of northern Ohio counties with growing excitement. Sure enough, only Erie County is between Magee Marsh's Ottawa and Lorain County! Modern birding started here, according to Kenn Kaufman!

As many know, ornithology in the 19th century took a true shotgun approach to gathering bird specimens for research. It was thought only a dead bird in one's hand could be studied adequately, an approach that didn't fit well with the budding conservation movement of the 1890's that led to the creation of National Audubon Society and other environmental groups.

At that time, an Oberlin College zoology instructor, Lynds Jones, was particularly interested in birds and their environments. He attended Iowa's Grinnell College for two years but returned to the state of his birth when he transferred to Oberlin College due to the "greater variety of science courses offered there."

Jones received his bachelor's degree in 1892 and immediately began teaching at Oberlin as an assistant, and later an instructor, prior to earning his master's degree from the same institution in 1895. In 1905, he would obtain his doctorate from the University of Chicago.

With his master's in hand, Jones began his career as a trailblazer when he convinced Oberlin to offer a course in ornithology, the first in the nation. The course included early morning birding field trips that were so popular they drew up to 120 students, an enrollment that required assistant guides. Jones, a low-ranking faculty member, must have had great powers of persuasion to convince the faculty and administration to approve this approach, so different from the shotgun ornithology of the time.

Professor Lynds Jones in Bird Lore (Audubon magazine today), 1903
Photographer unknown

Jones, an avid bird lover since childhood, was out almost daily pursuing his professional interest and passion. In 1898, the professor and his student, William Leon Dawson, decided to see how many birds they could record in one day's field trip. Rising before dawn on May 17, 1898, they hiked the fields around Oberlin counting every bird they saw. Then, catching the interurban trolley (the mass transportation of the time), they traveled to Lorain and birded along the lakeshore and every other good bird habitat they could find. When completed, they had sighted 102 species during the first well-recorded Big Day!

Later, on May 19, 1900, Jones spotted 100 bird species while hiking alone, the highest total by an individual up to that time. Later, in 1907, Jones and two others recorded 144 species in Erie County.

Jones published his results in The Wilson Bulletin, the journal of the Wilson Ornithological Society, a group he helped form in 1888 and which still is active today. The attention garnered helped popularize the trend toward field work in ornithology. This movement, also inspired by improving optics, encouraged amateur ornithologists, Big Days, and birding as we know it today.

Kenn Kaufman pointed out something else that enabled Jones' pioneering work in ornithology and ecology.

"Jones and Dawson were sharp and energetic, but another factor in their success was location. By taking in the Lake Erie shoreline, they tapped into the enormous concentrations of migratory birds that build up there every spring."

A passionate birding professor, support from a leading college, and a prime birding location, Lorain County, all came together 120 years ago to help turn ornithology and birding in a new direction.

References: Kaufman, Kenn, *A Season on the Wind,* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2019, p. 194; Jones, Lynds (1899). "The Lorain County, Ohio, 1898 Horizon". *The Wilson Bulletin*. **11**: 2–4; Kendeigh, S. Charles (1952). "In Memoriam: Lynds Jones" *(PDF). Auk.* **69** (3): 258–26.

GREATER ROADRUNNER

Geococcyx californianus

By **Jim Jablonski**

Few Black River Audubon Society members are more challenged when it comes to bird identification than I am. That's one reason why I was eager to see my first roadrunner. To be honest, after the bald eagle and American robin, there are few North American birds more easily identified than this native of the Southwestern deserts.

So, when I visited my nephew in Tucson years ago, I assumed that once we were out in the desert, I would easily recognize Wile E. Coyote's long-time nemesis. I was right! All those Looney Tune cartoons served me well. Once I saw the foot-tall, gangly bird skittering between the scrubby plants in Sabino Canyon, I knew my life list had grown by one.

Sabino Canyon is a huge park, well-hiked by many tourists, so the roadrunner wasn't spooked by a couple of transplanted Ohioans checking him out. Nevertheless, the heavily striped bird was a bundle of energy, darting between the various cacti and other plants while looking for the lizards, snakes, mice, and insects that make up its diet. What I didn't expect to see was that much activity in the mid-day, 90-degree heat of an Arizona March that had me wondering why I was out there.

It was a thrill to see the roadrunner in action but after a couple of minutes it quickly disappeared before we had a chance to see it catch anything. We also missed its well-known crest, a feature that isn't always prominent, I learned later. Kenn Kaufman was certainly correct when he used the term *"unmistakable"* to describe the roadrunner in his **Field Guide to Birds of North America.**

The roadrunner truly is lively. It rarely flies, although capable of doing so, but this desert dweller can reach speeds of 15 mph while running, even faster when pursuing prey, according to the Guide to North American

Birds at audubon.org. Amazingly, it has even been seen to leap in the air to catch a hummingbird.

With its back to the camera, the roadrunner displays its unmistakable tail. (photo by author)

Running is so much a part of its life (cartoons don't lie after all) that roadrunner courtship often involves chases on foot. One mating ritual resembles the Sadie Hawkins Day events of long ago. The male runs from the female with his tail and wings raised, then slowly lowers them. Eventually he wags his tail while slowly bowing to the female. One of the birds (male or female) may give a stick to the other as a sign of acceptance.

With courting completed, a nest is constructed in a bush, low tree or even a cactus, a few feet off the ground. Typically, 3-5 eggs are laid. Incubation, more often by the male, is fairly quick at about 20 days. After hatching both parents feed the nestlings and three weeks later the young leave the nest. The fledglings do catch some of their own food but rely on the parents for another month or more.

Roadrunners are not considered a threatened species although their numbers have dropped in southern California due to habitat loss, illegal shooting, and car strikes. This desert dweller may be one bird that actually benefits from global warming. The roadrunner climate change map at audubon.org shows its range expanding northward by 18 percent with a two-degree Centigrade increase in average global temperature.

Despite the problems individual birds encounter with humans, the greater roadrunner species is likely to bedevil coyotes well into the future.

References: Kaufman, Kenn, **Field Guide to Birds of North America**; "Greater Roadrunner," Guide to North American Birds, Audubon.org; "Greater Roadrunner," The National Wildlife Federation, nwf.org.

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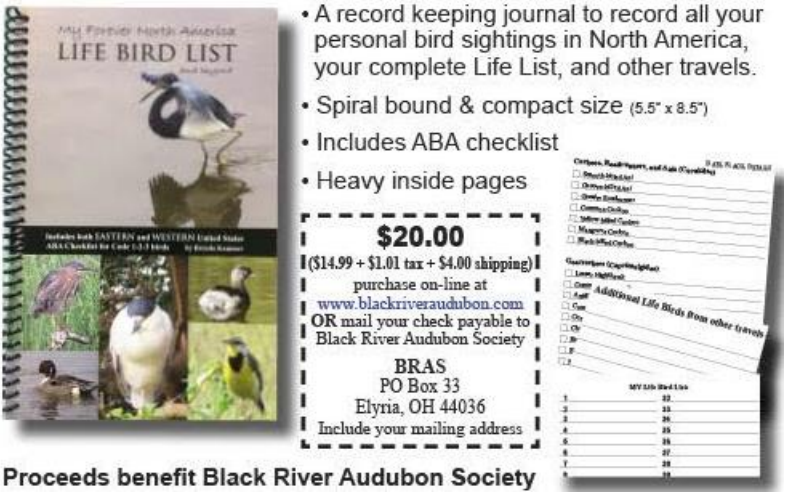
To pay online, go to ***blackriveraudubon.org/membership*** and select the type of membership you prefer.

My Forever North America LIFE BIRD LIST and beyond



Many birders keep 'life lists" to record their birding experiences—such as the date, time, and place they first saw a new avian species. **My Forever North America LIFE BIRD LIST and beyond,** by local birder Brenda Kammer, allows birders to keep track of those birds, as well as compile a numbered list of species. While there are online options—this book provides a physical record of your experiences to be "forever" treasured.

The book includes all Checklist Code 1-2-3 birds and plenty of extra pages to record rarities, log travel, and make notes. It features a chronologically numbered list of up to 400 birds (with room for many more). Made of sturdy materials, it can withstand a birder's travels.

The book can also be used for keeping annual totals, or totals covering an area—for example, Ohio Birds 2021 or Lorain County Birds 2022.

This is a nice gift for any birder, and, as a bonus, the proceeds generously benefit Black River Audubon.

Great Backyard Bird Count is Coming Soon

The birding event for everyone, including the homebound, is nearly here. The 24th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will be held February 12 through February 15, 2021. The count is an easy way to take part in an important citizen science project with hundreds of thousands of others in the U.S. and around the world. It's perfect for these times of social distancing since it can be done while sitting at your back window or, if you choose, while out in the field in your favorite birding location. To learn how to take part in this year's GBBC go to www.birdcount.org.

GREATER ROADRUNNER, photo by Jim Jablonski, Sabino Canyon, Arizona

BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

"Birding Since 1958"

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