

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

February 2011



Peregrine Falcon/Dane Adams



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

Program

Tuesday, February 1, 2011

Cynthia Druckenbrod

Director of Horticulture and Conservation

Cleveland Botanical Gardens

Friends or Foes

Cynthia Druckenbrod is responsible for overseeing 10 acres of outdoor gardens and the plants and animals in The Eleanor Armstrong Smith Glasshouse. She was primarily responsible for planning and determining which plants and animals would inhabit the spiny desert and cloud forest biomes in the Glasshouse. Previously, Cynthia served as the director of the Day Butterfly Center at Callaway Gardens in Atlanta, Georgia, and, before that, worked at Cleveland Metroparks Zoo as an entomologist and managed the daily operations of the tropical Butterfly Garden. She has a BS in biology from Case Western Reserve University and an MS in entomology from Auburn University. She is an internationally recognized expert on the praying mantis and received the J. Paul Vissher Memorial Award of the Cleveland Audubon Society for Outstanding Ability and Promise in the Field of Conservation in 1992.

Abstract of talk:

The talk will open your eyes to the seen and unseen world of insects in our gardens. It will showcase some of the interesting behaviors of insects that go on right in our front yards without us knowing it! The talk will also dispel common myths of good bugs versus bad bugs.

Board Meeting

Tuesday, January 25, 6:30 p.m.

304 West Avenue, Elyria

Everyone Welcome!

Field Trip

Saturday and Sunday, February 19 and 20

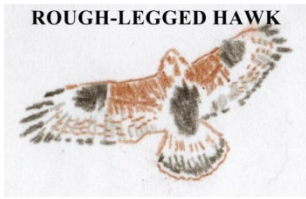
Castalia Pond and Killdeer Weekend

Meet at Castalia Pond, 9:00 a.m.



Elyria/Lorain Christmas Bird Count

Canada goose 1709, mallard 387, green-winged teal 2, bufflehead 5, common goldeneye 125, hooded merganser 1, red-breasted merganser 4, bald eagle 3, northern harrier 2, sharp-shinned hawk 4, Cooper's hawk 10, red-shouldered hawk 5, red-tailed hawk 29, rough-legged hawk 2, American kestrel 3,



Bonaparte's gull 7, ring-billed gull 2950, herring gull 93, Iceland gull 1, great black-backed gull 1, rock pigeon 54, mourning dove 138, eastern screech-owl 1, barred owl 1, belted kingfisher 2, red-bellied woodpecker 22, downy woodpecker 54, hairy woodpecker 7, northern flicker 5, pileated woodpecker 2,

Blue jay 172, American crow 51, horned lark 1, black-capped chickadee 167, tufted titmouse 73, red-breasted nuthatch 3, white-breasted nuthatch 42, Carolina wren 2, golden-crowned kinglet 6, eastern bluebird 55, hermit thrush 1, American robin 147, European starling 1778, cedar waxwing 5, yellow-rumped warbler 1,

American tree sparrow 124, song sparrow 32, swamp sparrow 1, white-throated sparrow 26, white-crowned sparrow 1, dark-eyed junco 236, northern cardinal 159, common grackle 2, brown-headed cowbird 3, house finch 112, pine siskin 25, American goldfinch 134, house sparrow 440

Total individuals 9436, total species 58, total observers 21

A Birder's Diary

By Carol Leininger

I have watched birds for so long that I see nothing wrong with anthropomorphizing a bit now and then. For some birds it's not hard to do so.

The ruby-crowned kinglet definitely has a case of ADHD. I often describe Ruby (male) to new birders as a round-little-green olive – a stuffed one actually as the red pimento shows when he is excited. It is hard to view him with binocs as he never sits still long enough to get the



Palm Warbler/John Koscinski

binocs up to the eyes. Perhaps some Ritalin might help.

The red-eyed vireo is one of those birds that is hard to see in the spring. His light green color blends in perfectly with the green of newly formed leaves just beginning to appear high in the trees. But, he knows you are looking for him and tries to help as much as possible –Here I am. See me. Here I am. See me. Eventually I do.

The palm warbler is the welcome-wagon lady. As soon as she sees you she hops over, cocks her head, and wags her tail. She is so happy to greet a newcomer that she practically dances about the forest floor.

And there is the yellow-rumped warbler. If you ever are unsure of which fork in the trail to take, look to him for guidance. He will continue to move a few feet ahead of you and look back from time to time to be sure you continue to follow. When in doubt, just follow the yellow rump. He will never lead you astray.

The Living Flying Airplane

California Condor

(*Gymnogyps californianus*)

By **Jack Smith**

The photo below shows a California condor flying over Zion National Park in 2007. I have been assigned to research this species and report what I have learned and discovered about the determined effort to bring this species, a living fossil of the past, from the brink of extinction.

In 1987 the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and others decided, despite strong criticism, to capture the last twenty-two wild California condors in the world and transfer them to either the



California Condor
Phil Armitage

San Diego Wild Animal Park or the Los Angeles Zoo. Also they began a program to breed the birds and release the young back into the wild. The success of these programs is shown by the 381 birds alive in November 2010. Over the years 192 young birds have been released into the wild. The remaining 189 breeding birds are now in four institutions: San Diego Wild Animal Park, Los Angeles Zoo, Oregon Zoo, and World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, Idaho. Utilization of four rather than a single breeding site diminishes the possibility of one catastrophe endangering the breeding program. For the same reason, four release sites, California's Pinnacles National Monument, Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge in California, Grand Canyon in Arizona, and recently the Sierra San Pedro Matir National Park in Baja, Mexico, have been used for release of the young birds.

Success of the breeding and release program came after many trials, tribulations, extensive disappointments, and a very large financial price. So far the total cost has been \$35 million, \$20 million of which came from state and federal governments. The program is the most expensive conservation program ever undertaken in the U. S. Although future expenses will be required, the potential amount has been reduced by the much-

welcomed breeding in the wild.

My fascination doesn't stop with this great success story but lies with the bird itself. The California condor is our largest land bird with a length range of 43 to 55 inches, a wingspan of 9.5 feet or more, and a weight range of 15 to 31 pounds. Fossils of the condor have been found in deposits from 100,000 years ago during the late Pleistocene epoch. The species may have evolved while mega fauna roamed throughout most of North America. As the glaciers receded and humans spread across North America, mammoths and large ungulates disappeared. Concurrently, the range and population of the condor decreased until about 500 years ago, the species range was

limited to the American southwest and the west coast. Fossils have been found in Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas. Since then human encroachment has been one of the main causes of the reduction of population to the low of twenty-two.

An adult California condor is uniform black except for the yellow-orange head and neck and triangular bands of white on the underside of the wings. Males and females mostly look alike although males are slightly larger. The condor's head and neck have few feathers. Some emotional states cause the skin to flush, which may communicate with other birds along with the grunts and hisses that constitute the bird's voice. Note the red-brown eye and ivory bill in the cover photo.

Possibly the largely bare head and neck is an adaptation to hygienic needs. Because of its carrion diet the bird's head and neck are often buried in decomposing meat. The bird's relatively small sternum restricts the size of the wing muscles. Consequently the bird flies mostly by soaring gracefully. This soaring can reach altitudes of 15,000 feet and speeds of 55 mph. Sometimes a bird can soar for miles without a wing beat leading some observers to mistake the bird for an airplane. Often condors soar near rock cliffs with their thermals.

Within a flock of condors the birds develop a social structure by competition to determine pecking order. During that competition the birds communicate through sight and sound, and this social hierarchy is especially displayed during group feeding. The dominant bird eats first.

Much of the time a bird roosts, preens, and rests. The selected roost is usually a high perch where the bird can launch itself without any major wing flapping. On a hot day, a condor may defecate on its legs. This act, called urohidrosis, is one method of reducing body temperature through evaporation of the moisture.

A condor may travel, mostly by soaring, up to 160 miles in a day searching for carrion. Thousands of years ago it could be carcasses of mega fauna but today condors prefer to feast on large carcasses of deer, goat, sheep, donkey, horse, or pig. If little food is available, the birds feed on smaller mammals. For some reason reptiles and birds are not on the preferred menu. Along the ocean coast the birds feast on sea lions and whales that have washed onto the beach. Unlike turkey vultures, condors have no sense of smell, and the birds often follow turkey vultures to their prey.

The middle toe of a condor's foot is greatly elongated and the toes are straight and blunt. This enables a condor to walk but not to grip or tear tissue. A stork has similar feet and is now believed to be a close relative of a condor.

Condors prefer open rocky scrubland for landing and foraging. They shun heavy forested areas because the species, after gorging and with its huge wing span, requires open ground to become airborne. Sometimes after consuming several pounds of delicacy the bird may have a difficult time becoming airborne.

Condors become sexually mature at six to eight years of age. The heads of sexually mature males that are interested in females turn bright red. An aroused bachelor male spreads his wings and walks slowly toward a female. If she lowers her head she accepts him, and the pair mates for life. They establish a nest with little nesting material in a cave or rock clef near a roosting area or tree that has an open space for landing and departure.

A female condor lays one large bluish-white egg (weight about 10 ounces, size about four inches by two-and-one-half inches). For the next 53-60 days male and female take turns incubating. The actual hatching is lengthy – taking perhaps a week for completion. If the egg fails or the chick dies, the female lays another egg. Until a chick grows almost to the size of its parents, it is covered with grayish down. After five or six months the chick can fly. It roosts with its parents for another two years, until the parents begin a new nest, and the first chick is displaced. Note the long breeding cycle of about three years to produce only one chick.

The California condor conservation status has improved with the breeding program, but the species faces many obstacles, most of human origin. Power lines and ten-foot wingspan sometimes collide to produce a flashing end. Three of the birds released in the early stages of the program died in this fashion. A temporary

solution of mild electric shock treatments of the young trained them to stay away from high tension wire.

Each released bird is given a number visibly anchored to each wing, and each numbered bird is monitored at key locations where the birds might fly. Two such numbered birds behaved lethargically, and they were recaptured and examined. Both were suffering from embedded lead pellets and lead poisoning. Possibly both also ingested lead bullets contained in carcasses abandoned by hunters. The condors' gastric juices are able to dissolve the lead fragments. Turkey vultures, in contrast, simply pass the lead fragments through their digestive system and are less affected. Both lethargic condors were treated for lead poisoning. One recovered and was released to the wild, and, at last report, the other was still hospitalized.

As a consequence of lead poisoning, the state of California has changed hunting regulations to require hunters in condor-used areas to use non-lead ammunition.

Many real or imagined problems have threatened the birds. Some ranchers vehemently opposed release of birds in the Grand Canyon area because they were under the false impression that the bird would kill calves. A real danger to the condor results when farmers and ranchers try to control coyotes by salting dead animals with poison. Human encroachment in habitat where condors nest or forage is yet another problem for the birds.

A question yet to be answered is: What will the whirling blades of wind turbines do to these birds at sites in the areas where condors forage and roost?

Many western native people attribute a mystical role for California condors. The Yokut Tribe members believe that the condor ate the moon, thus causing the lunar cycle, and that eclipses are caused by the bird's wings. Some tribes ritually kill condors for feathers used to make ceremonial clothing. Shamans dance while wearing these feathers to reach the upper and lower spiritual worlds. Whenever a Shaman dies, however, their clothes become cursed, and a new set has to be made for his successor. The ritual killing begins anew. Some scientists say that this process has helped to contribute to the decline in condor population.

References: *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; *Raptors: The Birds of Prey* by Scott Weidensaul; From the Internet: *California Condor* by Beacham's Guide to Endangered Species; *California Condor* by Wikipedia, the free Encyclopedia; *California Condor Population Soaring* by Chuck Graham in *California Condor Conservation*.

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

December 29, 2010

Canada goose 1935, mute swan 3, American black duck 27, mallard 394, northern shoveler 1, ring-necked pheasant 3, wild turkey 31, bald eagle 2, northern harrier 1, Cooper's hawk 10, red-shouldered hawk 1, red-tailed hawk 42, rough-legged hawk 2, American kestrel 15,

Rock pigeon 170, mourning dove 344, great horned owl 1, red-bellied woodpecker 36, downy woodpecker 48, hairy woodpecker 7, northern flicker 17, pileated woodpecker 3, northern shrike 1,

Blue jay 136, American crow 151, horned lark 367, black-capped chickadee 150, tufted titmouse 54, red-breasted nuthatch 1, white-breasted nuthatch 44, brown creeper 1, Carolina wren 2, golden-crowned kinglet 2, eastern bluebird 43, American robin 23, European starling 3652, yellow-



Wild Turkeys
Diane Devereaux



rumped warbler 11,

American tree sparrow 273, field sparrow 5, song sparrow 33, white-throated sparrow 3, white-crowned sparrow 16, dark-eyed junco 192, Lapland longspur 2, snow bunting 59, northern cardinal 153, red-winged blackbird 1, brown-headed cowbird 2, purple finch 1, house finch 57, common redpoll 23, pine siskin 7, American goldfinch 73, house sparrow 775.

Total individuals 9405, total species 55, total observers 17

Red-breasted Nuthatch/Mike Smith

Hawk ID Workshop

As preparation for an Operation Hawk Watch at Lakeview Park this spring, Gary Gerrone, Chief Naturalist of Lorain County Metro Parks, is offering a Hawk ID workshop twice, Wednesday, February 9, 6:30 p.m. and Saturday, February 19, 8:00 a.m. at Rose Café, Lakeview Park, Lorain. Learn the dynamics of why thousands of hawks migrate along Lake Erie shoreline and how to ID them.

Hog Island Camp Scholarship Awarded

It is with great pleasure that this year's scholarship is being awarded to someone we all know and have enjoyed working with as a member of the chapter board. He is a former Lorain County Metro Park naturalist, vocational agriculture teacher, and Boy Scout leader. He is currently working with students with developmental disabilities to enable them to work to their greatest potential. Gary Hawke will be an excellent representative as our scholarship recipient to the Educators' Workshop at Hog Island Maine.

Congratulations Gary!