

# WINGTIPS



GREATER FLAMINGO Photo by Barbara Baudot

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MARCH 2020

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**March 2020 Program**  
**Tuesday, March 3, 7 p.m.**  
**Carlisle Visitor Center**

**Kestrels in the Hood**



**Larry Wilson, Walter Gachuk, Najada Davis (l-r)**

Listen to Walt Gachuk, Najada Davis, and Larry Wilson describe the amazing tale of a pair of kestrels nesting and successfully fledging five chicks within sight of the West Side market in Cleveland!

Walt Gachuk had not been involved with birds for thirty years before he returned to his long-ago interest for this project. He has worked in the construction industry for forty years. This webcam project is the first opportunity he has had in helping wildlife, but it was a memorable one for himself and his family.

Najada Davis is a photographer, movie producer, and film and media arts major at Cleveland State University.

Larry Wilson, a member of Black River Audubon for seven years, and has headed the BRAS kestrel program for six in addition to serving as the speaker program director. He is in his sixth year as a board member.

**March Field Trip**  
**Saturday, March 21, 2020, 9 a.m.**  
8701 Lakeshore Blvd., Cleveland  
**Chuck Slusarczyk, Jr. to lead**

**Wellington Christmas Bird Count**

A pleasant, partly cloudy day greeted the participants in this year's Wellington Christmas Bird Count, held January 11, 2020. A total of 3,929 individual birds were sighted, representing 47 species.

Canada goose 569, mallard 29, canvasback 2, redhead 4, ring-necked duck 32, bufflehead 4, hooded merganser 7, ruddy duck 15, rock pigeon 138, mourning dove 126, American coot 14, Cooper's hawk 1, bald eagle 1, red-shoulder hawk 10, red-tailed hawk 26, eastern screech owl 1, barred owl 2, red-bellied woodpecker 19, downy woodpecker 27, pileated woodpecker 3, northern flicker 8, American kestrel 14, northern shrike 1, blue jay 146, American crow 55, horned lark 10, black-capped chickadee 102, tufted titmouse 14, white-breasted nuthatch 30, brown creeper 1, Carolina wren 8, eastern bluebird 27, American robin 6, European starling 2,041, house finch 3, American goldfinch 14, chipping sparrow 4, American tree sparrow 26, white-crowned sparrow 5, song sparrow 17, eastern towhee 1, common grackle 1, yellow-rumped warbler 2, northern cardinal 51, house sparrow 257.

**BRAS Board Member Applications Requested**

Black River Audubon Society, serving the Lorain County area, is seeking passionate and energetic board members to help protect wildlife and their habitats through science, education, advocacy and conservation.

The Black River Audubon Society board provides nature speakers, conservation programming, wildlife field trips, and scholarship opportunities to its members and the community. Specific skills that we are looking to add to our board include previous nonprofit or board experience, fundraising, event planning, strong community connections, and a passion for birds and conservation.

If interested, please contact Jim Jablonski at [jjjablon@aol.com](mailto:jjjablon@aol.com) or at 440.610.8626 for a Black River Audubon Society Board Member Application.

## Ohio Young Birders Scholarship Awarded

As a partner project to its adult Hog Island scholarship program, Black River Audubon Society has awarded its first official Ohio Young Birders (OYB) Scholarship to that organization's Helena Souffrant of Cleveland. The 16-year old, a five-year member of OYB, has wide experience as a volunteer at Cleveland Metroparks and Holden Forest, and has taken a college-comparable laboratory research class among other activities.

Ms. Souffrant will attend Hog Island's Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens camp, June 21-26. Hog Island is a National Audubon camp and conference site that has operated since the 1930's. It has become famous for its presence in the area of Dr. Steve Kress's world-famous puffin restoration project.

Black River Audubon plans to award an annual scholarship to a member of the Northeast Ohio Chapter of OYB.

The winner of the adult scholarship to Hog Island's Educator's Week camp will be determined by early March, too late to be announced in this Wingtips edition.

## GREATER FLAMINGO

*Phoenicopterus roseus*

By **Barbara Baudot**

Most people are acquainted with flamingos—“birds with wings of fire.” We see them on post cards and posters, and in zoos, marine parks, and botanical gardens—well beyond their native ranges. Notably, the Cleveland Zoo has a small flock. Maybe you have seen the large pink plastic replicas, gracing lawns throughout the US. Sharing this familiarity, I was somewhat unimpressed when I first saw a large flock feeding in a shallow, salty lagoon on the Rhone delta in Southern France. But with a little research I learned that they were far more than fancy tropical water birds. In fact, they are not water birds at all. Their closest morphological relative is the grebe with which they share a common, ancient ancestor. Despite their watery habitats neither is a true water bird.

There are six species of flamingos, four in the western hemisphere, or new world, and two in the old world's southern Eurasia and Africa. Until 2014, American and greater flamingos were classified as the same species. Then researchers reclassified them as individual species of the same genus. The greater flamingo has the largest and most

widespread population. Its range spans southern Europe, the Middle East, south Asia and parts of Africa. The American flamingo is concentrated in southern Florida, the Caribbean, Venezuela and the Galapagos Islands.

Flamingos are unusual in many ways. Given their ungainly appearance it is surprising that flamingos are strong swimmers and powerful fliers. Many are migratory and regularly fly short distances to seek new food sources and nesting grounds. Their flying speed can reach 35 miles per hour.

Normally considered tropical birds, flamingos survive in temperate climates providing access to salt-water shallows and food. (Small flocks of greater flamingos have settled in the Netherlands and far eastern Siberia.)

Aside from the intensity of the feather colors, and slight differences in size, both American and greater flamingos are genetically nearly identical. They are more or less five feet tall, with deeper or lighter pink feathers, thick down-bent pink and black tipped bills, long slender pink legs, graceful necks, large wings, and short tails. The wing coverts of both birds are orangey-red while their primary and secondary flight feathers are black. Males are larger than females. Chicks and juveniles have white and gray-brown feathers and long brown legs until they are about three years old.

The word "flamingo" comes from the Spanish and Latin word "flamenco" which means 'fire' referring to the birds' bright reddish feathers. But flamingos' reddish or pink feathers are not nature's indelible gifts. The strength of a flamingo's coloration comes from its diet. The pink and reddish colors come from eating the carotenoid pigments contained in the algae and crustaceans they feed on. To keep the plumage of captive flamingos from fading, zoos have added carotenoids to their food. Amounts of carotenoids in flamingo foods vary around the world, explaining different intensities of pink in their feathers.

Flamingos are highly social and thus uncomfortable when separated from their groups. Colonies of flamingos inhabit shallow saline wetlands and are often seen standing on one leg. It is not clear why they assume this position. Some say it is the way they rest. Others say it's a way to preserve body heat and energy. To locate their food, flamencos stir up organic matter on the floor of the shallows with their webbed feet. Their bent bills are held upside down in the mud. As they move their muddy-blackened heads from side to side, the comb-like structures inside their bills separate food from the water.

Mating generally occurs at the same time for all members of a flock. There is no fixed breeding season. The timing coincides with rainy seasons to insure materials for nest building and adequate food. Within the colony, flamingos are monogamous with a high tolerance for infidelity. Their elaborate courtship rituals include marching, preening, and head turning, lifting and lowering in synchrony. These rituals are surprisingly reminiscent of grebes with their graceful neck moves, posturing and tandem advances. Both partners participate in building their volcano shaped nest of mud, stones and sticks. A single egg is deposited in the nest. Parents share the initial raising of the chick. The first 7 days both parents feed it crop milk, which comes from their upper digestive systems. This dark red milk provides the chick fat and protein. Thereafter the chick joins all the other newborns in the colony's "crèche" to be raised by groups of adult flamingos.

There is a long history of troubled relations between humans and flamingos. For the Romans, flamingo tongues were a culinary delicacy. Hunters and poachers bagged flamingos in the Rhone delta from the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century. And from the time the Europeans first sighted flamingos in the New World their numbers declined until by 1900 few were left.

In 1950 the American flamingo began a comeback. Today there are about 200,000 American flamingos and nearly 125,000 greater flamingos in southern France. Worldwide, greater flamingos number 700,000. Neither of these two species is endangered but habitat loss, poachers, and climate change remain significant threats.

**References:** American, Greater Flamingos, Flamingos Flamingos of the Caribbean, in Wikipedia; JJ Audubon, Birds of America, Flamingo@Wilfredo Rodriguez; Flamingos, Madeleine Dubon/Smithsonian National; [Fun Facts and Trivia About Flamingos - The Spruce; britannica.com/animal/flamingo-bird](http://Fun Facts and Trivia About Flamingos - The Spruce; britannica.com/animal/flamingo-bird)

## COMMON RAVEN

*Corvus corax*

By **Gina Swindell**

When people think of ravens, they might think of the Baltimore Ravens, the NFL team that was "stolen" from Cleveland in 1995, or they might recall the dark and dramatic poem, "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe. However, when I think of ravens, I am thinking about the common raven. If you don't know much about them, you likely have, at the very least, heard how smart they are. Or, maybe you're familiar with the dark folklore that surrounds them or the ancient tales from Greek mythology. For me, it wasn't until we met our first raven that I

become enamored. In 2017, my husband and I drove to Las Vegas and back for our 20<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. While passing through Texas, the raven was the second life bird that we encountered (the first was a scissor-tailed flycatcher). I wondered how I would recognize a raven from a crow should we come across one. It turns out that it's quite obvious.

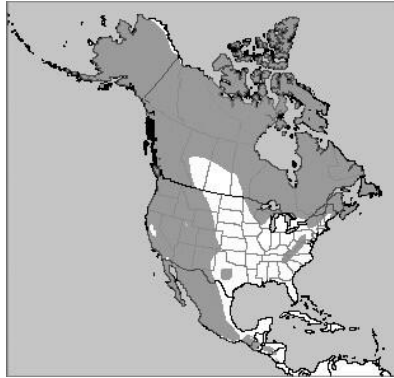
Immediately noticeable is their MASSIVE beak. Also, after seeing a few in different areas along the way, I also noticed that they were mostly loners. They were occasionally with another raven, but mostly they were on their own—whereas American crows (which are very similar to the raven) are often in groups. Also notable was their overall large size. I have since learned that they have about a four-foot wingspan and can measure about two feet from head to tail. They are listed as the largest passerine in North America, likened to a red-tailed hawk in size. They have beautiful, thick feathers around their neck, called hackles which was most apparent when the raven was vocalizing. And, if you look closely while they are in flight you may notice, as I did, that a raven's tail is a wedge shape compared to the rounded tail of the crow. Also, similar to crows, these big beautiful birds are loaded with personality.

While at the Painted Forest, whether they were curious or maybe just hungry, ravens came right up to us, hopping along like a comic book villain and looking at us as if to say, “Are you sure you don't have something for me?” I have seen a few different videos over the last couple of years showing them playing in snow—either rolling down a rooftop or rolling down a car windshield onto the hood and repeating the behavior over and over. There are also stories of juveniles playing keep away with sticks, among other entertaining things. Although, not everyone finds them so endearing.

Ravens can be seen as pests and were once culled since it was thought that they posed a threat to domestic animals as well as game birds. “Ravens disappeared from much of the east and midwest before 1900. In recent decades they have been expanding their range again, especially in the northeast, spreading south into formerly occupied areas,” according to National Geographic.

Their expansion is due in part to their omnivorous, opportunistic diet and their ability to adapt to just about every environment. In fact, they are doing so well in the desert that it is of concern to the well-being of the desert tortoise. Environmentalists are working on ways to protect them against raven predation.





[abcbirds.org/bird/common-raven/](http://abcbirds.org/bird/common-raven/)

I could go on and on about the common raven, especially in regard to their personality. If you've come across a raven in your travels, I bet that you have found it interesting. If you haven't, take a moment to read up on them. I think that you will find them to be a fascinating species. Happy birding!

**References:** [beautyofbirds.com/commonravens](http://beautyofbirds.com/commonravens); [national geographic.com/animals/birds](http://nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds); [Audubon.org.field-guide/bird/common-raven](http://Audubon.org.field-guide/bird/common-raven); [Nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/03/ravens-animals-evolution-species](http://Nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/03/ravens-animals-evolution-species); [mental.floss.com/article/53295/10-fascinating-facts-about-ravens](http://mental.floss.com/article/53295/10-fascinating-facts-about-ravens); [allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common\\_Raven/overview](http://allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Raven/overview)

## **A Black River Audubon Book Review**

**By Jim Jablonski**

Some book lovers turn their pastime into an obsession, buying books before finishing what they're reading. Invariably, this sort of reader owns dozens, even hundreds, of partially read, dust collecting volumes.

To be honest, I'm one such collector. However, I do return to neglected books now and again. A few days ago, I came across Colin Tudge's *The Bird*, which had stood on my bookshelf for years. Once I began it again, I immediately wondered why I ever put it down.

The book is amazing! Extremely readable, it still manages to pack new information into every paragraph. In comparing the mammalian larynx to the syrinx of birds, the author points out that a mammal's vocal system converts only three percent of the expended energy into sound. However, when birds force air past their syrinx, one hundred percent of the energy is translated into sound. Even a small bird can fill the neighborhood with its song. As Tudge claims:



***“If Pavarotti had had a syrinx, no opera would have been safe. Covent Garden, La Scala, and the Metropolitan Opera House would surely have been shaken to their foundations.”***

The example demonstrates one of Tudge’s purposes, which is to compare birds with mammals, including humans, in order that we more fully understand both animal classes.

You can’t go wrong in reading **The Bird: A Natural History of Who Birds Are, Where They Came From, and How They Live** by Colin Tudge. The book, although written in 2008, is still available online. I’m actually glad I didn’t finish it years ago because reading it now is so enjoyable!

## **Migratory Bird Treaty Act under Attack By the Government**

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed eliminating the Migratory Bird Treaty Act’s (MBTA) prohibition on industrial activity that kill large numbers of birds in a foreseeable manner, emphasizing that only bird deaths that occur intentionally, such as by hunting will be prohibited.

Coming at a time when reports show that the total number of birds of all species is down by one-third since 1970, this is particularly alarming news for those of us who care about birds and the environment. The MBTA, a bipartisan measure more than a century old, has been hailed as a worldwide model of an international program to protect birds. It is credited with saving some raptors and water birds from near extinction

A 45-day public comment period began early in February. If you disagree with this gutting of the MBTA, please respond, using this link. <https://www.regulations.gov/docket?D=FWS-HQ-MB-2018-0090>.

**Reference:** “A bad time to be a bird” in Chicago Sun-Times, Feb 3., 2020.

## **Birding Note**

Ohio Ornithological Society has announced its Warblers & Wildflowers event at Shawnee State Forest for May 1-3, 2020. The OOS is now taking registrations at [ohiobirds.org](http://ohiobirds.org). Registration is \$95 for all weekend events, including Saturday buffet dinner.

**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, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10014  
Attention: Chance Mueleck**



## **Greater Flamingo Photos**



**Greater Flamingo Juvenile, 2-3 years**

Wingtips writer and photographer, Barbara Baudot, took these and the front cover photo in Le carmarque, France, during a September 2019 outing.



**Greater Flamingo Adult in Flight**



COMMON RAVEN photo by Rob Swindell

## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

*"Birding Since 1958"*

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