

WINGTIPS



BROWN PELICAN Photo by Rob Swindell at Melbourne, Florida

JANUARY 2020

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January 2020 Program
Tuesday, January 7, 2020, 7 p.m.
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Gulls 101



Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr.

"I'm happy to be presenting my program *Gulls 101* to the good people of Black River Audubon. Gulls are notoriously difficult to identify, but I hope to at least get you looking at them a little closer. Even though I know a bit about them, I'm far from an expert in the field and there is always more to learn. The challenge is to know the particular field marks that are most important, and familiarization with the many plumage cycles helps a lot too. No one will come out of this presentation an expert, but I hope that I can at least give you an idea what to look for. At the very least, I hope you enjoy the photos. Looking forward to seeing everyone there!"

Chuck Slusarczyk is an avid member of the Ohio birding community, and his efforts to assist and educate novice birders via social media are well known, yet he is the first to admit that one never stops learning. He has presented a number of programs to Black River Audubon, always drawing a large, appreciative gathering.

2019 Wellington Area Christmas Bird Count

The **Wellington-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 28, 2019.** Meet at the McDonald's on Rt. 58 at 8:00 a.m. The leader is Paul Sherwood. His telephone number is 419-202-6080. You do not have to be experienced to take part in the event.

January Field Trips

Saturday, January 11, 2020, 9 a.m.

Lorain Harbor to Avon Lake

Meet in the parking lot behind the Jackalope Restaurant.
Sally Fox to lead the trip

Saturday, January 18, 2020

The Wilds

Van trip – registration fee required
Call Paul Sherwood, 419-202-6080

November Field Trip Report

Community Foundation Preserve at Eagle Point

Trip leader, Paul Sherwood, and one other birder made the best of a cold, windy, but sunny Saturday in spotting 17 species and 104 individual birds.

A nice variety of raptors, ducks, sparrows, and the usual backyard feeder birds made up the bulk of the birds added to the birders' tally sheets. The total list included bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, gadwall, mallard, Savannah sparrow, song sparrow, American tree sparrow, red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, blue jay, American crow, white-breasted nuthatch, American robin, house finch, American goldfinch, dark-eyed junco, and ring-billed gull.

BROWN PELICAN

Pelecanus occidentalis

By **Gina Swindell**

One might expect to find a brown pelican when traveling along the coast of Florida, but in Ohio? Jen Brumfield, a naturalist with the Cleveland Metroparks, found the rarity on a breakwall near Wendy

Park in June of 2013 and it hung around through December of 2013. This species of pelican has only been recorded in Ohio a few times as it is typically found on the southeastern and southwestern coasts of North America and on the northerly coasts of South America.

I learned of this “famous” pelican at the September 2019 Black River Audubon meeting when we heard Jen talk about the sighting while giving her presentation, *Urban Birding*. While I have never seen a brown pelican in Ohio, I have seen plenty of them when visiting South Carolina and Florida. Unfortunately, there was a time when they weren’t so easy to find in those states. Several factors led to a near-extinction of this pelican in North America.



Brown Pelican in flight (Photo by Rob Swindell)

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, pelicans were heavily hunted, as it was all the rage to wear pelican plumes on one’s hat or to enhance one’s clothing. Pelican numbers were dwindling fast. In 1903, to help reduce the threat from these plume hunters, President Theodore Roosevelt designated Florida’s Pelican Island as the first-ever National Wildlife Refuge. But that was not enough since hunters were not the brown pelicans only enemy.

After WWI there were food shortages and commercial fisherman blamed pelicans for eating their livelihood which led to the slaughtering of pelicans by the thousands, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. But studies proved that brown pelicans were not a threat to the fishing industry. These studies did help curb the slaughter but the near final blow was the introduction of pesticides in the U.S.

The widespread use of DDT weakened the eggshells for many species, including the brown pelican, which led to massive reproductive failure. By 1970, it was declared to be an endangered

species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 1972, DDT was banned by the Environmental Protection Agency. As a result, affected avian populations began to rebound. However, several devastated species needed help from conservation and reintroduction programs. Thanks to the efforts of many, the brown pelican was officially removed from the federal Endangered Species list in 2009. However, they still suffer from human actions.

Irresponsible fishermen cause the death of hundreds of pelicans in Florida each year when these birds become entangled in fishing gear. Human activity near nesting sights can cause pelicans to abandon their nests or to panic and accidentally crush their own eggs since they incubate by standing on them. One of the largest threats of all comes from oil spills. Once a bird's feathers are soaked in oil they are no longer waterproof, which can lead to drowning.

Due to climate change, 2013 might not be the last time Northeast Ohio sees a brown pelican. In fact, we might one day see a lot of them. Brown pelicans are projected to lose 54 percent of their current winter ranges by 2080, according to Audubon's climate model. This loss will likely cause them to expand their winter range, if they can find food, up the coast, and east toward the Great Lakes. Models project their arrival as soon as 2050.



Brown Pelican Range Map (from Wikipedia)

While birders would love to see brown pelicans fishing off the coast of Lake Erie, it would mean they are on the move due to the climatic disruption of their normal winter range. I'd rather make the trip to Florida to see them.

AFRICAN SACRED IBIS

Threskiornis aethiopicus

By **Barbara Baudot**

Resting on the bank of a small lagoon, after some hours trudging around the marshes of the Rhone Delta, I unexpectedly glimpsed a very large ibis. The long descending crescent-shaped bill was familiar, but not its other characteristics - its white body feathers, black rump plumes, and black featherless head and neck. Local wildlife officials identified it as a stray African sacred ibis, a migrant drawn to the swampy waters of the delta.

All 28 species of ibises are long-legged wading birds belonging to the family *Threskiornithidae*. They inhabit shallow inland and coastal marshes, riverbanks, and lagoons in warm regions around the globe. There are three species in North America, including the white ibis *Eudocimus albus*, inhabiting fresh and salt-water marshes of the south east and described in great detail by J.J. Audubon; the white-faced ibis *Plegadis chihi*, residing in the inland and coastal wetlands of the western half of the US; and the glossy ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, the most wide ranging of ibises, living on the east coast of the U.S. as well as Europe and Africa.

Ibises native to Europe include the glossy ibis and the northern bald ibis *Geronticus eremite*. Indigenous to central Europe until the 17th century, over-hunting has caused the virtual extinction of the northern bald ibis. Thanks to a European Union project, the species is being reintroduced in central Europe but remains one of the world's most endangered species. Recently, small flocks of sacred ibis, native to Africa and the Middle East, roam France's southern Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts.

Ibises usually travel in flocks probing mud and shallow waters to feed on small amphibians, crustaceans, fish, and insects. In villages and suburban regions, they are scavengers probing fields and garbage dumps for refuse and dung; a fact that once endeared them to the ancient Egyptians but is disgusting to most people today.

Although genuinely social, these birds are monogamous and become highly territorial during breeding season. Most nest on lower branches of trees and bushes near wetlands, often sharing their roosts with spoonbills and herons. They vary in size, measuring up to 30 inches in length and weighing between 2.5 to 6 lbs. Both parents incubate their clutch of 2-4 eggs for about 3 weeks. The young fledge

between 14-21 days but depend on parents for food until their flight feathers develop in 35-48 days.



African Sacred Ibis feeding in shallow water (Photo by Barbara Baudot)

Historically, ibises, especially the sacred ibis, have suffered greatly in encounters with humans. White ibises are a common target for hunters in the United States. The generally silent sacred ibis was a common bird in swampy areas all along the Nile for millennia. As early as 1100 BC it is recorded that villagers valued them because they feasted on disease-bearing snails infesting fishponds and devoured refuse and excrement. Today, they are shot for feeding on carrion, dung, and refuse.

Although known to ancient civilizations in Greece, Rome, and especially Africa, sacred ibises were unfamiliar to the western world until Napoleon's army invaded Egypt in 1798 and returned home with large numbers of sacred ibis mummies.

History tells how ancient Egyptians worshiped the sacred ibis as a manifestation of Thoth, the god of wisdom, truth, magic, and writing. Images of these ibises were used in hieroglyphic writings and as amulets and statues representing Thoth, who possessed a human body and the head of an ibis. Particularly during the Late and Ptolemaic Periods (700 BC until 30 BC) sacred ibises were mummified as votive offerings to Thoth, believing they would be on a direct line to the afterlife.

Millions of birds were killed, desiccated with salts, and covered with oils and resins. The wrapped birds were sealed in large clay pots and placed in vast crypts near temples dedicated to Thoth. The catacombs at Tuna el-Gebel were estimated to contain 4 million sacred

ibis mummies. It is unlikely that the numbers of birds supplied to venerate Thoth all came from the wild. This fact suggests that industrial bird farms already existed in ancient Egypt.

Sacred ibises are now extinct in Egypt. The last sighting was in 1891. Large numbers of sacred ibises still reside in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. Migrants from Africa and escaping zoo residents appear in small flocks along the coasts of Western Europe. Considered an invasive species, France has initiated efforts to cull their small populations. The French society for the protection of birds (LPO) opposes this action. They consider the sacred ibis a valuable bird that is inoffensive to other birds. Sadly, the numbers of ibises in the US is also declining as the result of hunting. To what end?

References: Ibis, Thoth, and Sacred African Ibis, in Wikipedia; Thomas, Janet, "The Role of the Sacred Ibis in Egypt, March 2013; Viney, Steven, "Endangered Species: Egypt's African Sacred Ibis, December, 2011; 'Les Especies exotique envahissantes,' L'Oiseau, Autumn, 2019.

Who was Jim Vardaman?

By Tammy Martin

I recently read Noah Stryker's *Birding Without Borders*, the account of his 2015 worldwide big year (an excellent book!). In the introduction, Noah describes what constitutes a "big year", mentioning several notable birders who have completed one (Kenn Kaufman, Greg Miller, Sandy Komito, and Lyn Barber). I'd already read their books. But then, he named the casual birder/businessman, Jim Vardaman. Who? I promptly searched Amazon and ordered *Call Collect, Ask for Birdman*, Jim's 1979 big year account.

Think back to 1979 . . . no Internet, no social media, no cell phones, no eBird!! Can you imagine? Crazy! In the late 70s, the North American big year record stood at 669, out of a possible 816 species. In comparison, today's record stands at 836, out of a possible 1112 species, due to yearly splits/additions and the recent inclusion of Hawaii into the search area. Vardaman intended to break the then-current record and reach the 700 mark.

To accomplish this, Jim assembled a Strategy Council of notable birders and ornithologists (including a young Kenn Kaufman) to help plan and assist with his year, hired guides, created a newsletter to inform monetary supporters, and encouraged others to call 'collect' to report rarities. He always birded with a witness (paid guide/fellow birder) to verify sightings, even signing his official checklist, a copy of which appears in the book. Multiple trips were taken to Alaska (twice

to Attu Island), Texas, Florida, California, and Arizona, plus numerous pelagic excursions (Maine, California, Florida, North Carolina, and Nova Scotia).

While reading Vardaman's book, I ran across many odd bird names, that have now been changed/split/lumped/etc., such as Wied's crested flycatcher (brown-crested flycatcher), Coues' flycatcher (greater pewee), gray-breasted jay (Mexican jay), and northern oriole (split into Baltimore and Bullock's orioles). Jim held nothing back, travel-wise, describing the rustic conditions on Attu (18 days without a shower), sleeping in rental cars for early morning birding (Pontiac Firebird got low marks), and mentioning bouts of seasickness on the rough pelagic trips. He also compiled a list of statistics: trip costs, miles traveled, time away from family, etc.

So, how'd he do? Jim broke the existing record, but finished the year with 699 species, one shy of the 700 mark. All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed *Call Collect, Ask for Birdman*. Check it out!

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 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.

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(but including Wingtips) is \$15/Year**

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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.”**

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



A Sandy Ridge Anniversary Party December 3, 2019



One of two anniversary cakes at the meeting and party
(Photo by Jim Jablonski)

Twenty years! How could it be? It seems the best birding location in Lorain County just opened. That's the case until we start remembering all the wonderful times there over the years.

Remembering - that is exactly what 76 Black River Audubon Society members and their guests did on Tuesday, December 3 at the park's Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center. It helped that Naturalist Tim Fairweather (it's always fair weather at Sandy Ridge, of course), who has been with the park since it opened October 16, 1999, presented his selection of photos from that first day to the present.

The park's metamorphosis from a largely barren field with ponds to today's natural wonderland was astounding as Tim narrated the series of images while commenting on incidents at the park, both humorous and educational, throughout the years.

This member of the audience was taken back to his first park visit when, after clearing the woods, he looked out over the expanse of water and saw great white herons for the first time in his 60 years! Here in Lorain County of all places! How could that be?

Every other person in the audience must have had similar thoughts about their favorite birding location. Black River Audubon's sincere congratulations and thanks go to the Metro Parks and Tim Fairweather!

JJ



AFRICAN SACRED IBIS photo by Barbara Baudot

BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

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