

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

February 2014



Bonaparte's gull photo by Dane Adams

Editors: Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe
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Program

Tuesday, February 4, 2014, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Henry Adams

Professor of American Art, Case Western Reserve University

John James Audubon, His Life and Art

Professor Adams, a graduate of Harvard and Yale Universities, has been highly acclaimed in the world of art and art education and is the winner of numerous awards.

John James Audubon's major achievement, his illustrated book of *The Birds of America*, was both technically and artistically the most ambitious and the greatest illustrated book of the 19th-century, if not of any period. More than that, it is a cultural landmark, a fundamental reference point of human achievement like the Bible, Michelangelo's *David*, or Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. No other American artist of the 19th-century produced an achievement which played such a role in the fundamental fabric of western culture.

Describing the life of Audubon is also complicated by the fact that he told many tall tales, including inventing false stories about his birth.

This lecture will untangle Audubon's remarkable biography and business career and discuss how it culminated in his extraordinary career as an artist and naturalist.

Field Trip

Saturday, February 15, 2014, 9 a.m.

Castalia Pond, Pickerel Creek, etc.

Meet at Castalia Pond

Paul Sherwood, leader

Board Meeting

Tuesday, January 28, 6:30 p.m.

The Jack Smith House, 304 West Ave, Elyria

Great Backyard Bird Count

February 14-17, 2014

A Birder's Diary: Favorite Bird

By **Carol Leininger**

I often give talks about birds and help with Black River Audubon exhibits at schools and other community locations. The most dreaded question that is often asked is: What is your favorite bird? As a bird lover, how can I possibly prefer one bird over all others? It's akin to asking: Which of your children do you like best?

Every time I answer this question, I choose a different bird. I could name a bird that is beautifully colored, such as a cardinal, indigo bunting, redstart, scarlet tanager, or Baltimore oriole. I even like the outstanding color differences between male and female Eastern towhees.

Or I could name a bird that stands out because of its unusual behavior such as the distraction display of a killdeer.

Many birds are fascinating to watch during feeding: fox sparrows that hop forward, then backward in the leaf



litter, ruddy turnstones as they search under rocks on the beach, goldfinches as they climb on bird feeders upside down, crossbills as they extract seeds from cones, spotted sandpipers bobbing their tails up and down as they walk along the shore, eastern kingbirds that fly up from a perch – catch an insect in midair, and land back on the same perch.

Other birds impress me with their songs: the chortle of a red-bellied woodpecker, the rattle of a belted kingfisher, the mournful call of a loon, the ee-o-lay of a wood thrush deep in the woods, or the ‘conquer me’ of a red-winged blackbird. Sometimes I think there is nothing lovelier than the song of a house wren that seems to go on and on.

Still others have interesting requirements – the snail kite with a bill adapted to feed only on snails, the Kirtland warbler that depends on man-controlled burns at nesting sites, purple martins that only nest in man-made apartments or gourds, bluebirds that require lots of human maintenance at nest boxes, and meadowlarks that say please-do-not-mow-here.

Sometimes one word can say it all for a particular bird—northern pintail (elegant), bald eagle (regal), chipping and tree sparrows (perky), cedar waxwing (sleek), winter wren (stumpy), catbird (mimic), rose-breasted grosbeak (cheerful), and snowy owl (wise).

What is your favorite bird?



BELTED KINGFISHER photo by Cindy Alger

National Audubon supports proper siting of wind turbines

Audubon supports strong federal protection for the bald eagle, America's national symbol, and the majestic golden Eagle under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Audubon strongly *supports properly sited wind power* as a renewable energy source that helps reduce the threat posed to birds and people by climate change. But a December 2013 rule by the U.S. Department of the Interior would weaken protections for eagles by making it possible for wind energy companies to acquire 30-year permits to kill and injure eagles. We are asking our members, supporters and advocates to send a message of protest to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW, Washington DC 20240.



SNOWY OWL photo by Jerry Talkington

Current Snowy Owl Irruption: the Good and Bad

By **Erik Bruder**

The winter of 2013/14 is one of the best in our area for snowy owls. A major irruption is under way with more than 100 snowy owls reported in Ohio, including four birds in Lorain County and more than twenty in Cuyahoga County. On December 29, an astounding eight owls were seen at one time at Cleveland Hopkins airport. Snowy owls have been reported as far south as Florida, and one bird was spotted in Bermuda.



The cause of the irruption is not well understood. Some experts have speculated that a crash in lemming population in the birds' wintering range forced the hungry birds to venture south in search of food. Another speculation is that a super-abundance of lemmings in the birds' breeding territory caused a population boom in snowy owls.

Opportunities for owl viewing have been excellent, but some viewers misused their opportunities. Many accounts of owl harassment in Ohio and other states were reported by birders. In Ohio alone, responsible birders observed irresponsible observers attempting to obtain better views or photographs by approaching too closely, intentionally and repeatedly flushing and chasing birds, trespassing, climbing fences into restricted areas, and yelling or making noise at owls. Unfortunately, Lorain Harbor was one of the sites of such improper birding.

Both the American Birding Association (ABA) and the Ohio Ornithology Society encourage birders to follow the ABA Code of Ethics. Excerpts from that Code are:

- Avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger. Exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, and filming.
- Limit the use of recordings and other methods for attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas or for attracting any species that is *Threatened*, *Endangered*, *Special Concern*, or *rare* in your local area.
- Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.

Reference: ABA Code of Ethics, www.aba.org/about/ethics.html

Erik Bruder is NE Ohio Regional Director, Ohio Ornithology Society.

Interrelations of rufa red knots, carbon dioxide, climate change, humans, and horseshoe crabs

By **Harry Spencer**

An article concerning this disparate collection of birds, humans, and science published in the New York Times (November 28, 2013) piqued my interest. Red knots (*Calidris canutus*), members of the group of shorebirds called peeps, occasionally visit the Lake Erie shoreline as a stopover during their extremely long migration flights. The birds nest in the high arctic and some of them winter in southern South America. A subspecies, rufa red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*), is proposed for threatened status nationally and is listed as endangered in New Jersey.



Prime springtime stop-over areas for some red knots are the beaches of Delaware Bay. There the hungry birds gorge on eggs deposited in the beach sand by horseshoe crabs. But humans and nature have effected crab population losses. Hurricane Sandy recently wiped out most of Delaware Bay's best horseshoe crab spawning beaches.

Also the population of horseshoe crabs has been declining because of overuse of crabs for bait and by a new demand for their blood. Scientists discovered that the crab's blood can be used to detect bacterial toxins that can be deadly to humans. Another factor is that carbon dioxide pollution of the atmosphere increases the acidity of the ocean thereby diminishing horseshoe crab food.

The world of rufa red knots illustrates again that for good and evil, wildlife, humans, and all nature are interdependent.

Bonaparte's Gull

Larus philadelphia

By **Cathy Priebe**

The Bonaparte's gull is a common migrant along the Lake Erie shoreline, especially in fall and winter months. Sometimes numbering in the thousands, these small, agile gulls are fishers (not parking lot or landfill visitors) that swoop gracefully on the water to catch their meal.

In winter, the non-breeding gull has a white head with a well-defined black dot over its ear, thin black bill, bright white breast, pale gray back and much of its wings. An adult breeding gull has a black head with a white nape and a rosy blush on the breast. Bonies (nickname) are often recognized in flight by the large white triangular wedge on the edge of the outer wings.

Bonaparte's gulls nest in conifers in the boreal forest of Canada and Alaska along large lakes, rivers, and marshes. Their food is generally aquatic such as small fish and tadpoles, but the birds glean the earth for small invertebrates. They also catch insects in flight.

Arriving in Ohio in the fall, Bonaparte's often linger along the lake into early January. Smaller numbers may stay through March if the winter is not too severe. Individuals also venture inland and gather in flooded farm fields or reservoirs.

According to Pete Dunne, Bonaparte's gull flocks often contain a few rare individuals such as little gulls or black-headed gulls. Gull aficionados should carefully scrutinize these flocks for such occasional rare visitors.

A few Lake Erie locations where you can find these spectacular birds are Lorain Harbor, Avon Lake Power Plant, Cleveland lakefront parks, and Huron Municipal Pier.

References: *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Roche, *Birds of North America* by Kenn Kaufman, *Birds of Ohio* by Jum McCormac, *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne



GHOST FROM THE PAST

By **Gary E. Hawke**

Last December I had the honor and thrill to observe a lifetime-first sighting off the pier at Lakeside, Ohio. Not fifty feet from my location four trumpeter swans glided through the early morning mist like ghosts from the past. Their magnificent eight foot wing span was truly something to behold.



This regal bird is the heaviest bird and largest North American native waterfowl and is the largest swan on earth. The trumpeter swan is a long lived, social species, conspicuous by its large size, white coloration, and black bill. It breeds in fresh water marshes and along ponds and lakes. It feeds on submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation, grasses and grains. Its nest consists of a large bowl made of aquatic vegetation, grasses, and sedges lined with down and body feathers and usually placed on slightly elevated sites surrounded by water, such as muskrat mounds, beaver lodges, or small islands. The average clutch size consists of five creamy-white eggs. The cygnets are covered with down, eyes open, and leave the nest within twenty four hours with the ability to swim and feed.

Population numbers and distribution were greatly reduced during the early fur trade and European settlement of North America during the 1600s-1800s. The species was prized for its skins and primary feathers, the largest of which made the best quality quill pens. Only about 69 individuals were known to exist in 1935.

Recently population numbers have steadily increased due to conservation efforts, including protection from

shooting, habitat conservation and range expansion programs. I applaud the efforts of David Sherman at the Crane Creek Wildlife Research Station, who has spent a career researching and reintroducing trumpeter swan to Ohio. Today the population in Ohio is estimated at about 150-200 individuals.

Sources: Mitchell, Carl D., 1994. Trumpeter Swan in *Birds of North America*, No. 105; Selected papers of the twentieth trumpeter swan society conference by David E Sherma

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TRUMPETER SWANS photo by H Spencer

Elyria CBC, 2013

TRUMPETER SWAN, CANADA GOOSE, MALLARD, AMERICAN BLACK DUCK, BUFFLEHEAD, COMMON GOLDENEYE, RED-BREASTED MERGANSER, COMMON MERGANSER, COMMON LOON, BONAPARTE GULL, RING-BILLED GULL, HERRING GULL, GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL, GREAT BLUE HERON, AMERICAN COOT, WILD TURKEY,

BALD EAGLE, COOPER'S HAWK, SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, RED-SHOULDERED HAWK, RED-TAILED HAWK, AMERICAN KESTREL, BARRED OWL, SNOWY OWL, SHORT-EARED OWL, ROCK PIGEON, MOURNING DOVE, BELTED KINGFISHER, RED-HEADED WOODPECKER, RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER, DOWNY WOODPECKER, HAIRY WOODPECKER, NORTHERN FLICKER, BLUE JAY, AMERICAN CROW, EASTERN BLUEBIRD, AMERICAN ROBIN, CEDAR WAXWING, BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE, TUFTED TITMOUSE, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH, BROWN CREEPER, CAROLINA WREN, GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET, HORNED LARK, DARK-EYED JUNCO, AMERICAN TREE SPARROW, SONG SPARROW, WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, HOUSE SPARROW, PURPLE FINCH, HOUSE FINCH, AMERICAN GOLDFINCH, NORTHERN CARDINAL

COUNTERS 26; TOTAL SPECIES 55; TOTAL INDIVIDUALS 52,197

Teams started at 8:00 am and the last team ended at 5:00 pm. The day was very rainy and cloudy. The temperature ranged from 34 to 50.

Wellington CBC, 2013

CANADA GOOSE, MUTE SWAN, TUNDRA SWAN, ROSS' GOOSE, AMERICAN BLACK DUCK, MALLARD, GADWALL, NORTHERN PINTAIL, CANVASBACK, LESSER SCAUP, REDHEAD, RING-NECKED DUCK, BUFFELHEAD, COMMON GOLDENEYE, HOODED MERGANSER, RUDDY DUCK, PIED-BILLED GREBE, GREAT BLUE HERON, AMERICAN COOT, RED-SHOULDERED HAWK, BALD EAGLE, NORTHERN HARRIER, COOPER'S HAWK, SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, RED-TAILED HAWK, AMERICAN KESTREL, MERLIN, BARRED OWL, ROCK PIGEON, MOURNING DOVE, BELTED KINGFISHER, RING-BILLED GULL, PILEATED WOODPECKER, NORTHERN FLICKER, HAIRY WOODPECKER, RED-BELLIED SAPSUCKER, DOWNEY WOODPECKER, RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH, WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH, TUFTED TITMOUSE, BROWN CREEPER, BLUE JAY, AMERICN CROW, NORTHERN SHRIKE, HORNED LARK, EASTERN BLUEBIRD, AMERICAN ROBIN, CEDAR WAXWING, CAROLINA WREN, EUROPEAN STARLING, YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER, GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET, AMERICAN TREE SPARROW, FIELD SPARROW, SONG SPARROW, SWAMP SPARROW, EASTERN TOWHEE, WHITE-THROATED SPARROW, WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW, BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE, DARK-EYED JUNDO, AMERICAN GOLDFINCH, NORTHERN CARDINAL, COMMON GRACKLE, BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD, HOUSE FINCH, HOUSE SPARROW

COUNTERS 17, TOTAL SPECIES 68, TOTAL INDIVIDUALS 10,752, SUNNY DAY