

WINGTIPS



MOURNING DOVE photo by Debbie Parker

Or Current Residents	MARCH 2018	
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March 2018 Program

Tuesday, March 6, 2018, 7 p.m.
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Teressa Nemeth, Ohio State Master Gardener The Bird Garden



Teressa Nemeth, an OSU extension Master Gardener, will present “The Bird Garden,” a program designed to help you create a landscape that will increase the bird activity in your yard naturally. Teressa will recommend plants that attract the most species of birds.

Ms. Nemeth, a Black River Audubon Hog Island scholarship recipient, and her husband Edward maintain a backyard for wildlife, site-certified by the state of Ohio Department of Natural Resources. They live in the city of Lorain.

Great Response of Bluebird Volunteers

The BRAS Bluebird Program lost many of its monitors following the 2017 season. When Penny Brandau, chairperson of the program put out a call for volunteers BRAS members and others rallied to the cause – 22 new volunteers have been added! Here is Penny’s thank you to all who have worked in the program in the past and will in the future, along with her report of the program’s 2017 success. JJ

We are very appreciative of the additional volunteers who have offered to help as trail monitors in 2018 and for those who have volunteered to work with us on trail maintenance. The computer data entry helpers have made a huge contribution to bluebird conservation also! Thank you to each of you who have supported the Bluebird program in so many different ways!

Black River Audubon Society’s bluebird program had a really great nesting season in 2017. There has been a remarkable increase in the number of fledglings from our trails and also from many private bluebird landlords in our area! In 2016 the total number of native *(The rest of Penny’s article can be found on the inside back cover.)*

March Field Trip

Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area (Wyandot County)

Saturday, March 17, 2018, Noon until dark

Meet at Pond #27 parking lot

Paul Sherwood to lead

January Field Trip

Lorain Harbor to Avon Lake

By **Tammy Martin**



Black River Audubon joined forces again with Western Cuyahoga Audubon for our annual lakeshore outing in sunny, but chilly weather. Warm south winds had blown the night before, clearing out much of the nearby lake ice, but the Black River and harbor remained frozen solid. As thirty-three birders assembled, we all enjoyed scope view of a peregrine

Next we walked part of the impoundment dike to get a better view of Lake Erie's open water, where we found both common and red-breasted mergansers and common golden-eye. On cue, a small flock of common redpoll flew by. Of course, plenty of ring-billed and herring gulls were quickly noted and ignored by the group. While leaving the dike, we met up with ten members of the Blackbrook Audubon chapter from Ashtabula, Lake, and Geauga Counties. I was thrilled to see their VP Debbi Schuster, who'd been my roommate in Ecuador last September.

A patch of open water, viewable from the west bank of the Black River, was our next birding stop. To reach it, we carpooled across the bridge and fished our way through the fence opening, a route unknown to most participants. This area of warm water discharge was loaded with mergansers, but also added mallards, redheads, Canada goose, American coots, and lesser scaup to our list. Then, a lone snow bunting flew over and disappeared into the grasses, followed by a soaring red-tailed hawk.

After we'd exhausted the Black River, we headed east toward Sheffield Lake tallying European starling, rock pigeon, mourning dove, house sparrow, and American crow in route. At the boat dock, we added bufflehead, great black-backed gull, and bald eagle; then, we drove to Avon Lake's Miller Park, just west of the power plant. Here we birded

from the upper park area down to the pier, adding more new species for the day: greater scaup, pied-billed grebe, lesser black-backed gull, canvasback, and tufted titmouse. Two special finds of the day included an energetic long-tailed duck (found by Patty McKelvey) that swam right by and an Iceland gull (spotted by me). Well done! After most participants departed, I birded a little longer with my Blackbrook friends, helping them view the Iceland gull (a lifer for several), adding a pair of double-crested cormorants to our day list of 30 species. Not a bad turnout (birders and birds) for our January outing. Join us next month at Castalia pond, with Paul Sherwood as leader.

Firelands/Black River Audubon Societies Joint Event
“The Messenger” at Ritter Library
Wednesday, March 14, 2018, 6:30 p.m.



The Messenger, a powerful documentary about the drastic decline in songbirds over the last 50 years will be shown March 14th at Vermilion’s Ritter Public Library, 5680 Liberty Avenue.

The visually stunning film, which features slow motion scenes of warblers and other small birds in flight, will explore the various reasons for the decline from window collisions, cats, habitat loss and the new problem of neonicotinoid pesticides.

BRAS, Firelands Audubon and Ritter Public Library will co-sponsor the event. There will be an intermission for discussion, refreshments, etc. The showing is free and open to the public.

Reference: “The Messenger: Our Movie Review” in allaboutbirds.org, November 12, 2015.

A Birder's Diary: Dinosaurs and Birds

By Carol Leininger



Dinosaurs did not disappear from the planet 66 million years ago. They are alive and well as birds. Huge sauropods, horned dinosaurs, and duck-billed dinosaurs all had feathers. According to Carl Zimmer, there are three theories as to how this came about – (1) scales frayed and split to

produce feathers, (2) birds did not descend from dinosaurs, they had a common ancestor deep in the past, and (3) all dinosaurs had hair-like filaments and some lost them later in evolution.

Feathers in dinosaurs were for insulation not flight. They were also very colorful, possibly to attract a mate. Most early feathers looked more like fluff made up of thousands of hollow hair-like filaments. These strands grew longer and started to branch, forming tufts or down, then barbs, and still later asymmetrical vanes.

Today over twenty species of dinosaurs found in China have feathers. Some have hair like fuzz covering their bodies, others have porcupine-style quills, some have gliders with full wings, and still others have complex, asymmetrically vaned feathers like modern birds capable of flight.

Archaeopteryx, considered the first true bird, was discovered in Germany in 1877. It had contour feathers like modern birds with asymmetrical vanes, but it also had many reptilian features such as a boney tail, claws on the wings and teeth. According to Stephan Brusatte, “Birds are dinos just like bats are a type of mammal that can fly. Birds are a type of theropod like T. rex, allosaurus, and spinosaurus, but much smaller, nimbler, and brainier.”

Brusatte also points out, “There was no moment when a dinosaur became a bird, no big bang when a T. rex turned into a chicken. It was a journey.” The transition from dinosaur to bird took tens of millions of years. It began with upright posture leading to bipedal posture and simple filamentous feathers, through many other evolved features such as air sacs with lungs, small wings, vaned feathers and enlarged brain, enlarged wings that could fold against the body, a shortened tail and, according to some theorists, warm-bloodedness.

Many new discoveries are occurring all the time. Footprints in coalmines tell us about dinosaur behavior. Pigment sacs in fossilized

feathers tell us about their colors. Just recently a dinosaur tail with complex feather detail was found embedded in a piece of amber. A new ostrich-like dinosaur was discovered from fossil remains that had been stored in an old museum collection. Not everything we learn comes from digs!

References: “Taking Wing” by Stephan Brusatte in Scientific American, January 2017; “The Evolution of Feathers” by Carl Zimmer, National Geographic, February 2011.

MOURNING DOVE

Zenaida macroura

By Cathy Priebe



How can one not love the mourning dove? It has such a sweet face and a very lovely, almost eerie but recognizable song. Every year, mourning doves nest in and around my backyard, so I have grown quite familiar and fond of this very common, pigeon-like bird.

Both sexes are a soft, demure gray-brown with rosy blush underparts, long trim tail, with black spots on the upper wing. Their head, small in comparison to their body, is about the size of a grackle.

Mourning doves are currently one of the most abundant species in North America and the second most recorded bird in breeding bird surveys, according to Jim McCormac, author of *Birds of Ohio*. They are also the leading game bird, with over 70 million birds hunted annually. Luckily, they are prolific breeders and are able to repopulate despite being hunted by man and other predators.

One of the reasons they have reproduced so well over the years is due to habitat changes brought on by farming and land developments. Doves prefer open pastures and urban settings and generally stay away from heavily forested areas.

The female and male build their simple stick nest together, usually in bushes, small trees or sometimes in man-made objects such as hanging baskets or window ledges. Nests are often reused or built on top of other nests. They also take turns incubating the clutch, usually two white eggs, and both feed the young. When they are first hatched, the nestlings are fed “crop milk,” generated inside the dove’s crop, and later fed regurgitated seeds, berries and insects. Doves do migrate in the fall and spring, but are

primarily found in Ohio all year. They are seedeaters and love to graze on the ground underneath backyard feeders.

Here are some more facts about mourning doves:

*The male will often stand on the female's back (while nest building) and give her sticks for the nest.

*They generally mate for life and can breed up to five clutches a year, often starting in late winter in milder weather.

*Many are very tame and approachable except in areas where hunted.

*They are often the first bird heard or seen at sunrise and the last at dusk.

*Doves hunker down when a predator flies in and will often irrupt in a flurry of feathers as they fly to escape.

*Doves will often sit on telephone wires in pairs, but will also flock in very large numbers in fields.

*They are a very swift and agile flier in the air, but have trouble landing on branches, sometimes making several attempts before safely perching.

*Those not familiar with the dove's song often mistaken it's cooing for an owl.

References: *Birds of Ohio*, by Jim McCormac; *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, by David Allen Sibley; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion*, by Pete Dunne.

MUTE SWAN

Cygnus olor

By **Barbara Baudot**



Watch them streak across the sky, their large wings beating steadily in slow motion; or gaze while they glide peacefully across a pond, their necks in elegant “S” curves and the wings slightly above their backs! Observe their courtship, heads bobbing and meeting face on with their necks sculpting hearts!

This enchanting species has been associated with love, inspiration, transformation, gracefulness, peace, and beauty, as well as death and the Otherworld. No other bird symbolizes and inspires so many legends as mute swans. Consider for example:

According to Greek myths, Zeus becomes a swan to approach his love Leda. Apollo is born of that union. In German myth, the Valkyries, warrior goddesses, turned into swans to accompany dying heroes to Valhalla. Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake ballet portrays love, betrayal and

triumph. And, Hans Christian Andersen's "Ugly Duckling" is a cygnet ostracized because he is ugly and awkward until he matures into a majestic cob.

Mute swans are among the world's 10 largest birds; primarily sedentary; and prolific nesters. They migrate when their wetlands freeze. Pairs breed yearly over their 20-30 year lifespans. Courtship begins after two years of age and nesting comes later. They mate for life. Together they build their nests with aquatic plants on islands, or raised mounds of vegetation bordering wetlands. Five to seven eggs are incubated for 38 days. The male cobs fiercely protect their brood and claim four to ten acres of territory. Survival rates are high,

Mute swans were intentionally brought to the U.S. as decorative birds beginning in the mid-1800's. The legends, symbols and their noble beauty inspired this trade. Their flying feathers clipped, the swans embellished ponds of private estates, parks, and zoos. Over time some escaped and rapidly populated wetlands in the Northeast and Midwest.

Today, in states on the Atlantic and Mississippi flyways, mute swans are unwelcome vagrants reputed for aggressive behavior towards wildlife and people, destruction of submerged aquatic vegetation, displacement of native wildlife species and degradation of water quality.

In Europe, the mute swan's feeding habits are found to help other waterfowl forage because they stir up unreachable vegetation deep in the water. One mature swan weighing 28 pounds consumes up to nine pounds of submerged aquatic vegetation daily. These same habits in the U.S. are considered destructive to native waterfowl and deleterious to efforts to restore the native, migratory trumpeter swan, whose populations were decimated in the early 20th century.

Until 2003, mute swans were protected in the U.S. under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act by court order. However, in 2005, the U.S. Department of the Interior officially declared them an "invasive, non-native, unprotected exotic species" because of their increasing numbers and adverse effects on native waterfowl and ecosystems.

Mute swans are protected in some areas of the U.S. by local laws, for example in Connecticut. The goal of Ohio's swan management plan is to rid public wetlands of adult mute swans by humanitarian lethal and non-lethal methods.

References: "Mute Swan life history" in allaboutbirds.org/guide; "Mute swan" and other articles in Wikipedia; greekmythology.wikia.com/wiki/Swan; **Ohio Swan Management Plan**; **Atlantic Flyway Mute Swan Management Plan** prepared by the Snow Goose, Brant and Swan Committee, July 2003; **North American Bird Conservation Initiative, State of the Birds, 2014 Report.**

The Year of the Bird: An Ironic Centennial

By **Jim Jablonski**, *Editor*



On the last day of January, ten thousand Audubon chapter leaders and members joined in a Telephone Town Hall led by National Audubon's President and CEO David Yarnold. One would have thought just a few years ago, that in 2018 the occasion would have been a total celebration of Migratory Bird Treaty Act's Centennial.

The U.S. Senate ratified the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, or MBTA, the first, and one of the most significant conservation treaties, in 1918. Since then it has proven to be an enormously successful international initiative. It has even been extended to include other countries, Mexico, Japan, and Russia, and has drawn bipartisan and nearly total American support throughout its 100-year life. Currently the treaty protects more than 1,000 species, many of which are unprotected by any other means, while still allowing hunting of certain regulated game birds.

Now to celebrate the MBTA, the National Geographic Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Birdlife International and National Audubon Society have declared 2018 "*The Year of the Bird*". Unfortunately and unexpectedly until last year, another necessary purpose of the commemoration is to draw attention to proposed attacks on birds and the environment by the current administration in Washington.

The largest threat to birds today does not come from hunters but rather human development within the environment such as power lines, waste pits, weak regulation of wind power, and other environmental conservation problems.

However, this past December, the federal administration issued a legal opinion that the MBTA does not apply to the "incidental" deaths of migratory birds caused by industry but only to the intentional hunting and poaching of birds. This opinion would reverse decades of progress in protecting birds. In other words, the Trump Administration is proposing during "*The Year of the Bird*" that we end its effectiveness after a century of success.

With more than one million members and hundreds of chapters nationwide, the Audubon Society is in a position, along with other organizations, to make a significant political impact. Black River

Audubon Society has already signed on to National’s letter to Congress protesting any changes to the effectiveness of the MBTA.

However, Audubon’s million-plus members should respond individually to the threat to the MBTA by calling and/or writing their Representatives and Senators. This has been a well-supported bipartisan issue for nearly a century. It should still be so today.

To send letters to your representatives go to Audubon.org and click on the “Take Action” key.

References: “Telephone Town Hall Recording and MBTA Action” and “100 years of protecting birds, but more work remains” by John Nelson” in Audubon.org

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Attention: Chance Mueleck

fledglings, were 1,891 including house wrens, tree swallows, black capped chickadees, eastern bluebirds, tufted titmouse and white breasted nuthatch. This year that total was **2,234!** 703 of those new young fledglings were our favorite bluebirds too!

We especially want to thank the bluebird trail monitors who faithfully checked nest boxes, changed out nests, counted eggs and young, removed house sparrows, put up sparrow spookers, cleaned out blowflies, took notes and walked another mile, week after week, from early April through August. Their dedication and love of bluebirds is truly inspiring! They have made our world more beautiful and we owe them our deepest gratitude.

The detailed weekly trail nesting data from their notes is submitted to Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Nestwatch program and becomes a HUGE amount of valuable information for research studies. Our program has 31 bluebird trails, a total of 454 bluebird boxes and 33 volunteers who faithfully manage those nesting boxes. 100% of their data was submitted to Nestwatch this year! Many thanks also to the eight volunteers who helped enter all of this data on their computers into Nestwatch. That work was completed in record time with their help! Kudos!

The Ohio Bluebird Society is also given a summary report of the total numbers of fledglings per species for their yearly statewide tabulations by county. Last year Lorain County had the second highest number of bluebird fledglings reported in the state! The numbers haven't been completed by OBS for 2017 yet so we will wait to see how Lorain County compares in number of bluebird fledglings to other counties in Ohio. ***By Penny Brandau***



The first of the brood. Photo by Jim Jablonski at High Meadows Metro Park, May 29, 2014



MUTE SWAN photo by Barbara Baudot

BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

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