

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

April 2009

**Black River
Audubon Society**



**blackriveraudubon.org
Founded 1958**

Editors: Jack Smith and Harry Spencer
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Redhead/John Koscinski

A Bird of Two Worlds: The Challenge of Conserving the Cerulean Warbler

Amanda Rodewald

Associate Professor of Wildlife Ecology

Ohio State University

Tuesday, April 7, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Amanda Rodewald brings a landscape-scale approach to the study of avian community ecology in tropical and temperate regions. She has been particularly focused on the role of land-use practices in forest and urban areas in determining the structure and function of avian communities. She also conducts work on neotropical birds on their wintering grounds with an emphasis on Cerulean Warblers.

Field Trip

Saturday, April 18, 9 a.m.

Olsen State Nature Preserve

Wakeman

Lake Erie Wing Watch

Saturday April 4, 2009

Port Clinton High School, Port Clinton

8:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Exhibitor Tables Open

9:00 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. Educational talks

11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Lunch

12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Guest Speaker

2:00 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. Educational talks

Educational Talks

	Session A	Session B
9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.	Waterfowl ID Mark Witt	Photography Sharon Cummings
10:15 a.m. to 11:15 a.m.	Shorebird ID Brad Wilkinson	How NOT to go Birding: Bloopers and "out takes" from the field Jen Brumfield
2:00 to 3:00 p.m.	Raptor ID Jim McCormac	Bird Song Tom Hissong
3:15 to 4:15 p.m.	Warbler ID Larry Richardson	Songbird Migration: Timing & Weather Mark Shieldcastle

Guest Speaker

Chuck Hagner

Secret Life of the Kirtland's Warbler

Off Site Events

Saturday, April 4

7:00 a.m. Magee Marsh. An educational Bird walk followed by Breakfast with the Birds. Pre-registration required, space limited. 800-441-1271 for more information.

6:00 p.m. Open House and tour at Back to the Wild Rehab Center, 4504 Bardshar Rd., Castalia

Sunday, April 5

9:00a.m. Bird Hike: Sheldon Marsh, 2715 Cleveland Rd., Huron

Bird Hike: Sandy Ridge, 6195 Otten Rd., N. Ridgeville

Bird Hike: Magee Marsh, 13229 W. SR 2, Oak Harbor

11:00 a.m. Bird Walk: Old Woman Creek, 2514 Cleveland Rd. East, Huron

2:00 p.m. Eagles of Erie County Car Pool Trip, Frost Center at Osborn Park, 3910 Perkins Ave., Huron

Fees

\$35/person including lunch pre-registered

\$40/person including lunch on-site registered

Breakfast with the Birds: \$5/person (pre-registration required – limited space)

For further information: **800-441-1271**

Castalia Outing, February 21, 2009

By **Tammy Martin**



With snow flurries predicted, a small but dedicated group of birders gathered at Castalia Pond for our February Field Trip. Members included Dick Lee, Tammy Martin, Jack Smith, Mike Smith, Jean Sorton, and Joann Wagner.

Perhaps due to the recent warm weather and plenty of available open water, the variety of waterfowl species was low compared to past years. We recorded a total of eight species—Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Gadwall, American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Mallard, Northern Shoveler, and Bufflehead. Though limited in numbers, the views at Castalia Pond are always rewarding, allowing us to watch preening/feeding/mating behavior as we listened to their various sounds. The shovelers were especially noisy. And, I am always thrilled to see that lovely rust-colored speculum of a preening Gadwall.

Once we exhausted the pond, we drove west of town to [Erie County Metro Park] Castalia Quarry for a walk, tallying an American Crow and a large flock of European Starlings on the way. A chill in the air kept us moving on the 1.1 mile levy trail, which seemed extremely quiet and vacant of woodland birds. Luckily, Jack comes prepared, armed with his cassette player and tape of a calling Screech Owl. At several locations, we relied on this “assist” to produce Woodpeckers—one Red-bellied, lots of Downys, and several Hairys. Other woodland bird species looking for a fight included Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, and American Goldfinch. Alas, I believe they were disappointed by the ‘fake’ owl.

After our walk, I bid the group farewell and headed home. The remaining birders stopped for lunch in downtown Castalia with plans to drive through Resthaven and Pickerel Creek afterwards. Unfortunately, the predicted snow squall hit after lunch, producing a ‘white-out’ and forcing the group to depart early. As they say, timing is everything. Well, until next month, keep birding!

Nancy's Florida Journal

By Nancy Shipman

Spring in February



When we arrived in mid January at our winter home, O'Leno State Park and River Rise State Preserve, I was amazed to see the Innocence (relative of northern Bluets) and Sweetbells in bloom. This was earlier than I had ever seen them. I anticipated the usual Red Maple "bloom" brightening up the drab winter colors of tall dark green pines, bare trunks rising above the brown ground covered with pine straw (needles) or oak leaves. These maple blooms are brilliant red flowers and red "helicopter" seeds. I saw few of them on the trees, but noticed most had already fallen to the ground.

By early February, the yellow Jasmine were dropping from the vines. The wild plum began to bloom. Then the Sandhill Cranes started their raucous calls that can be heard for miles as they group to head north. This year it was reported that about 10 thousand sandhills wintered at Paynes Prairie State Park, about 30 miles south of O'Leno. We had earlier gone to see them. While there, we also saw Snow Geese, Whooping Cranes, Great Blue, Little Blue, Tri-colored, and Green Heron, Common Moorhen, White and Glossy Ibis, Common Snipe, American Bittern, Northern Harriers, Red-winged Blackbirds, Red-shouldered Hawk, American Kestrel, Blue-winged Teal, Short-billed Dowitcher, Osprey, Boat-tailed Grackle, and yellowlegs to mention the most notables.

By mid February the Redbuds were in bloom. Also Violets, both purple and white, Red Trillium, Atamasco Lilies and Wood Sorrel decorated the higher woodland floors. Tiger and Zebra Swallowtails, orange Fritillaries, yellow Sulfurs, and Silver-Spotted Skippers were flying around. A Luna Moth spent one evening on our camper window.

Now in late February, the azaleas are in full bloom, along with the dogwood. Flocks of robins are moving up from south Florida. I saw a Yellow-rumped Warbler in breeding plumage, the birds are singing loudly, and it is raining leaves. Here the southern oaks are semi-evergreen. They do not lose most of their leaves until the new ones start to emerge. These small, thick, leathery leaves fall profusely. They make so much noise when they hit our trailer that it sounds as if it is raining. The locals have to rake their yards in spring instead of fall.

Yes, Spring is arriving a week or two early here in Florida. I hope it does in Ohio also.

ANOTHER TOOL IN THE TOOLBOX

By Dane Adams

In October of 2007 Shari (my wife) and I worked through the services of the Lorain County Soil and Water Conservation Office, to have a wetland area constructed on our property with the intention to attract shorebirds and waterfowl, aiding the visiting birds during their arduous migration and providing us with the pleasure of viewing them. In its inaugural year the results of our endeavor proved successful beyond our wildest dreams. We were fortunate enough during the spring and summer of the wetland's first season to host numerous species which I had hoped to be able to attract as well as several species, which I would not even remotely have anticipated seeing. Frankly, I was unprepared for several of the sightings, not realizing how difficult identification of several of the shorebird species could be. Because of my inexperience with shorebird identification I was somewhat hesitant to report some sightings confirmed only by my field guides, and became growingly concerned that maybe I could be viewed as an exaggerator by some, which of course I did not want to have happen. Seeing and reporting Wilson's Phalarope, Red-necked Phalarope, American Bittern and the

grand-daddy of the lot-- the Blacknecked Stilt-- from a site that only one year previous was a farm field could have seemed suspect. I soon realized that a possible solution to my perceived problem could be photographic confirmation of my sightings, visual proof. Simple enough I thought, bought a point and shoot camera, and off I went.

Well, off I went, is exactly what my wife thought I had done-- off my rocker! Not only had we turned a perfectly good, fertile, twenty acre field into a swamp, but now I had to spend money to buy a camera to record bird sightings, which to that point I had only seen in my mind! Fortunately for me and our marriage, the birds came, many birds came. Purple



Osprey/Dane Adams



American Pipit/Dane Adams

Martins, Bank, Tree, Rough-winged, Barn and Cliff Swallows; Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs; Spotted, Stilt, Least, Semi-palmated, Pectoral, Solitary and White-rumped Sandpipers; American Woodcocks; Wilson's Snipes; Dunlins; dowitchers; plovers; terns; egrets; herons; kingfishers; various sparrows; American Pipits and more. Now, how to photograph them?

Quickly I learned that regardless of the hype no point and shoot camera is available that will adequately record all of these species, let alone the woodland warblers, raptors, reservoir species or even the birds on the other side of my own wetland. I was able to photograph most of

the birds that I could not readily identify, but I wanted proof of their presence and photos of all of our property birds, which often I was unable to attain. Extremely overcast days, and long distance shots proved my most formidable and unachievable tasks. Blurry pictures with small dots of birds in the center soon



Greater White-fronted Geese with Canada Geese/Dane Adams

became irksome. Those subtle, identifying field marks just did not show up. I learned that on some of the most difficult shorebird distinctions, I could email my pictures to someone more expert than I am and if the pictures were clear enough, they could sort through the field marks and help me with my identifications. Unfortunately, I found that nobody can identify a blurry blob and grew reluctant to impose on others to solve my identification problems. Unquestionably I needed to take pictures with much more clarity.

It was obvious to me that buying a camera and the necessary array of lenses to do the job I intended would require a truck to move and cost as much (or more) than my car and was beyond reason for my purposes. However, I already had a good quality spotting scope and thought that maybe I could try the recent innovation called “digiscoping”. Purchasing an adapter and a relatively cheap point and shoot camera to simply slide onto my existing scope seemed reasonable and I decided to give it a try. My very limited experience is teaching me that this can be a wonderful tool for certain applications, (particularly if you already have a spotting scope). The digi-setup works well if there is adequate lighting and little wind. Poor lighting means the camera’s shutter has to be open for a longer time to allow more light into the camera and the longer the shutter has to be open during an “exposure” the more blurry the picture becomes. Wind, of course, joggles the tripod/scope/camera setup thereby causing blur.



Ross's Goose with Canada Geese/Dane Adams

I have only been working with this digiscoping technique for a few months and am finding a great deal of satisfaction from photos I have been able to take at a distance in fields (Lapland Longspurs, Snow buntings), large ponds (such as the image of the Ross's Goose on the back cover taken across the big pond at Caley Reservation), and from the Wellington and Oberlin Reservoirs (Iceland Gulls, Thayer's Gulls, Glaucous Gulls,

Greater and Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Cackling Goose, Ross's Goose, Snow Goose and Greater White-fronted Geese). I anticipate good results photographing some of the many species of ducks this month at the reservoirs, (I am writing this in early March). Of course my biggest expectation is that I will be able to attain beautiful, crisp pictures like those I see in magazines, of the shorebirds and others that visit our property. Without the expensive camera, lenses, flashes, etc. I realize that this endeavor has limitations and therefore is unlikely, but I am confident that I will be able to get photographs that are vast improvements over my past results and that I may even be able to capture those elusive identifying field marks. Regardless, experience is the teacher and the fun is in the challenge!

A Birder's Diary

By Carol Leininger



The word *petite* took on a whole new meaning for me once I saw my first phalarope. *Petite* –small, slender, trim, dainty. I have now seen all three of the North American species of these oceanic shorebirds – the Wilson's Phalarope at Magee Marsh, Minot, North Dakota, and Churchill, Manitoba (It nests in pot holes), the Red-necked (formerly Northern) and the Red Phalarope in Alaska (Both tend to nest in arctic tundra).



Wilson's Phalarope/Dane Adams

My favorite sighting was of a group of Wilson's Phalaropes as they swam in a pond near grain elevators in Churchill. Just to watch their behavior is fascinating –they look a bit like sandpipers but have lobed toes and swim readily. When feeding they swim in circles like a toy top spinning, stirring up food, which they then peck at as it floats to the surface. They love plankton, crustaceans, and jellyfish. I could have watched them feed for hours.



Red-necked Phalarope/Dane Adams

The phalarope family is fascinating for other reasons as well. Unlike most birds where the male does the courting and is brightly colored, these birds are polyandrous and exhibit sex role reversal. The female is larger, more brightly colored, and aggressive as she competes for a male during courtship. After she lays eggs, the male incubates them and rears the young while the female goes after another male, and then another! One would think that the male is drabber in color since he is the one hiding from predators while incubating eggs. But, I have recently found out that the amount of testosterone (male hormone) in the ovary of a female phalarope equals the amount in a male's testis. So, the brighter colors in females could actually be due to a high production of testosterone!

Great Lakes' Restoration Budgeted: Next Stop Congress

From Audubon Ohio

President Obama recently announced an unprecedented investment of \$475 Million in his Fiscal Year 2010 Budget to restore the Great Lakes. Audubon Ohio, working as part of the 110 member Healing Our Waters® - Great Lakes Coalition applauded the announcement.

Today, the health of our Great Lakes is seriously threatened by problems such as untreated sewage and

invasive species. The plan for Great Lakes restoration and economic recovery is a multi-year strategy for tackling the problems, and calls for action to: modernize sewage treatment, clean-up polluted harbors, restore wetlands, and prevent unwanted, new species from invading the lakes. Each of these steps is essential if we are to restore the lakes and revive our economy.

Members of Congress ultimately hold the purse strings for the federal government through the annual appropriations process, so it is critical they match the President's initiative in their own budget resolution and appropriations to restore this treasured resource. You can learn more and contact your Members of Congress by visiting www.healthylakes.org or contacting Marnie Urso at urso@audubon.org for more information.

Secretary's Notes: February 24 Board Meeting

By Arlene Ryan

The Lake Erie Wingwatch weekend will be April 3-5. Guest speaker will be Chuck Hagner. His topic will be "The Secret Life of the Kirtland's Warbler". Black River Audubon will have a display table at this event.

On April 2 Avon City Schools will hold their annual science fair. Carol Leininger and Jack Smith will represent Black River Audubon with a display of Audubon materials and a bird watching game for the children.

There will be an article in "Wingtips" asking members for input on advocacy subjects.

There are several conservation mini-grants available from Ohio State Audubon. Some of the grants are for: Together Green Volunteer Day, Chapter Projects, IBA Restoration, Environmental Education, etc.

Dick Lee passed out a Black River Audubon Education Report. In this report he describes why 80 Audubon Adventure kits were ordered. The report also talked about the Young Birders field trip in February.

Steve Chavez would like Black River Audubon to have some type of partnership with Lorain County Boys and Girls Club.

Possible future field trips include: a June trip on the Black River and a behind the scenes visit with Andy Jones at the Natural History Museum.

There are problems with the new system that records new members.

There will be a new structure for the Publicity Committee. There will be a subcommittee for the website and a new media subcommittee.

Members will be asked to volunteer for bird banding training.

Arlene Lengyel will receive special recognition on the Black River Audubon website for the work she has done for the Black River Audubon website.

Special guest, Terry Martincic from the Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society spoke at the meeting. Volunteers are needed to collect data for the Breeding Bird Atlas. A special Block Busting Weekend will be held at Findley State Park, June 12-14.

The next board meeting will be held on March 24 at the home of Joe Strong.

The Redhead: Female Champion Parasite

By Jack Smith



The photo at the beginning of this issue of WINGTIPS portrays one of our regular migrant visitors, a male Redhead (*Aythya Americana*). Our John Koscinski portrait exhibits details of this handsome bird: the red head, eyes with yellow irises and black pupils, coal-black breast, blue bill with black tip, and mottled gray back and sides. Its female counterpart has the same silhouette head-shape, and blue bill with black tip, but has a black eye and mostly brown sides and back.

Because of similar colorations, the Redhead's close cousin, Canvasback, may be mistaken at first glance for Redhead. A Canvasback, however, has a "ski jump" profile of head and bill. Canvasbacks and Redheads sometimes hybridize.

Although the population of Redheads increases tremendously in our area during the spring and fall migration seasons, some individuals may winter in Ohio while larger numbers winter in southeastern states and in coastal areas. Others winter along the Pacific coast from British Columbia to Southern California. Most breeding grounds are in freshwater marshes of west and northwest Canada. Recently a few females have been nesting in the western Lake Erie region.

Female ducks of many species commonly lay some eggs in the nests of other birds, but the Redhead is the champion of this practice. Besides nests of other Redheads, the females drop eggs into nearby nests of at least ten species, including Northern Harrier and American Bittern. Most female Redheads are semi-parasitic, although some are 100% parasitic. Female Redheads choose nesting sites in dense marshy areas where many other species nest, perhaps, encouraging parasitic habits.

After courtship, male Redheads abandon the females. Some males migrate hundreds of miles to remote lakes where they experience extensive molts and become flightless.

Females build nests on dry ground among plants such as bulrushes within a dense marshy area. The nests are composed of dead vegetation anchored to standing plants and lined with down from the females' breasts. The eggs are dull-white to pale olive-buff. Because several birds may lay eggs in the same nest, clutch size is not known with precision, but the range has been estimated at 9 to 14 eggs.

Females incubate eggs for 23 to 29 days. Within a short time after hatching, the young are led to water by adult females. The young soon feed themselves. After 60 to 65 days the young are capable of flying.

Redheads eat aquatic vegetation and insects. The diet of the young birds has a higher proportion of insects in order to sustain their growth. To obtain the vegetation, Redheads dive, sometimes several feet down, and dip and dabble in shallow water.

Redheads are somewhat smaller than Mallards, 18 to 23 inches versus 20 to 28 inches.

Probably the main cause of the decline of population of the species during recent years is the destruction of breeding habitat, and many organizations are working toward preserving existing and creating new wetlands.

References: *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres, *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman, *Sibley Guide to Birds* by David Allen Sibley, *Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas* by Bruce G. Peterjohn and Daniel L Rice, *Field Guide to Birds of North America* by Kenn Kaufman.

Adventure with Birders

Excerpt from *The Creation* by E. O. Wilson (W. W. Norton Co., New York, 2006)

Adventure with a different feel to it awaits the child who joins a group of birders. As an adult I thrill, even myopic entomologist that I am, at the sight of eagles, cranes, and ibises. Recently I sat in a skiff on Mississippi's Pascagoula River, transfixed by a dozen swallow-tailed kites that wheeled overhead and swooped to take sips of water from the river.

It is among birders, all of them naturalists and adventurers, that the child can find role models. There are a few eccentric loners in their ranks, but also physicians, ministers, plumbers, business executives, military officers, engineers, and in fact members of virtually every trade and profession. They are united in a common focus. At least while in the field, they are among the most congenial and enthusiastic people I have ever known.