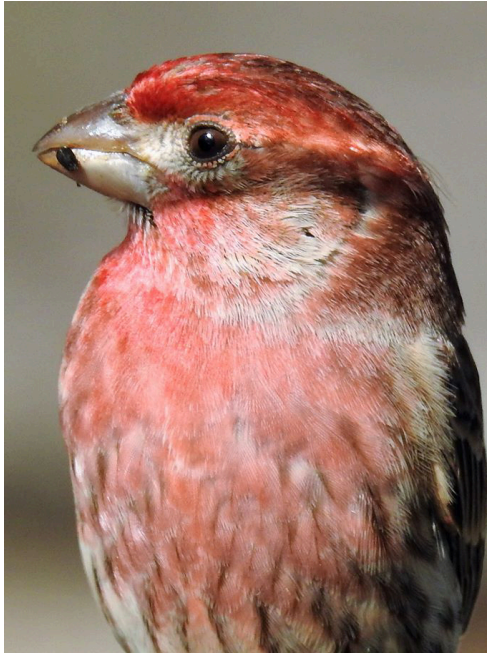


# WINGTIPS



HOUSE FINCH MALE Photo by Gina Swindell, Lorain, April 13, 2019

FEBRUARY 2020

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**February 2020 Program**  
**Tuesday, February 4, 2020, 7 p.m.**  
**Carlisle Visitor Center**

**Birding Research in Costa Rica**



**Tyler McClain**

Tyler McClain, who spoke to Black River Audubon in March 2017, will again present to the Society at its Tuesday, February 2020 meeting at Carlisle Visitor Center.

Currently a junior in environmental studies at the University of Toledo, McClain has been interested in birding and nature studies since the age of seven and remains deeply involved. In addition to taking part in conservation efforts in Costa Rica last summer, he also worked with children on the Lake Erie Islands through an Americorps internship. The program he helped establish created pollinator habitats on Kelley's Island. He eventually hopes to pursue a career as a state park naturalist.

During his presentation, he will discuss his experiences while birding and working in Costa Rica, a trip that was made possible by a partial Black River Audubon grant for a trip organized by National Audubon's Hog Island staff.

**February Field Trip**  
**Saturday, February 15, 2020**  
**Castalia Pond**

Meet at the pond on Spring Street, Castalia  
**Paul Sherwood to lead**

**Elyria/Lorain Christmas Bird Count 2019**

A rainy December 14 did not deter 33 hearty birders from participating in the Elyria/Lorain CBC. Participants covered 33 miles on foot and 280 miles by car, finding 61 species and 11,543 individual birds. These numbers are similar to last year.

The species seen and the number of each are: Canada goose 1821, mallard 392, American black duck 10, northern shoveler 1, lesser scaup 6, bufflehead 3, common goldeneye 9, red-breasted merganser 2, ruddy duck 162, double-crested cormorant 5, common loon 2, horned grebe 1, ring-billed gull 6039, herring gull 419, great black-backed gull 6, lesser black-backed gull 1, great blue heron 8, American coot 2, wild turkey 20, sandhill crane 2, bald eagle 5, Cooper's hawk 5, sharp-shinned hawk 1, red-shouldered hawk 16, red-tailed hawk 21, American kestrel 6, barred owl 5, short-eared owl 1, rock pigeon 75, mourning dove 153, belted kingfisher 1, red-headed woodpecker 5, red-bellied woodpecker 44, downy woodpecker 63, hairy woodpecker 5, pileated woodpecker 5, northern flicker 9, blue jay 256, American crow 26, northern mockingbird 2, eastern bluebird 26, American robin 54, cedar waxwing 4, black-capped chickadee 126, tufted titmouse 75, white-breasted nuthatch 54, brown creeper 1, Carolina wren 10, winter wren 1, golden-crowned kinglet 4, dark-eyed junco 142, field sparrow 1, American tree sparrow 44, song sparrow 21, white-throated sparrow 21, white-crowned sparrow 1, house sparrow 436, house finch 67, American goldfinch 78, northern cardinal 121, European starling 511.

**The Great Backyard Bird Count Is Coming!**  
**February 14-17, 2020**

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes or as long as they wish on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org). Anyone can

take part, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded.

The 23rd annual GBBC will be held Friday, February 14, through Monday, February 17, 2020. Please visit the official website at [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org) for information and to check out the latest resources.

Data collected during the 2014 GBBC data highlighted a large irruption of snowy owls across the northeastern, mid-Atlantic, and Great Lakes areas of the United States. It also showed the effects that warm weather patterns have had on bird movement around the country.

On the program's website participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during and after the count. Be sure to check out the Explore a Region tool to get an idea of what you can expect to see in your area during the next GBBC.

Editors' note: This article was adapted from one that is in Audubon.org.

## HOUSE FINCH

*Haemorhous mexicanus*

By **Jim Jablonski**

The house finch is a common bird throughout the country today but identifying it remains difficult for beginners. I know it certainly was for me when I began birding fifteen years ago. The males looked too much like purple finches in my field guide and I frequently checked off the latter until I knew better.

There were three causes of these misidentifications. First, the red of house finch males seemed to vary quite a bit in nature. Second, I was probably influenced by my desire to add to my very short bird list. Finally, I simply couldn't imagine just how much more colorful the purple really was until I saw one.

No doubt about it, the house finch male, despite its red coloring is no purple finch or cardinal. The brown shades and stripes seem to swamp its attempts to draw attention. In addition, the female appears to completely fit the "little brown bird" label applied to most sparrows.

Still, everyone knows where beauty actually resides. And, with time, my eye came to love house finches and now can see the more

subtle beauty of them in images such as that in our cover photo. I also learned both sexes brighten considerably during breeding season with the male sporting a near cherry-red tone while the brown and creamy beige of the female becomes brighter. Even the patterns of its brown stripes can be striking.

Another interesting characteristic is this finch's fidelity. I seem to always see a male and female together at my backyard feeder. The guides say they are monogamous for up to a year, but I wonder if it extends longer. I see the mates together more often than northern cardinals, that other species renowned for its faithfulness.

House finches, originally southwestern desert birds that would nest in cactus, were once part of the exotic bird trade on the east coast. A crackdown on sellers of birds native to the U.S. led to many simply being released in New York suburbs in 1940. Willing to nest in just about anything, and often producing three broods a year, house finches exploded across the east much like house sparrows decades earlier.

The eastern population now has essentially met its western cousins near the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian in the middle of the country. In their progression across the continent, they out-competed purple finches, forcing them further into the woods, leaving today's beginning birders wondering where they are.

Just as with house sparrows, house finches are associated closely with humans, tending to nest around us in trees, shrubs, hanging baskets, etc. Since they don't care for forests, they are drawn by our lawns with scattered trees that provide both food and shelter. With a diet made up largely of "weed" seeds, they particularly like lawns like mine. Honestly, I drew great satisfaction one day when I saw a male house finch, who had been eating at my feeder, fly off to the lawn to continue feasting on the weeds. It was one of the many joys that come with being a slacker!

In fact, the yard might be the best place for them to feed. A number of years ago, a form of conjunctivitis, a serious eye condition, hit house finches particularly hard. The inflammation around the eye would worsen until the individual bird was blinded and unable to feed. Death was the result. One recommendation was cleaning bird feeders regularly. However, since the disease is communicable and birds associate with each other at feeders, perhaps the best prevention might be to plant bushes and flowers that produce seeds and to simply let the lawn weeds "go to seed."

Despite what simply was called "house finch disease," the species is hardly in decline today. The numbers show that as does my backyard,

where the only attractive birds are the pair of cardinals and perhaps a dozen house finches.

**References:** “House finches show their colors for mating season,” in Houston Chronicle, June 12, 2019; “House Finches” in *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman.

## **COMMON SNIPE and WILSON’S SNIPE**

*Gallinago gallinago and Gallinago delicata*

By **Barbara Baudot**

‘Snipes’ intrigued me before I realized they were birds. My first acquaintance was with the word ‘snipe.’ In the course of an initiation I was sent off on a snipe hunt to capture some mysterious creature with a paper bag. The creature was non-existent. I became aware that snipe hunts are pranks played on unsuspecting innocents. And, I learned that the snipe was really a bird. Although very common, these birds are infrequently sighted—and thus make ideal subjects for such a hoax. However, not long ago my camera caught a glimpse of a common snipe squatting, camouflaged by grass bordering a marsh. And recently I was privileged to watch a small flock feeding while they strolled openly on a mud flat, their long bills repeatedly poking the soft mud. It was fascinating!

Snipes are distinguished from other shore birds by appearance and particular behaviors. Their names, ‘becassine’ in French and ‘snipe’ in English - referring to long needle-like bills - have many connotations, for example they denote fools, simpletons, or snide persons, sharp shooters, back stabbers and mean gossipers. In fact, their bills are wonders of nature, equipped with extra-sensory nerves and fibers, enabling these waders to consume prey while their bills remain lodged in soft mud. Their feet detect worms, larvae, and invertebrates buried in mud.

Snipes include 26 *species* of wading birds in three genera of the family *Scolopacidae*. The common snipe is native to northern Eurasia. Wilson’s snipe is the only species native to North America. Worldwide these two species are the most prevalent. The two species are barely distinguishable and until recently were combined as one in field guides. Research now reveals they are different species. They differ in number of tail feathers or retrices (seven pairs in *G. gallinago* and eight pairs in *G. delicata*). Other morphological variations are the depth of white on the edges of their secondary wing feathers and the drumming sounds generated by wind playing on their tail feathers in mating displays.

Both species are pudgy medium-sized, game birds with short, stocky legs and bills twice the length of their heads. They weigh about a quarter of a pound. Females are smaller, otherwise these birds are monomorphic. Their feather cloaks of many mottled and striped shades of black, brown, beige and white provide camouflage as they hunker down in grasses and under bushes.

To attract a mate for the duration of a breeding season, males, rarely females, take to the sky near twilight. Orbiting in circles, they periodically dive to the earth at 40-degree angles. The wind ruffles their outer tail feathers to produce sounds similar to drumming. In other courtship displays, males crouch on the ground and raise and spread their tails to impress females.

Females choose the mates they consider the strongest among suitors. They build their nests on dry earth among clumps of grass and brush close to feeding grounds. The nests, set in shallow depressions, are lined with fine grasses, leaves, and moss. They lay and incubate four eggs. After hatching, the monogamous parents divide the brood, each nourishing and caring for two hatchlings.

Snipes are migratory and fast flyers. Common snipes travel thousands of miles from the arctic regions of Europe and Asia where they breed, to winter on the southern coasts of Europe, India and central Africa. Wilson's snipes breed in Canada, Alaska and far northern parts of the United States. They winter from the west coast (where many live year-round) to southern reaches of the US and Central America. Both species are common vagrants in each other's habitats. They interbreed in the Aleutian Islands.

Snipes are popular game birds. In Europe 1.5 million are reportedly shot each hunting season and their numbers are shrinking. Hunters in North America bag around 100,000 annually. In Ohio, snipe season is open from September through November. Given the snipe's small size, each one offers little more than a tasty morsel for "connoisseurs." It is likely the sport of the hunt that makes snipes such attractive game birds. Once flushed, these birds fly rapidly in a zigzag pattern, crying out as they escape. It takes excellent shooters to bring them down. Hence, the epithet 'sniper' given to stealthy markspersons.

Snipes are 'of least concern' to the IUCN. Sadly, however, hunters are seeing smaller numbers of them every year. The loss is also due to shrinking and increasingly polluted habitats.

**References:** britishbirds.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/article\_files; Wikipedia, becassine des marais; Snipes; Wilson's snipe, All about Birds, Cornell Laboratory; Gallinago gallinago, Animal Diversity Web, U of Michigan Museum of Zoology; Wilson's snipe, Birds of America, Audubon.org; Personal interview with a snipe hunter.

# **Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act**

**By John Sabin, Citizen’s Climate Lobby**  
**Great Lakes Regional Coordinator**

According to the National Audubon Society, “It’s a bird emergency. We need to act on climate. Two-thirds of North America’s birds are at risk of extinction due to climate change.” Beyond voluntary, individual changes in lifestyle, what can be done? There are a number of helpful pieces of legislation under consideration right now in Congress. One of them, actively supported by the Audubon Society, is the BEST Act (HR 2986), which would direct the Department of Defense to develop better energy storage systems. Another piece of legislation, which would have far-reaching benefits throughout our economy, is the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (HR 763). The Energy Innovation Act currently has 75 cosponsors in the US House, including Republican Francis Rooney of Florida.

The Energy Innovation Act will put a steadily rising fee on carbon emissions, returning the revenue from the fee to households in the form of equal monthly dividends. A border adjustment would charge a fee on goods coming from any country that does not have a similar carbon fee, creating an incentive for other countries to follow our lead. This type of policy—a rising fee on carbon emissions with the revenue returned to households—has been endorsed by over 3500 economists (<https://www.econstatement.org>).

The Energy Innovation Act will reduce carbon emissions—by statute—40% in the first 12 years, and 90% by 2050. This puts us in the ballpark of keeping global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This is the mark the IPCC has said we must meet in order to prevent the worst consequences of global warming. EICDA will reduce human deaths from respiratory illnesses and will benefit low and middle-income Americans financially. One economic study (by Regional Economic Models, Inc.) projects that the dividend will stimulate economic growth and create 2.1 million new jobs over the first 10 years. This legislation is revenue-neutral, so it does not grow the size of government and costs the government exactly \$0 in new spending to implement. You can read more about the Energy Innovation Act, including the full text of the bill, at <https://energyinnovationact.org>.



Statements of support for EICDA have been issued by numerous environmental groups, including the Nature Conservancy, the Environmental Defense Fund, Trout Unlimited, Protect Our Winters, the National Wildlife Federation, the Ocean Conservancy, and the Natural Resources Defense Council. In addition, the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act has been endorsed by local chapters of the Audubon Society in Baltimore, MD, Emmaus, PA, Fond du Lac, WI, Grand Rapids, MI, Lawrence, KS, Ogden, IA, and Punta Gordo, FL.

Members of the Black River Audubon Society can help to pass this and similar legislation by contacting their members of Congress and urging them to act on climate. Now is the time for decisive action. Our legislators need to hear from every single person who is concerned about this issue. If we work hard together, we can protect bird species and every other form of life on our blue planet, our common home.

## Applications for Hog Island Scholarships



BRAS is again offering a Hog Island birding camp scholarship to an adult educator or naturalist. The successful applicant will acquire additional skills to educate students and the public about bird conservation, wildlife in general, and the environment. The scholarship will cover tuition, room & board, plus travel expenses.

The goal is that the recipient will follow the examples of others who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors for conservation and environmental education in our communities.

A reservation has been made for the BRAS scholarship winner for the **Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week** camp, although other camps might be possible.

All application materials must be sent to Black River Audubon by February 15, 2020. Individuals interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at [jjablons@lorainccc.edu](mailto:jjablons@lorainccc.edu) or call 440-365-6465 for the application materials. Be sure to leave a message if calling.

For more details and description of the camping experience, go to [hogisland.audubon.org](http://hogisland.audubon.org).

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

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**Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon  
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**“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  
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magazine: \$20/year)**

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**Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8  
Send your check to: National Audubon Society,  
225 Varick Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10014  
Attention: Chance Mueleck**



## More Cover Bird Photos



**Wilson's Snipe**

See Barbara Baudot's story that includes this snipe.

(Photo by Sally Fox)



**House Finch**

Included to show the entire body of the house finch.

(photo by Gina Swindell)



COMMON SNIPE photo by Barbara Baudot

## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

*“Birding Since 1958”*

**P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036**

**440-365-6465**

**[www.blackriveraudubon.org](http://www.blackriveraudubon.org)**