

# WINGTIPS



BURROWING OWL, photographer, Gina Swindell, Cape Coral, Florida

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MARCH 2021

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**March 2021 Virtual Program**  
Tuesday, March 2 at 7 pm, Via Zoom  
**Monty and Rose**  
**Bob Dolgan**



Bob Dolgan will present his first film, "*Monty and Rose: The Story of Chicago's Piping Plovers*" that he shot as a volunteer plover monitor in 2019. The film tells the story of advocates determined to protect a pair of endangered piping plovers who took up residence on a busy Chicago beach. The film was an official selection of the One Earth Film Festival.

Bob is the founder of Turnstone Strategies, a marketing and communications firm with a specialty in nonprofit organizations, and a Board Member of Chicago Ornithological Society. He writes **This Week in Birding**, a newsletter published twice each week. He has been a writer for the Chicago Tribune and Cleveland Plain among other newspapers. Bob earned his BA from Kenyon College and his MBA from Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University.



*For this and future Zoom meetings, go to [blackriveraudubon.org](http://blackriveraudubon.org) and register at the bottom of the first page under Subscribe. A Zoom link will be sent to you.*

## **Future Program Update**

The Black River Audubon Society (BRAS) Board of Directors has decided that Covid-19 conditions have not improved sufficiently to hold monthly meetings. Thus, March, April, and May meetings will continue to be presented through Zoom. To register, go to [blackriveraudubon.org](http://blackriveraudubon.org) and click on the subscribe button.

Hopefully, conditions will improve substantially through the spring and summer, allowing for the return of normal in-person meetings in September. *JJ*

### **What a Year!** By **Rob Swindell**

Last March, several of the board members made the trip to Kearney, Nebraska for the National Bluebird Conference and to see the amazing sandhill crane migration. We left with tremendous excitement and expectation but returned to a changed world. The corona virus had exploded, and stores, sports, and social events were being canceled. Restaurants closed as we were making our way home.

It's been a rough year, not only for this country and the world, but also for groups like BRAS, which exists to socially celebrate our love of nature and birds. Programs and field trips were canceled. The board had to cancel our Outstanding Speaker (and we had a good one lined up) as well as scholarships to Hog Island.

However, all was not lost. Despite all the cancellations, the board was able to accomplish a few things over the last year.

Our conservation programs, including our renowned bluebird program, continued to excel. We also contributed and collaborated with the Western Reserve Land Conservancy to open the stunning Oberlin Preserve, complete with a beautiful new chimney swift tower built by local Girl Scouts. The Christmas Bird Count continued its fine tradition despite modifications.

We chose a new logo and built a new website—which includes an archive of Wingtips newsletters and offers online memberships and donations. Like many organizations, we started to present meetings via Zoom and posted them to our new YouTube channel. The new website also enabled us to better communicate with

members through email blasts—letting them know of upcoming events. Our social media presence on Facebook has increased significantly. And finally, the Chronicle Telegram began to run a birding column every other Friday.

While 2020 is behind us, the return to normalcy will still have to wait. But there is light at the end of the tunnel, and the board members look forward to reconnecting to our membership in person at our monthly programs and field trips. We can't wait to plan a birding picnic or put together the next Outstanding Speaker program. We are excited to engage in new conservation projects and plan to offer fun new products, like hats, t-shirts, and jackets, to show off our organization and share our love of birding. We also have new ideas to explore, like a local calendar, with local photographers, and increased local advocacy efforts.

We're almost there and we look forward to the future. Until then, please enjoy our Zoom programs, feel free to send us feedback, and keep birding!

## **BRAS Board Member Applications Requested**

Black River Audubon Society, serving the Lorain County area, is seeking passionate and energetic board members to help protect wildlife and their habitats through science, education, advocacy, and conservation.

The BRAS board provides nature speakers, conservation programming, wildlife field trips, and other opportunities to its members and the community. Specific skills that we are looking to add to our board include previous nonprofit or board experience, fundraising, event planning, strong community connections, and a passion for birds and conservation.

If interested, please contact [blackriveraudubon@gmail.com](mailto:blackriveraudubon@gmail.com) or text to 440-610-8626 for a Black River Audubon Society Board Member Application.

BRAS is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Located in the United States and incorporated in 1905, National Audubon is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the world. *JJ*

## BURROWING OWL

*Athene cunicularia*

By **Gina Swindell**

My husband and I decided to spend 18 months, beginning in January 2020, searching for as many birds as our lives would allow. As you can imagine, the pandemic quickly put that adventure on hold. However, before things went bonkers in the U.S., we did go to Florida for one week in January. One of our target birds was the burrowing owl. We knew exactly where to find them—Cape Coral, a peninsula city located in southwestern Florida. In fact, in 2005, the city council named the Florida burrowing owl as its Official City Bird.

This 100 sq. mile, south Florida city, not that long ago was home to mangrove swamps, pine forests, hardwood hammock, and streams. Developers purchased the area and proceeded to drain the swamps and clear all of the land to make way for development. At that time, these owls were more prevalent in prairie habitat located in northern Florida. However, Cape Coral is now home to more of these owls than any other place in Florida. These birds do well near human habitation when humans learn to adapt to the owls' needs.



Burrowing Owl

(photo by Evan Barrientos/Audubon Rockies)

Though the IUCN Red List has these owls listed as LC (least concern), years ago the state of Florida listed them as a “Species of Special Concern.” This basically means, that it is a species that could take a turn for better or worse depending on human management. Cape Coral (as well as other areas of the country) has done a fantastic job of putting laws in place to protect these birds and it has really paid off for the species that people have grown to love so dearly. With around 1,000 mating pairs and more than 2,500 burrowing owls, it’s clear that humans have learned how to manage and live with these little cuties. Wildlife management and residents also help out on a very personal level by installing artificial burrows for these avian gems.

Unfortunately, not everyone has done such a stellar job with conservation. These owls have disappeared from other parts of their previous Florida range. In 2017, Florida listed the burrowing owl as a threatened species. Due to their habitat needs, they are very susceptible to harm from development and our own habitation when we don’t care for their needs. If not aware, it is easy to overlook their underground “homes” since they are underground.

Though these owls will use burrows made by tortoises and ground hogs, Florida’s burrowing owls excavate in grassy areas where they live and breed (as opposed to western burrowing owls that typically do not do their own excavating). It is common for them to put garbage, cigarette butts, animal dung, and the like at the entrance of their burrow, which may be done to let it be known that the burrow is taken. The male and female are similar in size and color except during the extended time the female spends in the burrow incubating and raising the young which leaves her feathers darker. The male experiences more bleaching of the feathers since he is out in the hot Florida sun for longer periods of time—unlike most owls, they are diurnal (active during the day).

If you haven’t seen these owls, I hope that you get to one day. They are so cute and fairly easy to see thanks to eBird and the Web, which makes it very easy to locate them for viewing. The owls that we saw are in a well-known location behind the Cape Coral public library. But, if you are not able to see them in person, check out “burrowing owls in Cape Coral” in YouTube. Happy Birding!

**References:** [Youtube.com/watch?v=Aiff1cWLtY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aiff1cWLtY);  
[capecoral.net/net/departement/community\\_development/environal/burrowing\\_owls.php](http://capecoral.net/net/departement/community_development/environal/burrowing_owls.php);  
[audubon.org/news/where-burrowing-owls-are-your-neighbors](http://audubon.org/news/where-burrowing-owls-are-your-neighbors);  
[allaboutbirds.org/guide/Burrowing\\_Owl/overview](http://allaboutbirds.org/guide/Burrowing_Owl/overview).

## **Birds of the Bible: Rock Pigeons, Eagles, and Ravens**

**By Barbara Baudot**

Reversing the declines in bird populations requires that we acquire a deeper appreciation of the values birds instill in humans and the symbolic meanings we attach to them. W.H. Hudson, a naturalist, wrote a century ago in **Birds and Man**, “(Birds) are important to us in their relations ... to all things, and the essence of things, material and spiritual.” The Old and New Testaments of the Bible elevate doves (pigeons), eagles, and ravens to demonstrate how birds can provide meaning for us.

Rock pigeons, *Columba livida*, are the “doves” mentioned more than fifty times in both Old and New Testaments. In Latin, pigeons and doves have the same nomenclature. In the Old Testament rock pigeons and turtle doves were used as sacrificial offerings. Since other doves have no homing instinct, Noah would have sent forth a rock pigeon to determine if the waters of the great flood had receded. All doves symbolize God’s protection, fidelity, and love. A dove even embodied the Holy Spirit during the baptism of Jesus. The four Gospels recount the ceremony in a similar manner, describing when the heavens opened up and John the Baptist “*saw the Spirit of God like a dove, alighting upon (Jesus).*”

White doves, often used to represent the Holy Spirit, are non-existent in nature. They are domesticated and selectively bred from wild rock pigeons and are frailer than their progenitors. These birds are more vulnerable to attacks from other birds. Released in ceremonies, they symbolize purity, new beginnings, and peace. On the other hand, rock pigeons, a gourmet’s delight for some and considered invasive by others, congregate on roofs, in cities, and on farms. Despite declining populations, rock pigeons are of least concern on the IUCN red-list.

In biblical times the eagle, *Aquila fasciata*, was common in Israel and the Holy Land. They symbolized youth, perpetual strength, and

nobility. Their powerful wings and wide wingspan, high altitude flights, and great speed, gave rise to beautiful imagery and symbolism in many biblical citations. Their nobility was shown in imagery of soaring flights above storms battering the earth, and their gentle protection glowed in images of powerful wings hovering and fluttering over humanity.

Moses compares God's care for humans to an eagle tending her young:

*"Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions." (Deut. 32:10-11)*

The prophet Isaiah describes divine rewards to the faithful in eagle terms:

*"They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)*

Sadly, in the holy lands, many eagles have been killed off by pesticides, leaving few remaining pairs. But the nobility of the eagle has not gone unrecognized seeing that many countries have adopted eagles as their national bird.

The raven, *Corvus corax* is the third biblical "star," cited more than a dozen times and is the first bird mentioned in the Bible. In Genesis, Noah sent out the raven,

*"which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from the earth. Also, he sent forth the dove..." (Gen 8:7-8)*

Jesus also uses ravens to illustrate God's provision for the world.

*"Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap, which neither have storeroom nor barn, and God feedeth them." (Luke 12:24)*

Ravens served God by feeding the prophet Elijah with bread and meat both morning and evening. In actuality, ravens are carrion eaters and intelligent scavengers that by caching their food demonstrate wisdom in living sustainably within the boundaries of nature's resources.





**Common Raven**

(photo by Jeanette Tasey/Great Backyard Bird Count)

Metaphors, symbolism, and parables reveal desirable virtues by references to birds and connect these to universal themes. Hopefully this can stimulate more active interest in their protection, even for rock pigeons, eagles, and ravens, world-wide and hardly appreciated in their natural state, yet at risk as are most of the world's birds today.

**References:** Handbook of the Birds of the World, 2018; Wallace, Mark, When God Was a Bird, Fordham University Press, 2018; [patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/07/17/what-does-the-eagle-represent-in-the-bible-a-christian-study/](http://patheos.com/blogs/christiancrier/2015/07/17/what-does-the-eagle-represent-in-the-bible-a-christian-study/); Cultural depictions of Ravens in Wikipedia; The Language of Parable, New-Church Press, 1897; The Bible, KJV.

## Audubon Avian Quiz

1. At nearly 2 feet, the longest bill belongs to the \_\_\_\_\_
2. With a bill 3.9 inches long, the \_\_\_\_\_ hummingbird is the only bird with a bill longer than its body.
3. Owls live on every continent except \_\_\_\_\_
4. The most talkative bird in the world is the \_\_\_\_\_
5. True or False. Many birds, such as starlings, sing notes too high for humans to hear.

*Answers can be found on the inside back cover.*



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

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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**

(Includes membership in Black River Audubon and subscriptions to WINGTIPS and AUDUBON magazine: \$25/year)

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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

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

# The Iconic Great Blue Heron

By Jim Jablonski



Photo courtesy of Jeanne Buttle Williams

Nearly every Audubon member has a favorite bird, one that seems to strike a chord unique to that individual birder. Mine is the great blue heron, a bird that is especially meaningful in Lorain County, which includes nearly all of the Black River watershed.

Our river has a sad history as most Lorain Countians know. The river's beautiful waterfalls in Elyria attracted early 19<sup>th</sup> century settlers for the renewable energy that was provided. But the falls ultimately led to the river's decline. Industries along it sprang up, polluting the river so heavily that by the 1970's it was considered one of the most polluted entering the Great Lakes.

The river often ran orange through Elyria from industrial runoff. I never expected to see wildlife along this once attractive waterway that had been turned into an industrial sewer in the pursuit of profit.

However, one day more than a decade ago, I drove over the Ford Road bridge and saw a blue heron quietly feeding while standing in the water! Later, I was struck by the sight of another flying just a few feet above the river as it wound its way through the northern end of Cascade Park!

To me, the great blue heron is the icon of the reclamation of our chapter's namesake river. The photo above by Elyria photographer Jeanne Buttle Williams captures a blue heron, seemingly admiring its own striking image or appreciating the recovering Black River.

**Answers to Avian Quiz:** 1) Australian pelican, 2) sword-billed, 3) Antarctica, 4) African grey, 5) true



ROCK PIGEON, photographer, Barbara Baudot



## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

*"Birding Since 1958"*

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