

WINGTIPS



TREE SWALLOW photo by Gina Swindell

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Black River Audubon Unveils Its New Logo



Designed by Susan Collins, here's the first, full-color appearance of Black River Audubon's new logo! The board considered it was time to modernize our look with a new image. An artist was quickly selected. The bird to represent us took some consideration of course, but in the end, board members decided it should be different from most Ohio chapters' reliance on northern cardinals or great blue herons. The board also wished to emphasize one of our very successful programs to serve as our identity. The selection was obvious – the Eastern bluebird! I hope you agree.

Chronicle-Telegram Features New Birding Column

If you haven't seen it already, don't miss the Chronicle-Telegram's new birding column. The C-T has been running BRAS treasurer Rob Swindell's wonderful articles on various avian-related issue on alternate Fridays.

I sincerely believe everyone who takes a few minutes to read Rob's compelling stories comes away a confirmed birder. A long-time writer in various media, his polished style is inspirational.

The entire BRAS board wishes to thank the Chronicle-Telegram for its willingness to promote birding, birds and conservation in this way. You owe it to yourself to purchase a Friday issue of the C-T

2020 PROGRAM UPDATE

Just as “Birds of a feather flock together” so, too, do we birders. Unfortunately, we will not be able to physically gather this fall due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Fortunately, **we do anticipate being able to provide some programs live via the Internet using Zoom and Facebook.** If all goes well, we hope to share recordings of those presentations afterward on our website, where you will be able to watch them at your convenience.

Black River Audubon Society will be canceling the September meeting in order to get the Zoom account set up and to allow you to submit your email address so that you will have the opportunity to attend. We will have the October and November meetings via Zoom. BRAS will look at the Covid situation in November to determine how to move forward with meetings at that point.

In order to “attend” the live programs via the Internet, you’ll need either a computer, smartphone, iPad, etc. and an Internet connection. If you’ve shared your **email address** with BRAS, you’ll get an invitation to “attend” via **Zoom** technology. Zoom allows you to see and hear the presenter, and (if you have a webcam and microphone) allows you the possibility to see and talk with others in the comfort and safety of your home.

An alternative method will be to watch the program on **Facebook Live.** Facebook Live does not require you to have a Facebook account; you simply “tune in” to a website that will be linked from the BRAS website.

Please **share your email address with BRAS** if you haven’t already, so that we can keep you up-to-date with these programs which will allow us to “flock together.” Just go to www.blackriveraudubon.org and scroll to the bottom where you’ll find an easy way to submit your email address. Thank you!

OCTOBER SPEAKER **BUSTER BANISH of the BIRD NERDS**

Richard “Buster” Banish was introduced to birding more than 25 years ago when his wife’s aunt invited him to an Audubon bird walk. He was instantly hooked. An avid birder since then, Buster has turned his experience and enthusiasm to very good use ever since.

A Cleveland city teacher for 37 years, more than 20 years ago, Buster began taking his students on bird walks. His success in promoting the pastime at East Clark Elementary School has led to the Bird Nerds, a student group that is becoming famous in northern Ohio birding circles for

its young members' birding enthusiasm.

A field tech for Swarovski Optik, Buster has received financial help for the Bird Nerds from his employer and from other supporters such as the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland. That support has enabled the Bird Nerds to travel to birding functions around northern Ohio. The experience has widened the students' experience and has taken them to birding hotspots they may never have visited otherwise, increasing their enthusiasm for birding.

Buster and his Bird Nerds will discuss the birding group's great success during the October meeting. Please see the program update in the notice above for details on how to take part in the meeting via Zoom.

FIELD TRIP UPDATE

Our good friend Covid-19 has led us to the decision to cancel the September and October field trips. Paul Sherwood and the BRAS leaders will look at the state of the country at that point to see about moving forward with planned field trips which include The Wilds, Castalia Pond and other favorites. Until then, enjoy nature on your own and stay well!

TREE SWALLOW *Tachycineta bicolor* By **Gina Swindell**

Would it surprise you to know that some people view our native tree swallows in the same light as they do the non-native house sparrow-a nuisance? It's true! These masked-faced, bluish, brownish, purplish birds with the striking white underside are so beautiful. The expression on their face is mesmerizing, and their aerial acrobatics can command my attention for as long as time will allow. However, some bluebird lovers find tree swallows to be a nuisance.

There has been a movement to help increase bluebird numbers by inviting them to backyards around the country with the building of nesting cavities. Thanks in part to the explosion of bluebird boxes the tree swallow numbers are soaring. Swallows, as well as the Mountain, Western & Eastern bluebirds, are of least concern on the ICUN Red List of Threatened Species. While that is great news it does not distract from the fact that many people enjoy their bluebirds and find it disheartening when tree swallows move in. There is a way to help curb this "issue."

It is recommended that bluebird boxes be spaced 300 feet apart or more because EABLs defend a large feeding territory. If bluebird boxes are placed too close together it may invite Tree swallows to take up residence since they require much less real estate—about 100 feet. To help these two species enjoy manmade nesting cavities harmoniously,



Proper distance between paired bird boxes – Gina Swindell photo.

people have discovered that “pairing” boxes may assist the situation. When two boxes are placed 10-20 feet apart, it will often draw a pair of swallows to one box and a pair of bluebirds to the other. Once the two species work out who will inhabit what box, their unintended partnership works well.

As is the case with almost everything in life, pairing doesn’t always work but it is worth a try should you find your bluebird boxes invaded by tree swallows. It is important to place the paired boxes at least 300’ apart from other boxes since the bluebird still requires that distance between them and another EABL pair. Black River Audubon Society has had success with pairing. Overall, in 2019, they saw 1123 tree swallows and 503 Eastern bluebirds fledge from a total of 741 nest sites. Many of these boxes are paired.



Tree swallows are fearless when defending these boxes which may also help the bluebirds according to some. Swallows will dive bomb and call out endlessly. It is really quite startling if you are near their territory when they prefer you not be there. They will fly straight at you, veering off only inches from your face. This makes sense since it is typical for them to raise only one brood per year.

Tree swallow peaking from a BRAS box- Dominique Michal photo.

Tree swallows may mate year after year, but it is not uncommon for them to “step outside” of their union. The female, who is more of a brownish or muted blue color, typically gathers the nesting materials over a period of two days to two weeks. She will form a cup of about 2-3” wide and 1-2” deep, which is made mostly of grass and is lined with the feathers of other birds. After about 15 days hatching begins. Both parents feed the nestlings an insect-rich diet but will also feed berries. These nestlings should fledge 15-25 days after hatching.

If you are able to participate in the man-made cavity nesting process, remember that both the bluebird and the tree swallow are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. It is legal to manage invasive house sparrows and European starlings by eliminating them, so you will have to find another way to manage the tree swallows. If you’re having trouble, give pairing a try. Happy birding!

treeswallowprojects.com/tresvsbb.html; allaboutbirds.org/guide/Tree_Swallow/id;
natureconservancy.ca/en/what-we-do/resource-centre/featured-species/birds/tree-swallow.html

The Oberlin Prairie Preserve is finally open!

By Kate Pilacky

As part of Western Reserve Land Conservancy’s [#GetOutsideOhio](#) campaign we are very excited to announce the public opening of the Oberlin Prairie. In October 2015, Western Reserve Land Conservancy acquired this 63-acre property on the southern edge of the City of Oberlin in Lorain County. This property is part of what is considered the Oberlin Great South Woods. The former 30-acre farm field is now planted in tall grass prairie. The 30-acre wet woods area is a favorite spot of birders and wetland enthusiasts, especially during spring migration. The site is located on the south side of Hamilton Road, west of the Oberlin Recreation Complex and the Lorain County Metro Parks operated Splash Zone. It is also along the North Coast Inland Trail. The site is historically significant, having been a stop on the Underground Railroad and owned by the Copeland family; their son John Anthony Copeland participated in the Harpers Ferry raid.

BRAS has been a special partner on the restoration of this property. In the spring of 2019, BRAS received funding from the National Audubon Society for the planting of a Bird Friendly Underground Railroad Freedom Garden in the NE section of the property. This garden was planted with trees and shrubs. In the fall of 2019, one kestrel box and eight bluebird boxes were installed. This summer over half of the nest boxes were

occupied with bluebirds and tree swallows. BRAS bird and wildlife improvements contribute greatly to the new ecologically diverse park.

On Thursday, Aug. 6, the property officially opened to the public. BRAS gave remarks and the ceremony was followed by a short walk through the beautiful prairie. Parking for the property is available either at the small lot on site or in the Recreation Complex, east of the Prairie Preserve. The prairie is in its full glory in August and September. Please come and enjoy the mowed trails through the prairie in the county's newest public parkland!

American Coot *Fulica americana* By **Barbara Baudot**

Across the world coots are swimming on inland lakes and ponds and nesting on platforms in the shallow waters of marshy shores. The American coot thrives throughout North America. The Eurasian coot, somewhat larger but otherwise similar, is found throughout Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. Six striking ornamented species inhabit South America. Existing for millennia, these hardy birds are among the least endangered on the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species, but their numbers are dwindling with loss of habitat and climate change.

All coots' heads and necks are plumed in black, and their body feathers are sooty gray. All ten species of *Fulica* [coot in Latin] have chicken-like beaks. American and Eurasian coots have red eyes and white beaks topped by a flattened fleshy white callus or shield. In addition, American coots sport a red patch atop this shield, black markings on their beak tips, and white feathers under their short tails. Aside from physical features, it's coot behavior that distinguishes this bird: a coot is a water bird often mistaken for a duck but is not related to waterfowl. It shares features with chickens, cranes, and grebes.

Coots' strong chicken-like legs compensate for weaker short, rounded wings. Like grebes they have big feet with fleshy lobed toes enabling them to scoot over muddy or watery terrain or run on the surface of ponds to get lift to fly. They peck the ground for food like chickens or dive in the water like grebes. They feast mostly on aquatic plants, seeds, mollusks, and worms. A member of the rail [*Rallidae*] family, coots belong to the same order as cranes. Like cranes and grebes, coots are monogamous and mate for life.

Their breeding season extends from late March through July. The season begins with a long courtship marked by bill touching, bowing and nibbling. Once joined the pair seeks a place to nest. Coots are prolific

builders constructing and reconstructing floating platforms built of aquatic plants and grasses in shallow waters near shorelines. They construct at least three raft-like platforms for 1) roosting, display and copulation, 2) egg laying and incubation and 3) brood nests for chick rearing. Brood nests have in-built ramps to facilitate the coming and going. Both partners participate in building, incubation and rearing of the young.

Females lay 8 to 12 eggs and may soon begin a second nest when the first is destroyed. Incubation begins after a few eggs are laid. Hatchlings are beautifully clothed in jet-black down, temporarily decorated with bright orange scarlet, purplish blue feathers, called chick ornaments. When food is scarce, as is often the case with larger broods, parents will kill off weaker chicks. The stronger ones are identified by the color intensity of these ornaments. Coots are known for nest parasitism. Females without territories or nests will lay eggs in host female's nests. Nest integrity is determined by the capacity females have to identify their eggs by imprinting on cues from their first chick. Coots are one of the world's three bird species capable of chick recognition, which reduces the effects of parasitism.

If you are not acquainted with this bird, you will certainly have heard familiar epithets relating coot characteristics to human appearance and behavior. Already in the 15th century, their featherless shields gave rise to the expression "bald as a coot." Descriptions also derive from coots' bossy gregariousness in noisy, bustling coverts, or from their head-bobbing as they swim or walk. They also capture their regular bickering, mutual belligerency, and aggressive attacks on birds invading their territory. Correspondingly, doddering but kindly old men are called "old coots," angry or crotchety persons are described as "mad as coots," and foolish, stupid people are labeled "crazy as coots." I wonder how many people familiar with these expressions are actually acquainted with coots?

References: American coot in Wikipedia.com; American coot in Birds of North America, audubon.org; leesbird.com/2018/08/08/crazy-as-coot; All About Birds, The Cornell Lab.

ARLENE LENGYEL, THANK YOU!

After 16 years as the BRAS web mistress, Arlene has "retired." Shortly after retiring from teaching in 1998, Arlene was asked by Dave Bragg to run the BRAS website. Arlene, who was self-taught, took on the challenge and has done so since 2004. She has officially passed the baton to Rob Swindell. Thank you very much Arlene for your dedication to Black River Audubon over the years. You are greatly appreciated!

The Wren's French Name: A Fable

By Jean Francois Blade

Adapted by Dominique Michal

In France, this little bird has a special name. It is called "le Roitelet." Literally the Little King! It is a cute name for a little bird, but how did it get it? Here is how.

A long, long time ago, long before humans inhabited our beautiful planet, animals were living freely in harmony. They were happy!

One day, all the birds were excited. They were all talking to each other passionately and in complete disorder. One had heard that the four-legged animals had nominated the old Lion as the King of the Earth!

"How dare they nominate one of theirs without asking the birds' opinion," said the Old Crow.

"Strength is not the only criterion, beauty should be taken into consideration," said a peacock, spreading its feathers.

"Who knows the secrets of the ocean and the faraway lands but us" said an albatross.

Finally, when they all calmed down a secretary bird made a proposition. "We are the population of the land and of the air, we go to the sea and the top of the mountains. But most of all we fly, let's have a contest to decide who will be the king of the birds. The one who can fly the closest to the sun will be elected King."

All agreed! And immediately the birds took off and flew higher and higher. Finally, the eagle went so high that one could barely hear him saying, "I flew the highest! I should be the King!"

The birds were joyful and about to cheer their new king when they heard a little voice singing a beautiful song above the eagle. A tiny little bird was there, higher than any other and was singing, "I should be your king, I won the contest."

Everyone was in disbelief. How could such a tiny bird fly so high? When the pair landed, the birds had one question: "Little bird tell us how you flew so high?"

After a pause the little bird confessed that he jumped on the eagle's back to hide in its feathers, so that when the eagle reached his highest point, he could jump off the eagle's back and fly just a little higher.

All the birds were in turmoil! Some were booing the "cheater" while others were cheering him!

The old Crow noted there were no rules to the contest so they could not dismiss the little bird from its claim. Still, only the eagle flew to the highest point on its own.

After a little while and some discussion, the decision was made unanimously that the bird world would have a "Roi" and a "Roitelet" - a King and a Little King!

This is the true story of how that tiny little house wren got its French name "le Roitelet."

Did I mention that at this long-ago time birds all spoke French?

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

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**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
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**Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8
Send your check to: National Audubon Society,
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Attention: Chance Mueleck**



Black River Audubon Park Maintenance



Officers (l-r) Larry Wilson, Danielle Squire, Dick Lee, Andy Lance, Charlie Weil and Kevin McGuinn take pride in the work done to maintain the chapter's namesake park. (Jim Jablonski photo)

Although the current pandemic has resulted in the cancellation of meetings and field trips, BRAS officers have remained busy.

On Sunday June 7, eight officers and volunteers spent a sunny morning performing maintenance work at Black River Audubon Park in Elyria. In 2018, chapter members and volunteers finished the transformation of a trashy eyesore into a garden spot with twelve relatively rare, native trees. A wildflower border was added to attract butterflies.

The work could not end with that success. So, in June of this year, board members devoted their Sunday morning to extensive weeding and mulching around the trees and resetting the protective wire fencing. After months of inactivity due to the pandemic, the work was pleasant as well as necessary.

It was a joy to see how successful the original planting had been. Many of the trees had doubled in height since that day in 2018. It won't be long until a shady, green canopy covers much of the park, providing shade, protection, and feeding opportunities to birds drawn to the river area.

Keep in Touch by Joining Our New Email List!

Stay current on the latest news and updates from Black River Audubon Society regarding meetings and other events by joining our new email list! You can join either through the website by subscribing (at the bottom of each page) or by sending an email to our webmaster at robwindell@roadrunner.com



AMERICAN COOT Photo by Barbara Baudot

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