

WINGTIPS



BUFFLEHEAD, photo by Chad Wilson

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JANUARY 2022

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January 2022 Program
Tuesday, January 4 at 7 p.m.
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center
Note that meetings are subject to local Covid regulations
Migration in Northern Ohio
Nancy Howell



Nancy Howell Leading a Birding Group

Nancy Howell will present a wide-ranging description of birding in our area. She will present a look at the geological history of Ohio and how it shaped the wetlands and woodlands and even the weather conditions that affect the migrants that pass through our area. She will also discuss the many species that may be seen in the northern Ohio area during migration.

A former educator, Nancy is also retired from The Cleveland Museum of Natural History. She has been a birder since she was eight years old and began to attend Spring Bird Walks. In addition, she has been a volunteer with Black Swamp Bird Observatory's bird-banding station for over 20 years and serves as a board member of Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society and leads many bird walks for the organization.

February Road & Field Trip
February 11, 2022
Sax-Zim Bog
Northern Minnesota

The Black River Audubon Society is going on the road! We are heading to the Great White North to look for great gray and boreal owls, as well as winter finches. Our destination is the Sax-Zim Bog in northern Minnesota. We will leave early Friday morning, February 11, and will drive straight through to Minnesota. After birding all day Saturday, we will leave Sunday morning to return to Ohio. All travel will be in a 15-passenger van. Accommodations have been arranged at Alesche's in Meadowlands, Minnesota. Paul Sherwood is the tour leader.

Proof of Covid vaccination is required since the participants will be in close contact for long periods of time. Trip registration is first come/first served and Black River Audubon membership is required. The cost of meals is the individual participant's responsibility but travel and accommodations are included in the \$300 price. See the Black River Audubon website (blackriveraudubon.org) for further information and to register.

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

To take part in the Wellington area Christmas Bird Count on January 2, 2022, contact Paul Sherwood at 419-202-6080. He will assign areas in which to count. Afterward, participants will call Paul to provide him with the bird species and totals counted for each.

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

November Field Trip Report
Oberlin and Wellington Reservoirs

The November 20th Field Trip to Oberlin Reservoir, led by Diana Steele, was attended by 23 hardy souls. The weather was sunny, cold, and windy. Spotting scopes provided good views of the waterfowl. Birds seen at Oberlin Reservoir included the following: Canada goose, hooded merganser, ruddy duck, pied-billed grebe, Bonaparte's gull, ring-billed gull, herring gull, blue jay, and American crow.

After finishing at Oberlin reservoir, we proceeded to the Wellington Upground Reservoir. Local fire departments were doing rescue training there, but we walked by them and were able to spot the following birds: Canada goose, gadwall, redhead, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, bufflehead, ruddy duck, American coot, ring-billed gull, bald eagle, American crow, and eastern bluebird.

Notes From the President

By Rob Swindell

As the year ends, health and safety challenges continue. Covid infections increase then decrease, and just when we think we might have turned the corner, it is back. There is the evolution of the virus through Alpha, Delta, and now Omicron variants. Places and activities are opened, then closed again. Some places you must wear masks, some places you don't if you are vaccinated, some you need to wear them regardless. Some organizations have begun meeting in person, some still use Zoom, and still others have ceased operations for the time being. One shot, two shots, and now a booster are recommended. Some opt for none. Statistical safety is great, until an outlier affects someone you care about. It is hard to know what the right thing is to do.

It is a burden we have carried since March of 2020, coming up soon on two years. It is particularly difficult for a social organization like ours—where we want to meet to learn about birds, go out looking for birds, and collectively share our passion for birds.

So, 2022 begins like 2021, with a hope to move beyond the virus, to regain a semblance of normalcy. At Black River Audubon we have no choice but to continue to monitor the situation and adjust as necessary. Facilities may open and close; some speakers may be comfortable speaking in person—others may not. We sincerely apologize for the changing schedules.

We want to respect the safety concerns of everyone and ask members to only participate to the extent they are comfortable. We have been working to put the monthly program speakers on our YouTube channel—to accommodate those who would rather not meet in person.

We will continue to battle and move forward—and let's hope that 2023 starts with a different message.

As for 2022, we have a full schedule of speakers, field trips, outreach events, and advocacy efforts. We plan to be out in the community, including hosting information tables at local festivals and

giving presentations for libraries and other events. We are working on a local plan to address plastic pollution and will be looking for volunteers. We have a great lineup of speakers, and field trips are scheduled monthly through August.

In addition to the monthly field trips, we are pleased to announce a birding tour to Sax-Zim Bog in Minnesota. In mid-February, we will be making the trip (weather permitting) to Minnesota to visit the famous birding spot. The trip will include transportation, lodging, and birding guides.

The Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker program is back and scheduled for April 23, 2022. We are excited to share that our Keynote Speaker will be Jim McCormac of Columbus. We hope to make this a special event that includes recognition of those who have worked tirelessly to protect birds and other wildlife.

We appreciate our 500-plus members, and that they believe Black River Audubon is a meaningful cause worth supporting. We also wish everyone a safe and healthy holiday season and look forward to new beginnings in 2022.

RED-SHOULDERED HAWK

Buteo lineatus

By **Barbara Baudot**

In 1829, J.J. Audubon painted a portrait of a pair of these magnificent hawks. He described this species as “*one of the most noisy of its genus, during spring especially, when it would be difficult to approach the skirts of woods bordering a large plantation without hearing its discordant shrill notes, ka-hee, ka-hee...*”

In the spring these calls are most enthusiastic when the mates, together for life, are breeding. They soar upward in high flying circles and dive down, perhaps rolling on their backs and gliding in unison to a music of their own making. Together they build or refurbish their nest anchored in a major tree fork. In this large stick nest, lined with fresh greenery, the female incubates their four eggs while being fed by the male. Both will feed and care for the young.

In the United States there are five sub-species of these hawks, separated in two distinct breeding ranges--the eastern United States to central Minnesota and the area along coastal California.

The diets of red-shouldered hawks vary according to the season. During the warmer months, they favor cold-blooded prey including insects, crayfish, amphibians, and reptiles. In the winter, meals include

small mammals, typically voles and chipmunks, and an occasional small bird. They do not eat carrion.



Red-shouldered Hawk eating a frog

(Photo courtesy of Herbert Fechter, Audubon Photography Awards)

Red-shouldered hawks are forest raptors that inhabit tall deciduous or mixed tree stands near wetlands with open canopies. These hawks often hunt with their mates, searching for prey while perched on treetops or soaring above the trees.

These hawks are not exclusively birds of the forest; some red-shouldered hawks live in wooded suburban areas. Considered ‘of special concern,’ teams of ornithologists and volunteers continue to research their range, diet, survival, and population trends.

The similarity in the lifestyles of red-shouldered hawks and barred owls has been noted by ornithologists. The *Wilson Bulletin Quarterly Journal of Ornithology* in 1916 hinted that the red-shouldered hawk might be the diurnal equivalent of the nocturnal barred owl. They use the same nest sites, seek the same prey, and have similar behaviors. In Cincinnati, researchers have looked for features distinguishing barred owl nest sites from those of the red-shouldered hawk. No variables studied so far suggest that their habitats differ significantly.

The biggest threat to red shouldered hawks is loss of habitat through deforestation and the draining of wetlands. In the past, populations were devastated by hunters and DDT. Red-shouldered hawks are far less numerous than they were historically in some areas, including the upper midwest and parts of the Atlantic Coast, but current populations are thought to be stable in most regions.

References: Habitats of Suburban Barred Owls and Red-shouldered Hawks in Southwestern Ohio, Dykstra, Cheryl M, Simon, Melinda, Daniel F. Bernard, Hays, Jeffrey, June 1, 2012; “Red-shouldered hawk” in Wikipedia, Red-shouldered Hawk in ncwildlife.org; Red-shouldered Hawk in All About Birds.

A Very Big Year: Josh Yoder Shatters the Ohio Big Year Record!

By Chad Wilson

In the world of birding, doing a Big Year means trying to see as many species as you can in a given area within the calendar year. It is great fun to try, although you should think twice if you have a lot of responsibilities! I recently interviewed Josh Yoder about his incredible and ongoing year.

Hi Josh! Congratulations on the new Ohio record! Just for the record, how many bird species have you seen in Ohio this year, as of today?

As of Nov. 22, I have seen 331 species.

And what was the old record?

The old record was 324 held by Dan Gesualdo in 2017.

Have you had any communication with Dan?

No. I have never met him although I have heard a lot about him through other birders.

How long have you been a birder?

I started birding in 2012 when I was 12 years old but didn't do any serious birding or chasing until the fall of 2019.

Did you have a spark bird, or any other specific reason you got into birding?

I first got into birding because my cousins were birders at the time. I really enjoyed it and immediately got hooked.

What's your favorite bird that you saw this year?

I saw a lot of great birds this year but there is only one right answer. The gyrfalcon that showed up in Mahoning County in March was far and away my favorite bird. Some of it has to do with raptors being my favorites and the time and effort it took to see it. When I finally saw it, it was eating a crow before soaring very high and finally landing in a field. Absolutely the most awesome birding moment of my life and something that might never be topped.

How about the most difficult bird to find?

Most difficult to find was, surprisingly, a chuck-wills-widow

down in Adams County as we searched for several hours and finally heard it around midnight.

And did you have any heartbreaking misses?

One very heartbreaking miss was the anhinga in Cuyahoga County in May. I was in Coshocton County that morning having my best spring migration morning of the year when I got a text about the anhinga. I was reluctant to leave and took my time. When I finally got there, Alex Eberts had just updated Facebook's Ohio Chase Birds that they saw it fly over a parking lot just 5 minutes away. That will haunt me forever or at least until I get one in Ohio.

Are you going to try to break your record next year?

I won't be doing a big year. I want to travel around the country a lot more but if my record gets broken I might do it again. I have had a lot of fun doing it this year and can see myself doing one again.

Anything else you want to share about your incredible year?

Yes, this would not have been possible without the people I birded with such as Lucas Weaver, Duane Miller, and, most notably, Atlee Yoder who was always up to go chasing. He also pushed me to go watching for hawks up at Conneaut or to go lake watching whenever the weather looked good. Those are far from my favorite types of birding but when you're doing a big year they have to be done. I also want to thank those who found and reported rarities, as a big year is largely built on chasing birds that other people find.

I will update Josh's final Big Year number in next month's Wingtips! Congratulations Josh!

BUFFLEHEAD

Bucephala albeola

By **Jim Jablonski**

The bufflehead is a favorite of beginning birders. Its appearance makes it easily identifiable while its two-toned head is unforgettable and somewhat reminiscent of a bobolink. In the correct light, the feathers on the head can become a translucent rainbow.

Although one of the first ducks I identified, the name always confused me. Just what is a 'bufflehead?' How did this nice little bird

get stuck with that weird name? I always assumed it had something to do with the odd color scheme of its head. But according to the Guide to North American Birds at audubon.org, the name is taken from the head's shape that reminded early observers of a buffalo's head, back when that huge mammal was seen often enough for direct comparison. I don't quite see it myself, but I'll take the Guide's word for it.

Of course, the duck's head doesn't affect its mobility. The bufflehead, smaller than most ducks, is easily able to fly from water and forages totally submerged.



Bufflehead taking off

(Photo courtesy of Vaughn-Larsen, Audubon Photography Awards)

The bufflehead is somewhat omnivorous and changes its diet with the seasons and location. In the summer it prefers aquatic insects on lakes and crustaceans on the ocean. During the fall, plants make up its meals and, in the winter, it specializes in snails and other mollusks.

A very small duck, the bufflehead is a cavity nester that can squeeze itself into abandoned flicker nests. The female chooses the tree cavity nest site, which is usually up to ten feet above the ground but can be higher. It's even known to select nest boxes. The same nest site may be used repeatedly.

The summer range of the bufflehead is almost entirely within Canada and Alaska. It winters below the Ohio River and especially along the Atlantic, Pacific, and Gulf Coasts.

The bufflehead, although still widespread, is much less numerous today due to hunting and loss of habitat in the early 20th century. Fortunately, its numbers have stabilized in recent years.

Reference: Guide to North American Birds in audubon.org.

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

BRAS 2021 Bluebird Program Report



Eastern Bluebird
(Photo courtesy of Penny Brandau)

The last data entries have been made and the final totals calculated for another successful year for the BRAS bluebird program. Directed by Penny and Fritz Brandau, local bluebirders managed a total of 496 boxes in Lorain County and surrounding areas.

The program's End of the Year Report states that 638 nesting attempts produced fledglings of four species. The final breakdown included 719 eastern bluebirds, 1,521 tree swallows, 283 house wrens, and 38 black-capped chickadees.

The number of bluebirds was down from 834 in 2020. Cold, rainy weather in May led to losses among the target species. On the other hand, tree swallow fledglings were up more than 250 from the year before and the house wren number increased by 65. The chickadee total was a surprise since none fledged in 2020.

The nesting season is largely over by August, but the work continues every year with the maintenance and replacement of worn-out bird boxes; a total of 40 were replaced this past fall.

Plans are already being made for the 2022 season. Penny Brandau reports that she and Fritz are looking for a monitor to manage the 12-box trail at Indian Hollow Metro Park in Grafton. If you are interested, please contact her at pennybrandau@gmail.com.



RED-SHOULDERED HAWK, photo by Chad Wilson



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