

WINGTIPS



EUROPEAN STARLING photo by Debbie Parker

Or Current Residents
ADDRESS LABEL
HERE

FEB. 2018

**Editors: Jim Jablonski,
Cathy Priebe**
**Webmistress:
Arlene Lengyel**
**Photographer Emeritus:
John Koscinski**

Non-Profit
U.S. Postage
Paid
Elyria, Ohio
Permit No.
50

February 2018 Program

Tuesday, February 6, 2018, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Dr. Karen Munroe, Baldwin-Wallace University

**“Family Structures of Gray and Fox Squirrels:
More Than You Ever Wanted to Know (and then some)”**



Dr. Munroe and her B-W students have spent years studying the behavior and social structure of both fox and gray squirrels. Her presentation will explain how squirrels are studied in an urban environment, present results comparing the family structures of both species, and show how to manage squirrel species in our backyard and globally.

Another Citizen Science Opportunity is on the Way!



Christmas Bird Counts totals have been calculated, reports made and already the 21st annual Great Backyard Bird Count is looming on the horizon! This ever-growing citizen science event takes place across much of the world and provides a great deal of information on the status of birds throughout our changing globe.

This is perhaps the easiest and most entertaining bird count of them all since it can be done when you choose, and from your own back window while you're drinking your morning coffee – or it can be carried out in the usual way while braving the elements. For more information and to explore data from the first twenty GBBC's, go to gbbc.birdcount.org. And, remember, by the time it is over, spring migration will be nearly here!

February Field Trip
Castalia Pond, Pickerel Creek, Etc.
Saturday, February 17, 2018, 9 a.m.
Meet at Castalia Pond, Castalia
Paul Sherwood to lead

Elyria Christmas Bird Count, December 16, 2017
By Marty Ackermann



Thirty-nine people participated in this year's Elyria/Lorain CBC on December 16. Fortunately, the weather had warmed into the 30s and there was no precipitation. Participants covered 38 miles on foot and 282 miles by car, finding 77 species and 17,457 individual birds nearly 2,000 more than last year.

The species seen and the number of each are: Canada goose 2239, mallard 475, American black duck 4, gadwall 4, northern pintail 1, blue-winged teal 2, green-winged teal 35, lesser scaup 1, bufflehead 22, common goldeneye 66, hooded merganser 6, red-breasted merganser 5509, common merganser 1, ruddy duck 5, double-crested cormorant 20, common loon 3, horned grebe 1, pied-billed grebe 5, Bonaparte's gull 19, ring-billed gull 4891, herring gull 162, great black-backed gull 17, lesser black-backed gull 2, great blue heron 15, black-crowned night-heron 1, American coot 41, bald eagle 13, Cooper's hawk 8, sharp-shinned hawk 1, red-shouldered hawk 11, red-tailed hawk 14, American kestrel 3, barred owl 2, snowy owl 2, short-eared owl 6, rock pigeon 36, mourning dove 122, belted kingfisher 11, red-headed woodpecker 5, red-bellied woodpecker 83, downy woodpecker 87, hairy woodpecker 9, pileated woodpecker 8, northern flicker 11, blue jay 185, American crow 57, northern mockingbird 2, eastern bluebird 93, American robin 50, cedar waxwing 126, black-capped chickadee 186, tufted titmouse 85, white-breasted nuthatch 67, red-breasted nuthatch 1, brown creeper 1, Carolina wren 13, golden-crowned kinglet 3, yellow-rumped warbler 1, horned lark 7, Lapland longspur 6, dark-eyed junco 135, American tree sparrow 189, chipping sparrow 1, song sparrow 31, swamp

sparrow 2, field sparrow 1, fox sparrow 2, white-throated sparrow 22, white-crowned sparrow 2, house sparrow 447, house finch 92, American goldfinch 96, northern cardinal 147, European starling 1,423, red-winged blackbird 1, common grackle 2, brown-headed cowbird 1.



Wellington Bird Count December 30, 2017

By Diane Devereaux



Two weeks made a great difference as Wellington bird numbers were depleted by frigid temperatures compared to the Elyria CBC. Only ten birders participated, with two counting at home bird feeders. The other eight logged a total of 19 hours and 190 miles of driving.

Here is the list of species and birds seen during the count: American kestrel 3, Cooper's hawk 7, red-tailed-hawk 11, common grackle 1, American robin 1, eastern bluebird 5, black-capped chickadee 25, Carolina wren 1, tufted titmouse 11, white-breasted nuthatch 14, American goldfinch 46, house finch 13, northern cardinal 48, ruby-crowned kinglet 1, American crow 12, blue jay 52, American tree sparrow 83, chipping sparrow 2, dark-eyed junco 153, horned lark 150, house sparrow 341, song sparrow 3, white-crowned sparrow 3, white-throated sparrow 1, European starling 752, mourning dove 91, rock pigeon 35, Canada goose 1097, mallard 30, downy woodpecker 22, hairy woodpecker 5, red-bellied woodpecker 14, yellow-bellied sapsucker 1.

Frozen lakes reduced waterbirds to three species – the usual Canada geese, mallards, and ring-billed gulls. On the other hand, surprising sightings included house wren, yellow-bellied sapsucker and ruby-crowned kinglet.

A Birder's Diary: Hawaii – Diversity and Problems

By Carol Leininger



Tired of winter and want to add some new and exciting bird sightings to your life list? The American Birding Association (ABA) has added Hawaii to the official ABA checklist.

The birds of Hawaii fall into a number of categories: endemic, endangered, indigenous, visitors, and foreign birds.

Endemic birds that evolved in Hawaii and occur naturally nowhere else in the world include the iiwi and elepaio, among others. I should mention here that many of these endemics have common names taken from the Hawaiian language.

Endangered birds (according to the endangered list of 1983) include dark-rumped petrel, Hawaiian duck, Laysan duck, nene, Hawaiian hawk, and Hawaiian crow.

Indigenous birds are breeding species that arrived and established themselves on the islands unassisted by man and have not evolved significant differences from their ancestral stock. The sooty tern, white tern, brown noddy, great frigate bird, and both red and white-tailed tropicbirds are indigenous in Hawaii. Visitors are nonbreeding regular migrants, such as mallard, pintail, shoveler, golden plover, and wandering tattler.

Foreign birds are species introduced to Hawaii by man and include the cattle egret, red-crested cardinal, myna, spotted dove, zebra dove, and two species of bulbul.

To see as many species as possible, you should plan to visit urban areas, forests, uplands and coastal areas and, of course, more than one island. Hawaii also has one of the most renowned examples of adaptive radiation in birds – the Hawaiian honeycreepers. Once you visit you will become aware of the fact that the islands, like many other birding areas in the world, have problems – climate change, feral pigs, cats, mongooses, and avian malaria. Nonetheless, if you haven't been there yet – it is well worth the visit.

Reference: Hawaii's Birds, Hawaii Audubon Society (1984)

EUROPEAN STARLING

Sturnus vulgaris

By **Barbara Baudot**



In *Scratching the Woodchuck*, by David Kline, Amish farmer and naturalist, a chapter entitled “Starlings” begins: “I don’t really love the starling. Admire the brassy bird, yes, . . . and last week something happened that caused me to admire the starling even more. Actually, *Sturnus vulgaris* redeemed itself by doing such a good deed (ridding his fields of grasshoppers) that I feel guilty for disliking the bossy immigrant at other times of the year.”

Kline’s ambivalence is widely shared. Many people loath starlings for their aggressive comportment, ubiquitousness, and polluting behavior. Although starlings have admirable traits, their undesirable ones dominate the public psyche.

Come autumn and winter, garrulous starlings band together in murmurations of hundreds, thousands, and occasionally more than a million birds; swarming, swirling, and dipping in shifting aerial formations. Concentrations of droppings from heavily populated roosts can kill trees and spread parasites and viruses. Lesser amounts offer excellent fertilizer. Starlings are farmers’ friends when feeding on insects but a bane when devouring cultivated fruits and grains.

Classifying them an invasive species (from Europe, Asia and Africa), the USDA denies starlings protection under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and is trying to eradicate them. These measures are a sad end to the well-intentioned efforts of Eugene Schieffelin to introduce birds mentioned in Shakespeare’s works into NYC’s Central Park to boost the park’s aesthetic and cultural value. Starlings were the only species to thrive. He released 100 imported starlings there in 1890-1891. Today more than 200,000,000 descendants inhabit most of North America.

Few people consider the starling a marvel of nature. Yet the common starling is curiously beautiful, highly intelligent, and equipped from beak to feet to adapt to changing circumstances.

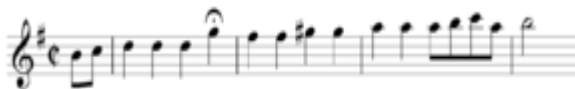
A stunning bird, the starling’s feathered dress varies with seasons in unique ways. Starlings molt once a year in autumn. New feathers have a glossy metallic quality reflecting light in

shades of purple and turquoise. They are tipped with yellowish star-like markings in the winter. These disappear by the spring nesting season. In the winter their beaks are yellow tipped in black. During nesting season their beaks turn yellow with the base of the lower mandible bluish in males and pinkish in females. Starlings appear mostly monomorphic, but do differ in size and the coloring of their irises and lower mandibles.

Over centuries people have documented starlings' intelligence and gifts for mimicry. Pliny the Elder, (23-79 AD) Roman naturalist, claimed starlings could be taught to speak whole sentences in Latin and Greek. One of the earliest tales transcribed from British oral tradition in the Middle Welsh Mabinogion (1100-1200 AD), tells of Branwen who tamed a starling, "taught it words," and sent it across the Irish Sea begging for help from her brothers. In Shakespeare's play Henry IV, Hotspur declares "The king forbade my tongue to speak of Mortimer . . . (but) I'll have a starling shall be taught to speak nothing but Mortimer, and give it to (the king) to keep his anger still in motion."

Starlings have often been treasured pets. In his book *King Solomon's Ring*, Austrian ethologist and Nobel laureate, Konrad Lorenz described the starling as "the poor man's dog" and "something to love," because nestlings, easily obtained and cared for, adapted well to captivity. Their inquisitiveness made them easy to train.

Most notably, Mozart purchased a starling in 1784, after completing his Piano Concerto in G Major (KV. 453). He named it *Vogelstar*, German for starling. Later he transcribed the notes for the Concerto's allegretto movement as sung by the starling. Extremely attached to the bird, Mozart composed an elegy when it died three years later. His "A Musical Joke (K. 522)" might be written in the comical, inconsequential style of a starling's vocalization. Interesting singing by a common but curiously, remarkable bird.



Mozart's "starling song."

References : Wikipedia various articles on starling, common starling and genus sturnus; “**European Starling**” in allaboutbirds.org; “**Mozart’s Starling**” by Lyanda Lynn Haupt; “**flight of the starlings**” in video.nationalgeographic.com; “**the invasive species we can blame on Shakespeare**” in smithsonianmag.com; “**Starlings**” in “**Scratching the Woodchuck**” by David Kline.

COMMON REDPOLL

Carduelis flammea

By Cathy Priebe

Winter backyard birding can be quite interesting if you take the time to look at your feeders. After I was lucky enough to host a pine siskin invasion a few winters back, I regularly continued to watch my feeders each winter to see if the siskins would return. One particular winter did bring a few siskins but mixed in the group was a half dozen common redpolls, a first for my yard!! Luckily, they do not require any special kind of food. They will eat thistle and other plant seeds, so feeding them is usually not an issue. But hosting redpolls is totally a hit or miss venture. Like siskins, they are an irruptive winter bird and show up wherever they can find a food source.

This winter season has reported sightings of common redpolls near the lakeshore in Lorain and various locations all over Ohio. I have not spotted any yet in my backyard, but I have a feeling that this could be the year that they will visit if only for a short period. The key is to keep a close watch on your feeders!!!

The following article was written by our BRAS co-founder, past president, benefactor and long-time member Jack Smith. Jack Smith was instrumental in founding the Black River Audubon Society in 1958. In honor of our 60-year anniversary, we are recognizing the many contributions made by our membership, past and present.

(The following is reprinted from Wingtips, November, 2011.)

By Jack Smith



In northern states, including Ohio, we see the common redpoll only in the winter, and then only sporadically, some years in large numbers and in other years almost none. It breeds in the Arctic areas of Canada and Alaska.

This bird is extremely well adapted to the severe cold weather of this region, but, when food is in short supply, it will migrate (mostly by day) to more southern regions where its food is more plentiful. In the Cleveland area it is considered an irruptive common migrant and winter visitor, appearing and foraging in flocks along with goldfinches and other species in open fallow fields where there is an abundance of seeds. It will also frequent feeders and is known to be very friendly. The average date of arrival is mid-October, and most birds leave by the end of April.

The redpoll is a small finch about 5 to 5.5 inches in length with a wingspan of 7.5 to 8.7 inches. Like a goldfinch, it has the ability to grasp a perch and feed upside down. A special feature of this bird is a pouch in the throat area where it can store food for several hours, allowing it to feed rapidly in open, cold areas and then move to sheltered areas to rest and digest food over longer periods of time. As warmer weather arrives in the spring and days become longer, redpolls begin to migrate by day to northern areas of North America. As shown by banding records, some move from our area as far northwest as Alaska; a few travel to Greenland.

When wintering in our area, the males dominate females, but in their far north breeding grounds females dominate, even to the point of taking the lead in courtship. The areas selected for nest sites are in birch thickets and tundra scrub. Not much of the nesting territory is defended, and nests of other pairs may be close at hand. The nests, believed to be constructed by females, are in dense low shrubs within a few feet of the ground. A nest is a small open cup made of fine twigs, grass, and moss, lined mainly with ptarmigan feathers. A female typically lays 4 to 5 eggs. She incubates the eggs, and the male feeds her. The eggs hatch in 10 to 11 days. The female does most of the feeding of the young, while the contribution of the male for this chore varies. The young fledge 12 days after hatching. Migration then begins in flocks by day with movement only as far south as necessary to find food, primarily seeds. Cold does not bother this hardy little bird as long as the seeds are available.

References: *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *The Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* by Roger Tory Peterson; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; *Weeds of the Northern US and Canada* by France Royer and Richard Dickinson; *Wildflowers in Winter* by Carol Levine.

Hog Island Scholarships: Due by February 28

If you have been considering applying for one of the BRAS Hog Island scholarships, you have until February 28, 2018 to complete your application.

Reservations for 2018 camps have been made for two BRAS Hog Island scholarship winners: one for *Field Ornithology* will be presented June 18 to 23rd and one for *Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week* will run from July 15 to 20th. For more details and description of the camps at hogisland.audubon.org.

To apply for the BRAS scholarships, contact Jim Jablonski at jjjablon@aol.com or 440-365-6465.

Celebrate and Support Land Conservation

By **Kate Pilacky**



Twenty years ago, in December 1997, a group of conservation minded individuals met in the bingo hall of a church in Huron County to discuss the possible formation of a land conservancy. The Firelands Land Conservancy was formed.

In January 2006, the Firelands Land Conservancy merged with seven other land trusts to form Western Reserve Land Conservancy. As a result, over 13,000 acres of natural areas and farmland have been preserved in the greater Firelands region and over 50,000 acres in our entire service area. These acres include coastal, riparian, wetlands, forested, historic properties, and rich, fertile farmland.

In celebration of this two-decade milestone, please consider making a special gift looking forward towards the next 20 years of land conservation in our region. The support of our members is so very much a key to the success of our land conservation work.

Restoration of habitat is also very crucial; the creation of the five-acre prairie on Hamilton Street in Oberlin will benefit imperiled monarch butterflies and other pollinators. Think about how important pollinators such as butterflies and bees are to ecosystems, our food production and the beauty of our natural world. This prairie project had a variety of partnering organizations; the neighbors and community really came through to make the project a success.

Your generous donations directly support the Land Conservancy's efforts to conserve more vibrant natural areas, preserve additional working farms, and create healthier urban environments across northern and eastern Ohio. Please make your tax-deductible donation at <http://bit.ly/wricwin>.

Or you can send a check in the mail to: Western Reserve Land Conservancy, 3850 Chagrin River Road, Moreland Hills, OH 44022. *Ms. Pilacky is a Black River Audubon Society board member and Assistant Field Director of the WRLC Field Office in Oberlin.*

* * *

**Black River Audubon membership only
(but including Wingtips) is \$15 /Year**

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

**Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon
P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036**

**“The mission of the Black River Audubon Society
is to promote conservation and restoration of
ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife
through advocacy, education, stewardship, field
trips, and programs for the benefit of all people
of today and tomorrow.”**

**National Audubon Membership Application
(Includes membership in Black River Audubon
and subscriptions to WINGTIPS and AUDUBON
magazine: \$20/year**

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8

Send your check to: National Audubon Society,

225 Varick Street, 7th Floor

New York, NY 10014

Attention: Chance Mueleck



COMMON REDPOLL photo by Kevin Lewis

BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

1958-2018: 60 Years of Birding

P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036

440-365-6465

www.blackriveraudubon.org