

# WINGTIPS



GREAT GRAY OWL AT Sax-Zim Bog, photo by Jim Klingshirn

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APRIL 2022

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## **April 2022 Program**

**Tuesday, April 5, at 7 p.m.**

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

*Note that meetings are subject to local Covid regulations*

### **Lights Out Cleveland**

**Courtney Brennan**



**Courtney Brennan at work**

The combination of light pollution and reflective building materials confuse migratory birds leading to collisions with buildings. Each year millions of birds migrate through Ohio where lights on tall buildings can disorient them and cause them to strike windows or circle the buildings until they fall from exhaustion. **Lights Out Cleveland** is part of a growing international movement to protect migratory birds endangered by city lights. Courtney Brennan will update us on the progress being made to reduce crashes, and how each of us can become part of the solution.

Ms. Brennan is the senior collections manager of zoology at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History where she oversees the maintenance and development of the ornithology, vertebrate zoology, and invertebrate zoology research collections. Her current research interests include passerine hybridization and migration studies in the Great Lakes region. A Black River Audubon Society board member, she is also heavily involved with the Lights Out Cleveland project, studying bird-building collisions in the city, and coordinating volunteer specimen preparation groups to process all bird casualties associated with the project.

## **BRAS Board Member Applications Requested**

Black River Audubon Society (BRAS), which serves 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, birding field trips, and other opportunities to its members and the community. Specific skills an applicant may have include previous nonprofit or board experience, fundraising, event planning, strong community connections, newsletter experience, and a passion for birds and conservation.

If interested, contact [\*blackriveraudubon@gmail.com\*](mailto:blackriveraudubon@gmail.com) or text to 440-610-8626 for a BRAS Board Member Application.

BRAS is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Incorporated in 1905, National Audubon is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the world.

## **Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker Series Is Back!**

After a hiatus due to Covid-19, the Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker Series is back and bigger than ever. This year's event, scheduled for April 23, 2022, 10 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center, is co-sponsored by BRAS and the Lorain County Metro Parks.

Jamie Cunningham, an award-winning photographer among her many accomplishments, will speak on **The Secret Life of Warblers** beginning at 10 a.m. Widely published naturalist Jim McCormac will present his program **Conservation Photography: Connecting the Masses with Nature** at 12:30.

Black River Audubon board members will discuss the work of its members and a merchandise/information table will be available. An optional bird hike from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. will precede the day's festivities. For more complete information on the speakers, their programs, and the day's events visit [\*blackriveraudubon.org\*](http://blackriveraudubon.org).

Tickets for the event will be available online beginning April 1 at [\*blackriveraudubon.org\*](http://blackriveraudubon.org). Tickets are free to BRAS members, \$10 to non-members.

**April Field Trip**  
**Saturday, April 16, 2022, 9:00 a.m.**  
**Sandy Ridge Reservation**  
6195 Otten Road, North Ridgeville  
Tim Fairweather to lead

## **Weekly Spring Bird Walks Scheduled**

A total of twelve weekly bird walks are scheduled for Elyria and Oberlin during April and May. Gina Swindell will lead the walks at Elyria's Elywood and Cascade Parks. Hikers should meet at the Elywood parking area. Diana Steele will lead the hikes at Oberlin's South Woods.

The Oberlin walks begin at 7:30 a.m. on the Saturdays of April 9, 16, 23, 30, and May 7, 14. The Elyria walks will be at 8:30 a.m. on the Sundays of April 10, 17, 24 and May 1, 8, 15.

### **February Field Trip Report Castalia Pond**

Two participants braved a 24-degree temperature to record 20 species at Castalia Pond. The birds seen were Canada goose, mute swan, trumpeter swan, northern shoveler, gadwall, American wigeon, mallard, American black duck, redhead, ring-necked duck, lesser scaup, bufflehead, rock pigeon, mourning dove, bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, American crow, horned lark, American robin, and snow bunting.

### **Sax-Zim Bog Road Trip Report By Gina Swindell**

On the morning of February 11, a group of mostly strangers met for an adventure that would leave them as great friends with awesome, forever memories.

Black River Audubon offered its first long-distance road trip in many years. Nine of us loaded up our luggage and gear and headed to Sax-Zim Bog in Meadowlands, Minnesota, a well-known birding hotspot. After leaving Elyria at 6:30 a.m., our first pitstop allowed us to view the gorgeous sunrise we were leaving behind as we headed west through Ohio. Anton also took this time to repack the van to make more room for us. He became our Master Packer!

Following an uneventful 15-hour drive, we made it to Alesche's Accommodations located in the bog. The only complaint upon arrival was the expected subzero temperature—which was descending to a low of -33 degrees, not including the wind chill. We entered the lodge to find a very cozy temperature inside, driven by the wood burning fireplace. We settled in, talked of our excitement for the upcoming adventure, and turned in around 11 p.m.

We all awoke with excitement, layered up and headed out at 7:00 a.m. to begin our search for the great gray owl. As we stepped out of the lodge, we noticed the inside of our noses froze instantly, as the true temperature was -26 degrees. Our first bird sighting was a flock of wild turkeys seen on our way to the nearby bog welcoming center. There we would be treated to pine grosbeaks, common redpolls, and a hoary redpoll, all of which were lifers for many of us. We eventually made our way to the main drag where owls had recently been seen, and we were immediately rewarded. There it was, a stunning great gray sitting on a tree limb, looking as regal as I imagined it would! We birded until dusk and then headed to dinner at Wilbur's Café. We returned to the lodge and spent the evening talking about our great day along with getting to know one another on a deeper level.

Though much of the day included scraping the insides of the windows, we did manage to record over two dozen birds. Our full day of birding gave us a list that included three great gray owls, a large flock of evening grosbeaks, downy, hairy & pileated woodpeckers, northern shrike, Canada jay, blue jay, American crow, common raven, black-capped chickadee, boreal chickadee, red-breasted & white-breasted nuthatches, European starling, house sparrow, American goldfinch, snow bunting and a porcupine. Yep, a porcupine was sitting high up in a tree munching away on the tree's buds. That was unexpected and exciting!



Porcupine at lunch

We turned in around midnight to get some rest for the long drive home on Sunday, but not before hatching a plan to look for a few more birds on our way out. At 7:30 a.m. we awoke to a temperature of -32 degrees. We loaded the van and headed out to search for crossbills, magpies, and grouse. We struck out at the location where we hoped to find the crossbills. The next stop was an area with feeders that typically bring sharp-tailed grouse. We turned down the road only to find that it was not fully plowed. I had to back up the 15-passenger van about ¼ mile—a little bit of last-minute excitement. Maureen and Jenna spotted the black-billed magpie for us but due to our limited search time, we did not find the grouse. Unexpected finds were moose tracks and a coyote to round out our final hours of “hunting.”

We said a final goodbye to the bog, for now, around 11:00 a.m. The return trip was entertaining as we all told stories and then watched the Super Bowl via Anton’s phone while he provided colorful commentary. We arrived in Elyria at 1:30 a.m. to find it a balmy 14 degrees. We gained many life birds and friendships on this trip, and we all talked of a return trip. What a great experience! Happy Birding.

## **GREAT GRAY OWL**

*Strix nebulosa*

By **Gina Swindell**

Spotting three great gray owls was one of the highlights of the trip to Minnesota’s Sax-Zim Bog. (See story above.) The largest of the world’s owls by length, the great gray is nearly as symbolic of the Great North as the snowy owl and less likely to be seen in our area.

Some other great gray owl facts:

1. The great gray can be hard to find despite often hunting in daylight.
2. The gray, due to its size, has few predators and is less aggressive than other owls, except when defending its nest.
3. Despite its size it mainly hunts rodents, often plunging into snow as deep as its body length to catch them.
4. Their asymmetric ears give the grays excellent hearing which allows them to hear their prey up to two feet beneath the snow.
5. A resident of Canadian forests from Ontario to the far west, great grays will, in some winters, move into southern Canada and the northeastern United States.

6. The great gray is called the “Phantom of the North” by some for its stealthy characteristics.
7. Errol, the old owl in the Harry Potter series, was a great gray owl.

**References:** [birdeden.com/great-gray-owl-facts](http://birdeden.com/great-gray-owl-facts); [animalia.bio/great-grey-owl](http://animalia.bio/great-grey-owl); Kaufmann Kenn, Field Guide to Birds of North America, “Great Gray Owl.”

## WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL

*Loxia leucoptera*

By **Barbara Baudot**

White-winged crossbills inhabit the colder boreal regions of the Northern hemisphere. They are easy to spot if you happen to be where there is a high concentration of cone-rich conifers, preferably spruce. With luck, you will come upon a fluttering, chattering flock clamoring about treetops, even hanging upside down as they pluck cones, holding them in one foot while the other assists their strong twisted beaks. As they move about you may hear their soft calls--chiff-chiff-chiff--mixed with their series of warbles and trills.

Studies of white-winged crossbills center on their beaks and their unique relationships with conifer cones. According to legend, their beaks twisted across each other as they wrested the nails holding the body of Christ to the cross. Red feathers on the breasts of males symbolize the blood of Christ.

These birds have a symbiotic relationship with conifers, one that benefits them while not harming the trees. Nature designed their beaks to feed on spruce seeds. White-winged crossbills don't migrate seasonally but irrupt in large flocks when spruce cones become scarce. They will fly the distance and direction needed to find a rich cone crop and to breed, whatever time of year. Rarely are they spotted below the Great Lakes.

White-wing crossbills nest in loose colonies in conifer forests. The courtship is brief. Males chase females in flight; they perch beside them and rub bills. Males may also feed the female. Nests, laced onto horizontal limbs of spruce or other conifers, are built by females. These small open cups are formed from weeds, twigs, mosses, lichens, and moss. Fed cone seeds by males, females incubate 2 to 4 eggs for 12 to 14 days. Both parents cooperate in feeding the nestlings regurgitated cone seeds. If the female begins a second brood the male will care for the fledglings.

The twisted beaks of the world's six species of crossbills— three in North America—and many more sub-species, are examples of adaptive evolution. With incremental twisting of their beaks from generation to generation, through natural selection, white-winged crossbills became so successful at extracting spruce seeds that they gradually ate little else.

The crossbill adaptation led to other adaptations including increased muscular strength. White-winged crossbills feed mainly on spruce seeds when available; otherwise, they feed from cones of tamarack, hemlock, or other conifers. On occasion they may feed on buds, weeds, berries, and insects.

Although crossbills were not among Darwin's famous finches of the Galapagos, (now found to be tanagers) crossbills were not ignored. Darwin was intrigued by the crossbill beak. In *Natural Science* he notes that they vary in "in length, curvature, and the degree of elongation of the lower mandible". He added: "The cross bill is very abnormal in structure of bill compared with other...(finches) and the beak is eminently variable."

**References:** Weiner, Jonathan, *The Beak of the Finch*, Vintage Books, 1993; White-winged crossbills in [allaboutbirds.com](http://allaboutbirds.com); Greenspan, Jesse, *How Crossbills and Other Birds are Rewriting the Rules of Evolution*; Benkman, Craig W., *Adaptation to Single Resources and the Evolution of the Crossbill*; Darwin, Charles, *Laws of Variation in Origin of the Species*.

## **Underbirded Gems: The Sheffield Lake Recreational Trail**

By Chad Wilson

Lorain County is one of the best birding counties in Ohio (5<sup>th</sup> in Ohio for all-time bird species seen at 334 species!). In fact, we have so many great places to bird that some people aren't even aware of some of them. Thus "*Underbirded Gems*" will continue to be a semi-regular feature in *Wingtips* in the future.

Today we turn to the Sheffield Lake Recreational Trail!

*Where is it, and where to park?*

The northern end of the trail is right next to a business called The Cardinal Scoop on Lake Road in Sheffield Lake. There is a picturesque, covered bridge that marks the entrance to the trail. However, the parking on the north end belongs to private businesses, so the best place to park is by Ferndale Park on Ferndale Avenue (look for a huge water tower and park on the road that leads to it).



*Then where do I go?*

After parking, there is an all-purpose trail that goes north and south. If you walk north, you're heading toward Lake Erie as the path follows a creek. If you go south, you'll cross a bridge, and the trail will curve to the east for a good bit. I usually go both ways because there is good birding along either, but if you only have time for one direction go north!

*Why is the Sheffield Lake Recreational Trail so fantastic?*

One word: warblers. And vultures. And thrushes. And wild turkeys. Okay, that was more than one word.

Let's start with the warblers. I can say without reservation that this is my favorite spot for warblers in the county, and that's saying something. Keep in mind that the best month for seeing warblers is May, as they are migrating north from South America to Canada. April, September, and October are the other months to look for them. The best part about this trail is that the warblers are often low, offering great views. In certain spots, they like to drink and take baths, so keep one eye on the creek!

For early birders, this trail is a huge turkey vulture roost, so you'll often see them right over your head. This is also the spot I had my best-ever look at a black vulture, which was roosting with them.

This is also one of the easiest places to see wild turkeys in our county. They usually hang around the water tower clearing area. I saw them so many times that I was more surprised when I *didn't* see them.

If you check the undergrowth as you walk in spring and autumn, you will be treated with many thrushes as well. This is the easiest spot to set eyes on a gray-cheeked thrush in the county.

The best rarity recently was a pair of evening grosbeaks in the spring of 2020. A yellow-headed blackbird has been heard in the area and seen at a nearby home as well.

Most of my walks at the Trail are fabulous, but it is a recreational area near a neighborhood so there are potential noise distractions that might interfere with birding. But, overall, this trail is fantastic for in migration season, and I highly recommend checking it out!



**Black River Audubon Membership Only**  
(Including Wingtips) is \$15/Year

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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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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 Hardy Sax-Zim Bog Crew of 2022



Left to right: Jenna, Anton Krieger, Paul Sherwood, Gina Swindell, Sherilyn Burns, Bob Burns, Elza Phillips, Maureen Bailey, and Jim Klingshirm.

A February trip to northern Minnesota? *No problem!* Two 15-hour road trips in three days? *Why not!!* Birding in real temperatures in the minus 30's? *Bring it on!!!*

Some might call them foolhardy to take on a long road trip north of Duluth Minnesota in mid-February but when the goal is out of this world birding, we all understand. Don't we?

The opportunity of going on Black River Audubon's longest road trip in recent memory drew nine determined birders who just might have started a winter tradition. All nine reported the February 11-13 trip to be a life-changing experience that not only produced wonderful birding but enabled them to bond with fellow birders. Some are already talking about returning next year!

Whether it is Sax-Zim Bog or another great birding location, there are probably more long road trips in Black River Audubon Society's future.

Of course, the results of every bird hike should be recorded. The species spotted at the bog were: wild turkey 49, rock pigeon 12, great gray owl 3, downy woodpecker 8, hairy woodpecker 5, pileated woodpecker 1, Canada jay 6, blue jay 1, black-billed magpie 2, American crow 152, common raven 11, black-capped chickadee 50, boreal chickadee 2, red-breasted nuthatch 1, white-breasted nuthatch 1, European starling 59, house sparrow 20, evening grosbeak 23, pine grosbeak 44, common redpoll 61, hoary redpoll, 2, pine siskin 3, American goldfinch 10, snow bunting 5.



WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL, photo by Greg Pasek



## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

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