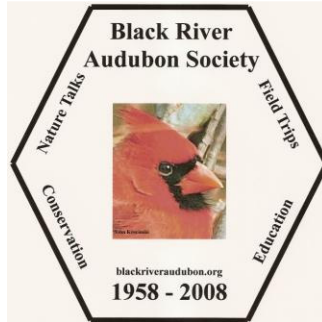


Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS



December 2008

Editors: Jack Smith/Harry Spencer
Photographer: John Koscinski
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel



American Goldfinch



Turkey Vulture

Program

Tuesday, December 2, 7 p.m.

Sandy Ridge Reservation

Dana Bollin

Naturalist, Maumee Bay State Park

Dana Bollin is director of the Milton B. Trautman Nature Center at Maumee Bay State Park where she has developed a series of programs and resources relating to monarch butterflies. She has visited the monarch wintering grounds in Mexico and has worked to protect this species by connecting citizens of the United States and Mexico who care about monarchs.

Christmas Bird Counts

Elyria

Saturday, December 20

Wellington

Saturday, December 27

To participate in one or both Elyria or Wellington CBCs contact Dave Bragg at 440-647-2355 or dbraggohio@hotmail.com.

Christmas Bird Count History and Objectives

(From Audubon.org)

All about the Christmas Bird Count

More than 50,000 observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database in ornithology, representing over a century of unbroken data on trends of early-winter bird populations across the Americas. Simply put, the Christmas Bird Count, or CBC, is citizen science in action.

History

Prior to the start of the 20th century, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt": They would choose sides and go afield with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages around the turn of the 20th century, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank Chapman, an early officer in the then budding Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census"—that would count birds in the holidays rather than hunt them. So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Frank M. Chapman and the enthusiasm of twenty-seven dedicated birders, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario [to Oberlin, OH] to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. The original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied a total of 90 species on all the counts combined.

Counts conducted in the first CBC: 25 total counts

- | | |
|---|---|
| * Scotch Lake, York County, New Brunswick | * Baldwin, Louisiana |
| * Toronto, Ontario | * Pueblo, Colorado |
| * Keene, New Hampshire | * Germantown, Pennsylvania |
| * Belmont and Cambridge, Massachusetts | * Wyncote, Pennsylvania |
| * Arnold Arboretum, Boston, Massachusetts | * Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania |
| * Winchester, Massachusetts | * Oberlin, Ohio |
| * Bristol, Connecticut | * Glen Elyn, Illinois |
| * Norwalk, Connecticut | * North Freedom, Sauk County, Wisconsin |
| * Auburn to Owasco Lake, New York | * La Grange, Missouri |
| * Central Park, New York City, New York | * Pacific Grove, Monterey County, California |
| * Englewood, New Jersey | * Neshaminy Creek & Upper Delaware River, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania |
| * Moorestown, New Jersey | * Delaware River Meadows, Tinicum Township, Delaware County, Pennsylvania |
| * Newfield, New Jersey | |

What do the Count data tell us?

The primary objective of the Christmas Bird Count is to monitor the status and distribution of bird populations across the Western Hemisphere.

The count period, which is from December 14th to January 5th, in North America is referred to as “early winter,” because many birds at this time are still in the late stages of their southward migration, so it is not “true” winter. When we combine these data with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, we begin to see a clearer picture of how the continent’s bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years.

The information is also vital for conservation. For example, local trends in bird populations can indicate habitat fragmentation or signal an immediate environmental threat, such as groundwater contamination or poisoning from improper use of pesticides.

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition – and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

As long as there are birds to be counted, the Christmas Bird Count will go on being the most popular, fun, and rewarding bird census the world over!

October 23 Birding by Tram

With Tim Fairweather as guide, Mr. and Mrs. John Dunn, Dale Cary and Harriet Alger birded on a sunny, windy day with the temperature in the thirties. They identified the following species: Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Gadwall, American Wigeon, American Black Duck, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Northern Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Peregrine Falcon, American Coot, Killdeer, Lesser Yellowlegs, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, European Starling, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, American Goldfinch, and House Sparrow.

Adapted from an eBird entry filed by Harriet Alger

A French Creek Rainbow

By Nancy Miller



On October 3, 2008, after several days of rain, the sun finally shined through brightly. In no time at all I was at French Creek Reservation. An expert birder was standing in the middle of the parking lot, seemingly mesmerized by fluttering birds. He started in surprise when I pulled up next to him, but I assured him I understood being fascinated by a migration-fallout. And it was a good one for that late in the autumn.

There were sapsuckers, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, flickers, Blue-headed, Red-eyed, and Philadelphia Vireos, both kinglets, Nashville, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Palm, and Black-throated Green Warblers, a late Scarlet Tanager, and an early White-throated Sparrow.

He did most of the identifications, since my eyes are no longer as good at seeing details through binoculars. And he was not too upset about allowing me to walk the Big Woods Trail with him, where we saw Hermit, Swainson's and Grey-cheeked Thrushes. He needed to return to work, and all I was able to add were a Dark-eyed Junco and a Common Yellowthroat.

This was a day I thought would be spent inside again. Instead I was treated to one of the

best fall days ever spent at French Creek with 32 species of colorful birds in an hour and a half.

A Birder's Diary

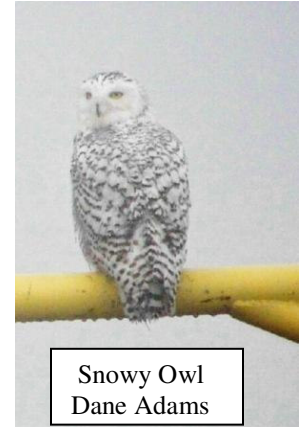
By **Carol Leininger**



One of my favorite birding trips was to Churchill, a small town in Manitoba, Canada, right on the Hudson Bay and just south of the Arctic Circle. You cannot get there by car, but must take a train or plane from Winnipeg. There are a few roads there but they all end a short distance outside of the town. It's the place to go to see animals in white – even in summer. Polar bears are coming out of hibernation with their young, and white beluga whales can be seen in the Churchill River. Since many birds come here to nest on the tundra, it is a birder's heaven. Look down, not up as you walk about! With no trees, you just have to be careful that you don't step on a bird sitting on its nest!

After seeing many interesting birds, our leader asked for requests from the group. I asked for a Snowy Owl, as I did not have one on my life list at that time. So off we went in a van to the outskirts of town to a small fenced cemetery. The entrance was a lovely white stone arch with an owl sitting on the top of the arch. The leader pointed to the owl and looked at me – I said it was nice but I really wanted to see a real live bird not a stone statue. He smiled. We all looked back at the owl – sure enough, it opened its big yellow eyes, gave me a long stony stare, and closed them again.

Well, I asked for it, right? Who knows what he thought as he stared at me! Since then I have seen numerous Snowy Owls right here in Ohio along the lake. When their food supply up north (lemmings and mice) drops during a harsh winter, they often venture south. When Lake Erie freezes over it looks just like their tundra at home. They can easily be seen perched on the ice, ground, or on a post along the lake shore. I understand they also will eat other birds, small mammals, and even fish. Unlike most owls they are active during the day! A Snowy Owl is a beautiful big bird that always brings a smile of satisfaction to the face of a birder..



October 18th Field Trip

Carlisle Reservation

By **Tammy Martin**

On another beautiful, sunny, but crisp, fall day, the BRAS field trip, advertised as a "contest" between two birding groups, quickly became one group of nine members. Our numbers may have been low, but our group was mighty, including Dane Adams, Kenny Austin, Karen Czerniawski, Sandra Jewell, Dick Lee, Tammy Martin, Nan Miller, Nancy Shipman, and Harry Spencer.

Our leader and scribe, Harry, walked us along a trail past numerous



restored wetlands and through a lovely forest as he tallied our sightings. Aside from a total of 32 bird species, we also spotted an albino squirrel, flowering closed gentian, Cooper's Hawk nest, and vibrant fall colors, especially those red maples!

As with all outings, we recorded all birds seen, heard, glimpsed, and especially the fly-bys. Some of the latter included Canada Goose, Cooper's Hawk, and Ring-billed Gull. Several Mallards were the only other water-birds of note. And, a lone Red-tailed Hawk perched nicely for us on the high power line cutting



Trail view/HSpencer

True to the time of year, Sparrows appeared in the greatest abundance of species, as we recorded six: Field, Song, Lincoln's, Swamp, White-throated, and White-crowned. In total numbers, the Yellow-rumped Warbler quickly became the "oh, it's just another" bird, as we probably saw several hundred.

Our smallish sized group did allow members to learn specific calls, as several birds cooperated by singing -- Eastern Bluebird, White-throated, and White-crowned sparrows. And, a couple of surprises included a late female Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a singing Eastern Towhee.

As with all field trips, those dependable/reliable sightings included the Woodpeckers (Red-bellied, Downy, and Northern Flicker), Blue Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Robin, European Starling, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch, and House Sparrow.

Black River Audubon Supports Preservation of Woodlot with Wetland

October 29, 2008

Dan Martin, Director

Lorain County Metro Parks

Carlisle Reservation

12882 Diagonal Road

LaGrange, Ohio 44050

Dear Dan,

The Black River Audubon Society fully supports the application of Lorain County Metro Parks for a Clean Ohio grant to purchase 76 acres in Sheffield Lake just west of Harris Road, a woodlot with wetlands.

Encouraging and facilitating the protection of natural habitat in urban communities, as well as suburban and rural, has become a priority for our organization and we are pleased to partner with Lorain County Metro Parks in many of those efforts. The tract in question would be a very valuable addition to the habitats now preserved in the Lorain County Metro Parks system and a grant to allow the Park system to acquire it has the unconditional endorsement of this organization.

Sincerely,

Harriet Alger, President

Black River Audubon Society

October 28 Board Meeting Minutes

By Secretary Arlene Ryan

- The treasurer's report was passed out and explained by Joe Strong.
- Harriet read a letter of support that she wrote to Dan Martin of LC Metro parks in support of a land acquisition grant in Sheffield Lake.
- The 50th anniversary party was discussed. All agreed that it was a big success. 87 guests attended. A letter of congratulations was shown to board members. The letter was from Senator George Voinovich.
- A motion was made and passed to accept the Annual Report.
- Dick Lee passed out an education report. He explained how the Audubon Adventures program was doing and detailed the reasons why more money is needed for the Audubon Adventures kits. Jack Smith made a motion to give Dick Lee the needed money from an anonymous donation of \$5000. The amount needed is \$2000.
- A group to be in charge of the tram-birding program needs to be formed by next spring. Eric Bruder's father is training to be the tram driver.
- An advocacy committee needs to be formed regarding important environmental issues. Eric Bruder will help form this committee.

How do wind turbines kill bats?

(Excerpt from sciencenow.sciencemag.org)

For decades, researchers have noticed that mangled birds litter the ground surrounding [wind turbines], and recently they've found that dead bats actually outnumber the birds, by as many as four times in some places. This was a surprise, as bats' sonar should allow them to detect moving objects even better than they do stationary ones.

There was another conundrum as well. "While we were picking up carcasses, I noticed that a large number didn't seem to have any external injuries," says Erin Baerwald, an ecology graduate student at the University of Calgary in Canada. For her recently completed master's thesis, she surveyed dead bats on a wind farm near the campus in Alberta, Canada. Baerwald and her advisers dissected 75 bats in the field and found that 69 of them showed signs of internal hemorrhaging. In contrast, all previous studies on dead birds found around wind turbines have turned up only external injuries caused by turbine blades. The findings suggest a sudden drop in air pressure that ruptures blood vessels in the bats' lungs, Baerwald says. The condition, known as pulmonary barotraumas, resembles the injuries SCUBA divers suffer if they return to the surface too quickly.

As a wind turbine's blades cut through the air, they lower air pressure, especially around the tips of the blades, Baerwald explains. If bats fly within a meter or so of a spinning turbine, they get caught in the depressurized zone and experience barotraumas. Birds don't, she says, because their lungs are more rigid and don't expand the same way mammals' do.

The findings appear in the 26 August, 2008, issue of *Current Biology*.

“The mission of the Black River Audubon Society is to promote conservation and restoration of ecosystems.....”

Fungi and Cholesterol Control

By **Harry Spencer**



This morning I swallowed my daily tablet that lowers appreciably my total cholesterol level, which in turn lowers my chances of serious cardiovascular diseases, the leading cause of death worldwide. My thoughts turned to the critical role that fungi played in the discovery of a group of chemicals called statins, one of which is the important ingredient in my tablet.

As a farm boy in northern Japan, Akiro Endo became intrigued by mushrooms. Later as a biochemist he combined his love of fungi with his biochemical research. He reasoned that some fungi incorporated a cholesterol-controlling ingredient, and he and his colleagues in Japan painstakingly screened several thousand fungal extracts before they found the first example of a new class of compounds called statins. One statin, for example, comes from a fungus (*Penicillium citrinum*) that is a relative of the organism that causes fungal mats that grow on old oranges.

Currently statin drugs constitute a multi-billion dollar market with a major impact on the death rate due to cardiovascular diseases.

For his work Endo was awarded the 2006 Japan Prize and the Clinical Medical Research Award from the Lasker Foundation in 2008.

So as I take my daily tablet I think of Akira Endo and his use of fungi, and I wonder what other life-saving drugs lie undiscovered in nature’s toolbox. Their existence will only be discovered if we conserve and restore nature’s ecosystems.

Black River Audubon Society Celebrates Fifty Years

By **Martin Ackermann**



Approximately 90 people gathered at the Rose Café at Lorain Lakeview Park on October 16 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Black River Audubon Society.

Arriving guests had time before dinner to engage in conversation and to enjoy the splendid view of Lake Erie and the Lorain Lighthouse, which shone brightly in the reflected rays of the setting sun.

After dinner Kenn Kaufman entertained the audience with a talk on "Wings of Imagination: Why We Need Birds" that reminded all of why he is such a sought after speaker. Highlights of the presentation, which was both serious and whimsical, were Kenn's



Celebrants

original poem about the Black-capped Chickadee and his impression of a courting Mourning Dove, whose attentions were completely ignored by the object of his affection, Harriet Alger.



Kenn Kaufman and friend

Harriet then introduced Jack Smith, who was greeted with a standing ovation. Jack's speech on the history, activities, and goals of Black River Audubon was published in the November issue of Wingtips. In addition to Jack, founding members Norma Kraps and Jane Coven also were present and recognized by the group.

The evening's activities concluded with the presentation of a plaque to Jack honoring his 50 years of service



Jack Smith and Harriet Alger



Norma Kraps and Jane Coven

to the chapter. The plaque bears the image of an eagle and the inscription: John "Jack" Smith, in honor of your 50 years of dedicated service to the BlackRiver Audubon Society, presented on October 16, 2008.

50th Celebration photos by H. Spencer

American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*)

The Sad Thistle-Eater

By **Jack Smith**

This bird is familiar to most of us. Thinking of it as just another goldfinch devalues a bird that is very common in our area. It is recognizable as a beautiful, striking little bird, brightly colored with a wing span of 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ to 9-inches and body length of 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inches, slightly smaller than a House Sparrow.

The goldfinch, brilliantly yellow and black, may have some therapeutic value for a human observer, judging from my own experience. When my mother at age 90 became seriously ill, was confined to her bed, and barely able to move, I hung a finch feeder from the second floor overhang next to her bedroom window. She watched goldfinches coming to feed by the hour. That activity brought her great joy and probably helped her recovery. She lived for several more productive years.

The goldfinch is mostly an eater of small seeds of the daisy family, such as thistles and sunflowers. The birds also eat seeds of trees, such as alders and birches.

In my first year of thistle feeding, House Sparrows became a major problem, dominating the feeders and consuming most of the seed. It didn't take me long to learn that switching to upside-down feeders was the answer to the problem. If the seed portal is above the perch, the nimble goldfinches can grasp the perch with their feet and feed upside-down. In amusement I often watch the House Sparrows try to imitate the finches. They comically provide a Ferris-wheel performance before giving up.

Once I was sitting with a new neighbor in our backyard garden passing the time of day when goldfinches came to eat. "My God," he exclaimed. "Look at those upside-down canaries." He was surprised that we really had 'canaries' in Ohio.

In our area the goldfinch does not begin to nest until after most other songbirds are through nesting, typically in late July or early August. Dr. George Jones, my Field Biology professor at Oberlin College, commented during one of our field trips when we students observed goldfinches for the first time, "Goldfinches play around and have fun until thistle seeds are available, then they get down to business." Apparently this characteristic is an evolutionary development, in which over time, the most successful breeders were the ones who had available the myriad seeds necessary for their young.

Courtship begins when the male goes through several fluttering flight displays in an attempt to attract a female. After mating, the female alone begins the construction of the nest. She selects a site in a horizontal fork of a shrub or tree, often in an open transitional field. (I have found several nests in hawthorn trees over the years.) The nest is 1 to 30 feet above ground. The female weaves tightly a cup-shaped nest from plant down, preferring thistle down, and spider webs. Sometimes the nest is woven so compactly that water will not drain out. Sometimes young birds have drowned in their nests.

In the completed nest, the female lays 4 to 6 pale bluish eggs, occasionally with brown spots. After the last egg is laid, she assumes the full burden of incubation for the next 12 to 14 days until the birds hatch. During that time the male feeds her. Her subdued ground color camouflages her nest against predation.

After hatching, the young are fed regurgitated food, mostly seeds. Initially the food is brought by the male, but the female also feeds the young. During the last of the 11 – 14 days before fledging, the role of the female is diminished as the male provides most of the food.

Some Ohio birds migrate, particularly in the northwestern area along Lake Erie where

movements are north to south in autumn and south to north in the spring.

During the warm months the birds exhibit dimorphism. The male's fall molt dresses him in drab attire much like that of a female.

The portrait of a male goldfinch at the beginning of this WINGTIPS issue presents an opportunity for careful observation. Note the appearance of some brown feathers among the bright yellow ones on the bird's back and rump. This male was probably photographed in the month of May. Why May? For answer, notice the emergence of leaves on the perching-branch.

The goldfinch's scientific name, *Carduelis tristis*, accurately describes the bird. The genus Latin word *Carduelis* means thistle-recognizing. The species name *tristis* means sad in Latin, and probably comes from the bird's plaintive call.

References: *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; *Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman.

Species of birds recorded during October on our BRAS eBird site: 127