

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

FEBRUARY 2017



PINE SISKIN photo by Barbara Baudot

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe  
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**Program**  
**Tuesday, February 7 at 7 p.m.**  
**Carlisle Visitor Center**  
**Chris and Chad Saladin**

**Peregrine Falcons in Cleveland**



Chad and Chris Saladin are a husband and wife team with an obsessive passion for peregrine falcons. They have monitored nests, rehabilitated injured falcons, photographed the birds, published the photos on Facebook, widely exhibited their photos, and used the photos to adorn books. The informal talk will focus on Chris' and Chad's experiences as well as covering whatever interests the audience.

**Raptor photos by John Koscinski in the WINGTIPS files**



**RED-SHOULDERED  
HAWK**



**COOPER'S HAWK**



**RED-TAILED HAWK**



**JUVENILE BALD EAGLE**

**PLEASE NOTE**

**The March, April and May monthly meetings of Black River Audubon Society will take place at Sandy Ridge Reservation's Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center off Otten Road in North Ridgeville.**

**This is due to Metro Park activities at Carlisle Visitor Center during those months. We apologize for any inconvenience.**

# Field Trips

## **Castalia Pond, Pickerel Creek, etc.**

**Saturday, February 18, 9 a.m.**

Meet at Castalia Pond, Paul Sherwood to lead

## **Killbuck Marsh/Funk Bottoms/Browns Bog, etc.**

**Saturday, March 18, 2017, 9:00 a.m.**

Meet at Shreve Lake parking lot, Sally Fox to lead

## **Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve**

**Saturday, April 15, 2017, 9:00 a.m.**

Meet at 8701 Lakeshore Blvd., Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr. to lead  
Cleveland, Former Dike 14

## **January Field Trip**

### **Lorain Harbor and Avon Lake**

**January 21, 2017**

#### **By Tammy Martin**

Forty-two people, a record turnout in my experience, participated in this year's Elyria/Lorain CBC on December 17. The cloudy skies with mist-to-light rain and temperatures in the 30s were a welcome relief after the forecast of heavy snow from a storm that hit most of the northern US. Participants covered 31 miles on foot and 353 miles by car, finding 68 species and 15,518 individual birds, just over 5000 more than last year.



The species seen and the number of each are: Canada goose 2147, mallard 193, American black duck 4, gadwall 4, northern shoveler 3, canvasback 2, redhead 1, lesser scaup 15, bufflehead 3, common goldeneye 24, hooded merganser 10, red-breasted merganser 5524, ruddy duck 11, common loon 1, horned grebe 1, pied-billed grebe 6, Bonaparte's gull 12, ring-billed gull 2864, herring gull 27, great black-backed gull 3, great blue heron 5, American coot 49, wild turkey 42, bald eagle 5, northern harrier 2, cooper's hawk 7, red-shouldered hawk 10, red-tailed hawk 22, American kestrel 8, merlin 1, barred owl 1, rock pigeon 494, mourning dove 333, belted kingfisher 2, red-headed woodpecker 3, red-bellied woodpecker 71, downy woodpecker 56, hairy woodpecker 9, pileated woodpecker 4, northern flicker 13, blue jay 289, American crow 85, eastern bluebird 27, American robin 381, cedar waxwing 26, black-capped chickadee 122, tufted titmouse 73, white-breasted nuthatch 52, red-breasted nuthatch 1, Carolina wren 8, house wren 1, golden-crowned kinglet 2, horned lark 5, dark-eyed junco 214, American tree sparrow 280, song sparrow 1, swamp sparrow 1, white-throated sparrow 14, white-crowned sparrow 3, house sparrow 381, house finch 61, American goldfinch 78, northern cardinal 180, European starling 1218, red-winged blackbird 2, brown-headed cowbird 1, rusty blackbird 1.

## **Great Backyard Bird Count Coming**

**The next GBBC is February 17-20, 2017**

**Go to: [www.BirdCount.org](http://www.BirdCount.org)**



# PINE SISKIN

## *Spinus pinus*

By **Barbara Baudot**

On a snowy winter day in New Hampshire I saw an intriguing and wonderful sight on our deck. There were at least 20 or 25 pine siskins hanging in all different positions on my feeders, dining on thistle, safflower and millet seeds.



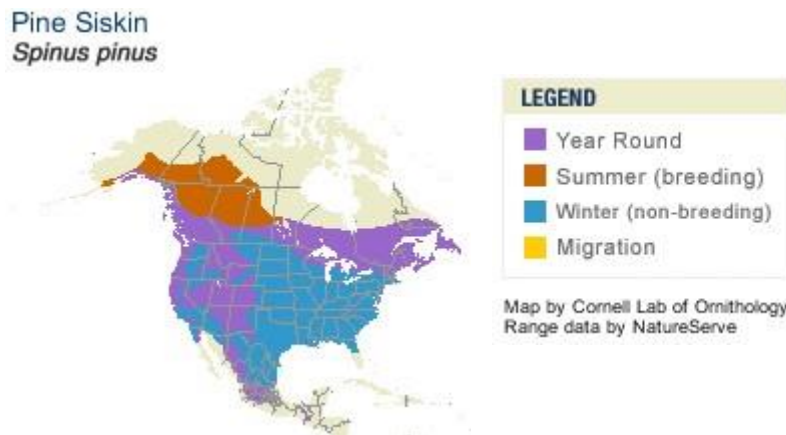
Although sparrow look-alikes from afar, the shape, actions, and call notes of the pine siskin liken them to goldfinches in disguise. On my feeders the siskins were in the company of a number of goldfinches and a couple of redpolls.

The pine siskins stayed with us for most of that particular winter. We never saw them subsequently. Nevertheless they really peaked my curiosity and I endeavored to learn about the life and habits of these spontaneous visitors.

What differentiates these grayish brown, dark- striped-finches from ordinary sparrows are the bright yellow edgings of their wings and tails flashing in flight. *Females* and young *males* are browner with subdued yellow wing and tail edgings. All have short, conical, slightly forked tails. The birds continuously flit about.

Their preferred foods are the seeds of hemlocks, spruce, alders, birches, and cedars, but when those seeds are scarce, the birds devour thistle, millet, sunflower, and other seeds. In summer they consume insects, also.

This nomadic finch ranges widely and erratically across North America in response to the availability of food. In winter months, pine siskins move about in flocks numbering from a few to thousands. When conifer seeds are sparse in the northern and western boreal forests, the pine siskins irrupt southward. In early spring the birds normally head to the boreal forests of Alaska and Canada.



Courtship and formation of pairs begins in winter flocks. During this courtship, a male displays interest in a female by singing as he flies in circles above her. The male often feeds the female during courtship.

In the boreal forest, the female builds her nest on the branches of pines, spruces and larches. To protect the eggs and hatchlings from the cold, the saucer shaped nests, constructed of bark, twigs and mosses, are heavily insulated with thick layers of plant down and feathers. She lays three or four brown speckled green eggs and continuously incubates them. Her mate feeds her as she broods the hatchlings. Later both parents feed the nestlings. The hatchlings fledge when they are fourteen to fifteen days old. Somewhat later the birds gather in large flocks and travel into semi-open country to feed in fields of thistles or sunflowers. As summer lapses into autumn and winter, pine siskins form large flocks and search for

evergreen seeds. . **References:** *All About Birds* (Cornell Lab of Ornithology); *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres.



AMERICAN GOLDFINCHES AND PINE SISKINS photo by Barbara

## PILEATED WOODPECKER

*Dryocopus pileatus*

By Cathy Priebe

“Woika-woika-woika-woika, kukk-kukk-kukk” filled the air and was immediately followed by loud drumming. The call echoed throughout the densely forested area where my friends and I were weekend cabin camping. My friend, Angie, knew immediately that it was a pileated woodpecker, one of the most primitive looking birds that I have had the good fortune to see now on a regularly.

Even though this bird is as big as a crow and has a very conspicuously bright red crested head, they are still difficult to see, as their call tends to cover great distances, especially where we were staying in Mohican State Park. Fortunately for our group, we were able to track the laughing bird to a particularly tall pine tree where it was pecking as it searched for an afternoon meal of ants or beetles.



The pileated male and female are both predominantly black with white bars on the face and down on the shoulders. Their eyes are yellow and their beaks are dark and very thick and formidable. Upon cursory observation, they both appear to look alike, however, there are distinct differences between the sexes. The male has a red mustache and his red crest begins on his forehead while the female does not have a mustache and her red crest begins on her crown.

Non-migratory and Ohio nesters, these birds prefer mature forests (deciduous and conifers) for their habitats. Once thought to be endangered in the 1900's due to settling and clearing land for agriculture, this bird has managed to rebound as younger trees matured to provide food and shelter. A pair of pileateds requires at least 100 acres of wooded territory to call home.

Much like bears and bobcats like to leave telltale marks on trees, the pileated leaves its own easily identifiable pecking hole on the trunks of dead or dying trees as it searches for food. The holes are fist sized or larger and usually oval. Not to be mistaken as only a tree dweller, it is quite common to find a pileated on the ground poking fallen logs and other decaying debris for a quick meal.

Nesting is in an excavated hole in a snag or almost dead tree trunk. The female lays four white eggs and they hatch in around three weeks. Both parents take care of the young. Old nesting sites make great homes for squirrels, wood ducks, owls and snakes to name a few.

This regal bird is the sixth largest woodpecker in the world but, despite its size, it is also very shy and will put “the trunk between itself and observers.” They will generally fly when approached too closely, even when high up on a tree.

After a drought of not hearing or seeing a pileated, I use this memory jogger to ID their call. Just think of a flicker's call, but greatly amplified with some echo added. Their manic laughter is hard to miss.

**References:** *Birds of Ohio*, by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion*, by Pete Dunne.





PILEATED WOODPECKER photo by Sue Mowatt



# A Birder's Diary: Birding Literature

By **Carol Leininger**

Are you stuck inside due to snow and ice? Pick up a good book or magazine to whet your appetite for all those fascinating birds you hope to see in the New Year. The amount of reading material on birds is phenomenal.

There is something for beginning birders and professional ornithologists and everyone in between. Enjoy Margaret Nice's classic study on song sparrows or Noah Strycher's study of penguins in Antarctic, outcries on environmental issues from Rachel Carson and Deborah Cramer, and updates on the most recent scientific information – which birds are really related by DNA, or exciting news flashes such as sighting an ivory-billed woodpecker or swamphen. It's all there.



Magazines for the general reader on bird watching topics include:

|                         |                     |
|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Bird Watcher's Digest   | Wild Bird           |
| Birding                 | American Birds      |
| Living Bird             | World Birdwatch     |
| Watching Backyard Birds | Birds International |
| Birder's World          |                     |

Those that include other aspects of nature and conservation along with material for the general reader as well as bird topics include:

- Birds and Blooms
- Natural History
- National Audubon
- National Wildlife
- Smithsonian

Scientific journals devoted to ornithology include:

- The Wilson Bulletin
- The Condor
- The Auk
- Continga
- Journal of Field Ornithology

And of course you will want to keep up to date with the Black River Audubon Society's Wingtips!

## Ginkgoes vs. Oaks

By **Jim Jablonski**

A number of years ago I thought it would be really neat to have a ginkgo tree or two in my backyard. After all, the ginkgo, native to China, is considered to be the oldest tree genus in the world. Wouldn't that be a great conversation starter?

Fortunately, my usual apathy regarding lawn and gardening work quickly set in and I never got around to that "wonderful" idea. Once in a while I would criticize myself for not doing it but little did I know that what I considered laziness was actually a good thing that some might call "benign neglect."



Now that I'm interested in birds, I have discovered that it would have been a big mistake. It turns out the ginkgo, like most non-natives, would be a disaster for birds in my backyard. The foreign import supports only four species of caterpillars while native oak hosts over 530 – a fact that I would be horrified to learn if I had that "made in China" tree in my backyard today.

John Rowden in the article “*Planting native species to help birds*” in the *BirdLife International* website, states that “the growing scientific consensus that native plants, which serve as necessary hosts for native insects, are critically important for healthy bird populations, particularly during breeding. Native birds need insects to feed their chicks; without native plants and the insects they provide, native birds cannot survive.”

As birders we need to remember a number of points when making gardening, or tree-planting, decisions.

- Nearly all land birds, 96 percent, feed insects to their chicks. After all, protein is crucial in the early stages of life.
- Chickadee parents, to raise one nest of young, must find up to 9,000 caterpillars.
- Yards planted with native species host up to eight times more native birds, according to entomologist Doug Tallamy.

At this time of year our thoughts often turn to planting and gardening. Keep in mind that for birds and wildlife in general, it is much better if we “go native” with all trees, shrubs and other plants.

## **Hog Island Birding Camp Scholarships Available Again**

This year we offer two Hog Island scholarships to adults. Each scholarship covers tuition, room and board, and travel expenses. Our goal is that the recipients will follow the examples of those who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors of conservation and education in our community.

The following camps have been particularly valuable to past participants: *Joy of Birding* (June 4-9), *Field Ornithology* (June 18-23), and *Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week* (July 16-21). For birding camp details and registration go to [hogisland.audubon.org](http://hogisland.audubon.org). Those interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at [jjjablon@aol.com](mailto:jjjablon@aol.com) or 440-365-6465.

## **The Great Backyard Bird Count**

We can't all be ornithologists but we can be citizen scientists who contribute to the work of the professionals. The Great Backyard Bird Count makes it possible for us.

This year's count, Friday, February 17, through Monday, February 20 is the twentieth and it just keeps getting bigger as more persons become interested in birds and learn about it. And a number of years ago it was extended to the entire world. Lately, India has been one of the top several countries by number of participants.

Being something of a map and numbers geek, I was first intrigued by the incredible records that are maintained on the GBBC website and the maps showing the density of birds in different areas of North America. The maps of past years are still available on the website making it fascinating to see how your favorite birds have shifted their territories on the same weekend each year.

Of course, the most important thing is the data, produced by backyard birders, and utilized by professional ornithologists to record trends in bird populations.

If you have never taken part but are interested, “google” Great Backyard Bird Count 2017, and read about it. All it takes is a commitment of fifteen minutes of daily birdwatching, from the comfort of your own home. Then you report on the GBBC website the numbers of each species seen during that quarter hour. How much easier can a very satisfying pastime be? **JJ**