Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

October 2013

RUSTY BLACKBIRD photo by Dane Adams

Editors: Harry Spencer, and Cathy Priebe
Photographer: John Koscinski
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

Mission Statement

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.

Help Preserve Wildlife and Wildlife Habitats!

Charitable giving through planned gifts to the Black River Audubon Society helps make sure that the Society's mission to conserve habitats for wildlife and educate the public about birds continues to thrive. No gift is too small and every gift is welcome. All are deductible.

Black River Audubon Society sets aside all sizable bequests, endowments, and other planned gifts in various available trusts in which only the income generated is used for support of the organization or designated programs. Benefactors thus leave this world with a feeling that they made a gift that keeps on giving in perpetuity.

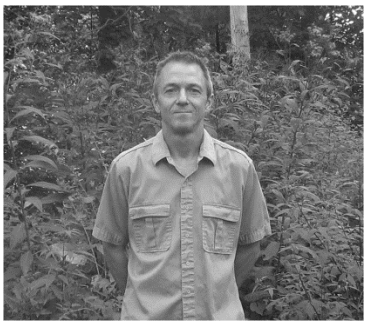
Program

Tuesday, October 1, 2013, 7 p.m.
Carlisle Visitor Center

Mark Purdy

President, Greater Akron Audubon Society

Wandering in Rwanda



Mark, a native of Kentucky with chemical engineering degrees from the University of Kentucky and North Carolina University, worked in aerospace research at BF Goodrich until his retirement in 2012. Now he devotes much time to nature causes.

In February of 2012, he visited the small central African nation of Rwanda as a guest of Rwandan President Paul Kagame. In his presentation, he will briefly review Rwanda and its recent history, concentrating on the national parks and their wildlife.

Field Trip

Saturday, October 19, 8 a.m.
Grant Thompson's property
629 Oberlin Road, Amherst
Grant Thompson leading

Save the date:

Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker Series

Saturday, April 5, 2 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Jim McCormac

Wild Ohio

Board Meeting

Tuesday, September 24, 6:30 p.m.

The Jack Smith House, 304 West Ave, Elyria

A Birder's Diary: Bird Names

By **Carol Leininger**

Besides their two-word Latinized scientific name, birds have common names, thank goodness. But common names vary. The names listed in field guides are the official ones designated by the American Ornithological Union (AOU). Other names vary in different localities in the United States. Early settlers in North America used various names. This latter variety I find most interesting and descriptive.

Their songs designated some birds. The white-throated sparrow was called the ***Peabody bird*** because it sounded like "Old Sam Peabody, Peabody, Peabody." The American bittern made loud guttural notes that sounded like an old-fashioned pump so the settlers called it ***thunder pumper***. Because those early farmers thought that cuckoo calls could predict rain, they called cuckoos ***rain birds***. Ovenbirds sounded as if they were shouting for a teacher, and their name became ***teacher bird***.

Appearance determined the names of other birds. The first time I saw a prothonotary warbler, also known as the ***golden swamp bird***, I was reminded of a ray of sunlight in the dark, dismal swamp. The anhinga or ***snake bird*** swims snake-like with most of its body submerged and only its long neck and head above water. The ruddy duck, or ***bristle tail***, often shows its short, stiff, upright tail feathers above the water-line. Although seldom seen, the painted bunting or ***nonpareil*** is one of my favorite birds. No other North American bird can compare to its colors: scarlet underparts, blue head, green back, and red-purple rump.

Early names of other birds describe their behavior. The Baltimore oriole was the ***basket bird*** because of it nest that looks like a basket. ***Teeter bird*** described the spotted sandpipers see-sawing walk along shorelines. Green heron became ***fly-up-the-creek-bird*** often seen crouching along shore or ditch until disturbed. Then it flew away. A shrike hangs its catches of insects, lizards, etc., on a thorn tree, much as meat carcasses are hung in a slaughter house. ***Butcher bird*** was its name.

From Our Readers

Successful hummingbird feeder

Ed Wardwell emailed Cathy Priebe that he had read Angie Adkins' article about hummingbirds in the September 2013 WINGTIPS. He conferred with his wife, bought a hummingbird feeder, and installed it at their home. Within one hour, a hummingbird drank at the feeder. He observed that this behavior represents instant satisfaction, a rarity during nature observation.

Thanks, Harriet!

By **Mary L. Warren**,

Harriet's influence goes well beyond Black River Audubon Society. When I was president of Firelands Audubon Society, she was always interested in what we were doing and in how BRAS might partner on projects. I remember her encouragement and support when we started the Friends of Sheldon Marsh to protect the area from dredging and degradation. When we started our KIDS NATURE CLUB she congratulated us on getting younger people involved in Audubon. While working at Magee Marsh, I ran into Harriet many times and she was always smiling and friendly.

Thanks Harriet for all that you have done to promote birding and conservation, not just in Lorain county, but everywhere you go! You have inspired, trained, partnered with, and encouraged many with your positive attitude and hard work. I wish you many more days of good birding!

Mary is Wildlife Communication Specialist, Magee Marsh Wildlife Area.

October birds in my Strongsville yard

By **Angie Adkins**

- ruby-throated hummingbird, Rufus hummingbird, northern flicker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, red-breasted nuthatch, brown creeper, house wren, winter wren, Carolina wren,
- ruby-crowned kinglet, golden-crowned kinglet, eastern bluebird, Swainson's thrush, hermit thrush,
- gray catbird, cedar waxwing, black-throated blue warbler, black-throated green warbler, palm warbler, Nashville warbler, yellow-rumped warbler, orange-crowned warbler,
- white-throated sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, song sparrow, chipping sparrow, Lincoln's sparrow, dark-eyed junco, red-winged blackbird, common grackle, brown-headed cowbird

Rusty Blackbird

Euphagus carolinus

By **Cathy Priebe**

A few years ago I identified my first rusty blackbird in early fall at Sandy Ridge Reservation. A lone male, sitting on a snag in the open wetland near the observation deck, was singing his squeaky-hinge song. Farther along the path, I observed a large number of rusty blackbirds searching for food in the wetlands on both sides of the trail. Rusty blackbirds are elusive, stealthy, and occasionally noisy. They forage in large flocks on the floor of wetland forests and swampy wooded fields. Their call, a rusty-door-hinge squeak, facilitates detection.

They do not breed in Ohio, so we see them during spring and fall migrations and as uncommon winter residents. Birding-survey groups recently identified more of the birds than previously known in Ohio in all seasons.

In northeast Ohio, we generally detect the winter plumage of non-breeding males. They have rusty wings, back, and crown and off-colored whitish eyes, often called yellow, as shown on the back cover. Females exhibit buffy underparts with rusty cheeks. The birds are smaller than common grackles and slightly larger than red-winged blackbirds. Their tails are much shorter than those of common grackles.

Rusty blackbirds mix with large flocks of other blackbirds feeding in agricultural fields. Their common food choices are beetles, dragonflies, snails, water bugs, and occasionally, small fish gleaned from the wet, swampy woodlands.

References: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America,* edited by Jonathan Alderfer; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne.

Fox Sparrow

Passerella iliaca

By **Angie Adkins**

At a very early age I encountered a fox sparrow at my Hinckley Township home. On the ground feeding with other sparrows was a giant bird that my mom helped me identify as fox sparrow. Fox sparrows returned faithfully every spring.

After I married and moved to Strongsville, I assumed that fox sparrows would avoid the more populated area, but I was wrong. The first ones appeared a few years after I started feeding birds in my backyard. Since then at least one fox sparrow has visited my feeding area each year, and from mid-March through April 9, 2011, I hosted five fox sparrows. My yard resounded with their beautiful, melodious songs.

I later learned that fox sparrows are generally not a flocking bird. An area with five individuals was unusual enough to qualify as a hotspot.

At first glance, these beautiful fox sparrows appear to be giant song sparrows. Our northeast Ohio birds are of the reddish-brown race, six and one half to seven inches long with heavy reddish brown streaking and a central breast spot. Wings, rump, and tail are reddish brown, but the crown, eyebrow, and nape are gray.

They feed on the ground in dense, shrubby landscaping, brush openings, and woodlands with thickets or abundant under-story growth. In late winter or early spring the birds frequent areas under bird feeders where they scratch towhee-fashion, kicking backwards with both feet simultaneously. Their diet consists of seeds, berries, and some invertebrates.

These sparrows do not nest in Ohio, although they occasionally spend winter in southern Ohio. Usually we see them as they migrate through the area.

My advice to people with backyard feeders is to watch for big, handsome sparrows scratching the ground under the feeders.

Reference: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac

(The following article is a summary of one written by **Kayri Havens and Sandra Henderson** and published in the September-October 2013 issue of *American Scientist*.)

Citizen Science Takes Root

In the mid-1800s, Henry David Thoreau sojourned outside Concord, Massachusetts where he made copious observations and measurements of plants and animals at Walden Pond. More than a century later, his records are drawing attention among ecologist seeking a view into past climates.

Thoreau was especially interested in the initial leafing and flowering of plants in springtime. He made notes on more than 500 plant species during his time at Walden, and his observations contain valuable reference points for judging how those species have responded to changes in their environment, including changes in temperature and precipitation, over periods for which there would otherwise be little data.

Thoreau thus was an early practitioner of what we now call *citizen science*. The field, which was given its name in 1990s by researchers at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, empowers people from all walks of life to participate in the scientific process and help advance knowledge in a wide range of scientific disciplines. Thanks in part to the ease of collaborating with partners and reporting results via the Internet, such projects have proliferated over the past decade. Citizen scientists working at continental and even global scales have collected tens of hundreds of thousands of observations. Their benefits are educational and also scientific: Many studies

have found that when reasonable quality control methods are used, the data are of publishable quality. The scientific community is beginning to recognize citizen scientist partners as important collaborators, even as ambassadors for science.

Project BudBurst, a large-scale project we have coordinated since its inception in 2007, is demonstrating the effect such work has on science education and data collection. In the spirit of Thoreau and other early observers of plant life, the project engages people across the United States in a collaborative effort to gather data on plant life cycles. In the process, participants are broadening their own scientific knowledge—and helping ecologists discover how plants respond to environmental change.

Tracking species' responses to climate change is notoriously tricky. Without large data sets collected over long timescales, it can be hard to see clearly the effects of gradual changes in temperature, rainfall, and other factors. If the data cover only a short period, an anomalous year can have a large effect on observed trends.

Project Budburst takes a crowd-sourcing approach to this problem. In the six years since the project began, participants have contributed tens of thousands of observations on hundreds of plant species, and the number of participants continues to climb. Plants' life cycles are an attractive subject of study for citizen science because they are relatively easy to discern. In fact the name for the field in which we work, *phenology*, literally means science of appearance. Phenology measures life cycle events, or phenophases. Bud burst, the phenophase from which Project BudBurst takes its name, refers to the first opening of leaf buds in spring.

Example of data collected by Project Budburst at three locations, Golden, Colorado; Stillwater, Minnesota; and Silver Spring, Maryland between 2008 and 2012 show that the first bloom date of common lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*) nearly uniformly decreased each year. At each location the 2012 date was about thirty days earlier than the 2008 date.

What I Learned Working with Harriet

By **Dick Lee**,

I have been involved in many Black River Audubon activities with Harriet Alger. She was not afraid to go against those who thought some of those activities would not succeed. She listened to all of the reasons given, such as it 'we tried that before' or 'you won't get anyone to do that'. If she felt strongly about the need for the activity she did not let the naysayers dissuade her. She did not always succeed but she gave it her best attempt.

Harriet would find people who had the skills and knowledge to carry out the project or activity and work with them taking advantage of their attributes. A recent example is the American kestrel project. She conferred with others in Ohio that had success in increasing the kestrels in their area. She researched the designs of various nest boxes. She asked me to head up a team to help build the boxes. Then she conferred with Grant Thompson, chief naturalist of Lorain County Metro Parks, and Kate Pilacky of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, to find appropriate habitat for placement of the boxes. She relied on Cathy Priebe's skills in public relations to get the volunteers to monitor the boxes. Harriet is terrific in building collaborative teams to get the job done!

Once the pieces are in place she works to find someone to continue the project or activity while she tackles another need.

Thank you, Harriet, for all that you have contributed to the community and the health of our environment as a diligent worker for Black River Audubon Society.

eBird Rarities

by **Harry Spencer**

The managers of eBird provide two lists to birders for use in recording field observations. One is a list of all birds ***most likely*** seen or heard in a given area during a particular season. The second additionally includes *rarities*.

Entry in eBird of a rare-species may trigger a request from the staff of the eBird organization for additional information. To attempt to forestall such a request, a birder should furnish additional information in his or her checklist.

Be specific about observed features such as relative size, distinctive shape, flight manner, color, markings, physical habits, song or call, etc.

Are you very certain of your ID? Or are you making a probable ID? Did you confirm your visual ID with a field guide, or your aural ID with a bird-song recording? Have you observed the species previously, perhaps at a different location.

Usually a birder only observes a few of these properties, but that birder should detail them on the eBird checklist.

WASTELAND, CARLISLE RESERVATION, SEPTEMBER 2013

Photo by H Spencer

FOX SPARROW photo by DANE ADAMS