

WINGTIPS

April 2015



RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER photo by Dane Adams

Editors
Jim Jablonski
Cathy Priebe
Harry Spencer

Program
Sarah Mabey
Moving Targets: The Challenge of
Conserving Migratory Birds
April 7 2015, 7 p.m.
Carlisle Visitor Center



Dr. Sarah Mabey will discuss the behavioral and ecological challenges that migratory songbirds face on their annual journeys, highlighting the elegant adaptations necessary for migratory life.

She will address how human activity may be changing the evolutionary cost/benefit equation for migratory birds and what we can do to protect these ecologically important and beautiful species.

Dr. Mabey is Associate Professor and Co-Director of the Environmental Studies Program at Hiram College where she manages to teach young adults to enjoy spending early mornings outside. Her research focuses on the behavioral ecology and conservation of migratory birds, particularly migration stopover and the challenges associated with protecting birds and their habitats. Over the past two decades she has had the good fortune to study migratory songbirds in North and

Central America as well as Europe.

Dr. Mabey received her B.A. from Bryn Mawr College, M.S. from the University of Maryland and PhD from the University of Southern Mississippi. She conducted post-doctoral research at North Carolina State University as a recipient of the David H. Smith Conservation Research Postdoctoral Fellowship. Dr. Mabey is a member of the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland's Board of Trustees.

Field Trip

Saturday, April 18, 2015, 9:30 a.m.

Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Meet Nan Miller at

Station Road Bridge/Brecksville Station

Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker

Sponsored Jointly by Black River Audubon and LCMP

April 11, 2015, 2 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Dave Horn, Professor Emeritus of Entomology at
The Ohio State University

“A Forty Year Survey of Birds in Northwestern Hocking County, Ohio”

February Castalia Field Trip

By **Sally Fox**

The five of us, led by Paul Sherwood, who braved the weather to travel to Castalia felt like we were in a snow globe. It was beautiful to look at, but was not conducive to good birding. The pond in Castalia was full of waterfowl viewed through a veil of snow.

At Castalia we saw gadwalls, American wigeons, mallards, mute, trumpeter and tundra swans, lesser scaups, redheads, Canada geese, horned grebes, red-breasted mergansers, northern shovelers, common goldeneyes, buffleheads, canvasbacks, and belted kingfishers.

Rest Haven produced northern cardinals and blue jays. From there we traveled to Pickerel Creek where we added horned larks, red-tailed hawks, European starlings, wild turkeys, American crows and house sparrows.

Birds were few and far between and the snow was making driving hazardous, so we ended the morning with a good breakfast and good fellowship at the Cold Creek Café in Castalia.



RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER

Melanerpes Carolinus

By **Jim Jablonski**



I had always considered the official designation of the red-bellied woodpecker to be an example of strange ornithological naming practices until I saw Dane Adams' photo on the cover of this month's *Wingtips*.

In the field or even my backyard, I always noticed the bright red crest and nape along with the black and white stripes along the back, which somehow reminded me of sea waves.

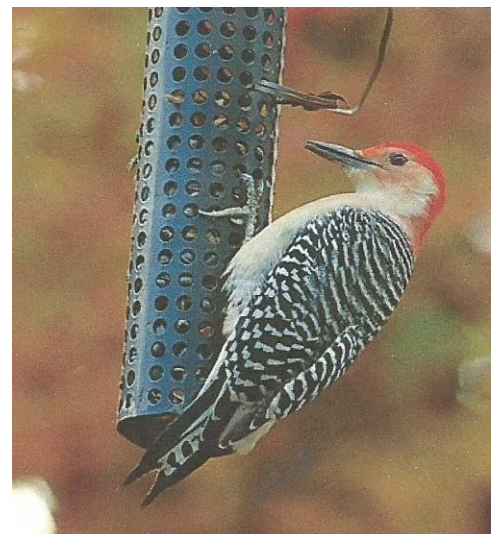
But its red-belly? Never really noticed it. Not until the very day I found out I was to write this article, when, by chance, one flew to my backyard feeder – the first I've seen there in years. The lucky break enabled me to see the red front clearly. Our cover photo, though, also shows the red splash on its belly while the bird is doing what woodpeckers do best – excavating dead wood. This handy skill enables all of them to provide both shelter and food for themselves.

The red-bellied drills holes in trees, poles, fenceposts or stumps, usually up to about fifty feet off the ground. The males begin the project by excavating several holes but, as all males know, the female decides which is to be completed and used. Sometimes they get lucky, however, and find a natural hole, one that is abandoned by another woodpecker or they might even use a nest box. Part of their courtship involves mutual tapping on the tree, with one mate inside while the other works from the outside.

The sexes are distinguished by their head coloration. The red patch of the male extends along the back and top of the head from its "shoulders" to the beak. The female has red only along the back of the head.

The clutch of four to five eggs is incubated by both parents with the male doing so at night. Both also feed the young and will continue for up to six weeks after fledging.

The red-belly uses its strong beak to find insects by foraging on tree trunks and major limbs but is really open to just about any meal. At some seasons its diet might be primarily plant material such as acorns, nuts,



Cornell Lab of Ornithology photo-www.birds.org

berries, tree sap and animal prey such as tree frogs and occasionally fish. The red-belly will often store food in bark crevices, just like my visitor did with the maple tree in my backyard.

A non-migratory bird, the red-belly only changes location in search of food outside of its breeding season. The



species seemed threatened in the first half of the twentieth century as its numbers declined, perhaps due to the loss of suitable trees and the introduction of invasive starlings which it competes with for nesting sites.

Unlike the red-headed woodpecker, in the second half of the century it began a comeback and is currently extending itself northward, despite only producing one clutch of eggs a year in our area.

The red-belly's numbers seem to be at least stable, if not increasing. Perhaps I will see them at my feeder more than every two years in the future!

References: "*Lives of North American Birds*," Kenn Kauffman; "*Field Guide to Birds*," Donald & Lillian Stokes; "*The Birders Handbook*," Paul R. Ehrlich, David Dobkin and Darryle Wheye.

Current range of the red-bellied woodpecker (from Wikipedia)

A Birder's Diary: Hummingbirds

By Carol Leininger

Although there are over 300 species in the Trochilidae family, all found in the western hemisphere, only the ruby-throated humming-bird seems to like Ohio.

Hummers range in size from just over two inches long, the smallest bird in the world, to eight and a half inches long, or the size of a purple martin. Everything about them is fascinating – the iridescent color of their throats (gorgets), the long bills for probing in flowers for nectar, their hovering and ability to fly backwards, forwards, sideways, and straight up and down, their territorial behavior while feeding, and their ability to go into a torpor on cold nights.

But what I want to know is why other species don't visit Ohio. I know there are lots of different species out west in Arizona and New Mexico. Rufous hummingbirds have visited Ohio a few times but even they seem to prefer the west, including Alaska! If you visit Trinidad, Costa Rica or South America, you can see many more hummers.

Scientists believe hummingbirds originated in South America and then moved north. Even their names are fascinating – mango, emerald, coquette, jacobin, sapphire, hermit, wood star, violetear and starthroat.

According to Kenn Kaufman in *Birds and Blooms* (Dec-Jan 2012), more western hummers are wandering eastward and wintering in the southeastern states. Does this mean there is a greater chance of different hummers visiting in the summers to come? Let's keep alert!



People seem to love hummers and this probably explains the many myths about them. Donald and Lillian Stokes (*Hummingbird Book*) list a few of these. Hummers do not suck nectar; they lick it. They do not eat only nectar (insects too). They do not mate in midair (they perch while doing so).

Also, **contrary to myth**, they will migrate even if food is available; they visit all shapes and colors of flowers, not just red tubular ones; and hummers do not, **I repeat, do not** hitch migratory rides on the backs of Canada geese!

According to an article by Jerry Mahlberg in *Birding* (Sept, 2012), some hummer species are now producing interesting hybrids! A magnificent hummingbird and Anna hummingbird hybrid has been confirmed and unlike most hybrids – this one looks nothing like either of its parents!

Well, I still think the ruby-throated hummingbird is the most beautiful, but I do look forward to seeing other species expanding their ranges.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER

Limnodromus griseus

By Cathy Priebe

I can definitely say that I have never seen one of these creatures. And to add insult to injury, according to sources, it can be difficult for many accomplished birders to tell the difference between a short-billed and a long-billed dowitcher. Fortunately, it has been established that the short-billed is by far the more common Ohio visitor during the spring and fall migration. These birds do not nest in Ohio.

Described as having a chunky body with a white belly and reddish buff neck with spotting, the short-billed dowitcher also has dark barring on white sides and flanks, short greenish yellow legs and a distinctive snipe-like dark bill and white eyebrow.



Perhaps the first way to determine an ID of this species (short or long) is to observe its behavior. Both species probe shallow water with rapid “sewing machine-like” strokes. A clue to determining the difference between the two is that the long-billed has a much darker breast in its breeding plumage. According to Larry Rosche, author of *Birds of the Cleveland Region*, vocalizations are the best way to determine an ID, especially when dealing with individuals in juvenile plumages. Needless to

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER photo by Dane Adams

say, it appears you may need some skills and guidance to determine a positive ID.

Breeding primarily in northern Canada to the eastern Hudson Bay, short-billed dowitchers prefer to nest in sedge meadows and bogs. When migrating, they can be found feeding on open mud flats near shallow bays, i.e., Magee Causeway or the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge where a few individuals were sighted in the spring of 2014, according to the Ohio Cardinal. These birds can also be sporadically found statewide in flooded fields, reservoirs, lakeshores and marshes.

Some interesting facts about the short-billed dowitcher:

- *These birds tend to slowly meander while feeding and like to stay in crowds of other dowitchers and shorebirds.
- *They forage and migrate during both the day and night
- *They are good swimmers and will swim to shallow water if they have foraged into deep water.
- *They are fairly tame and somewhat slow to flush when startled.
- *Their population in North America and the world is estimated at 320,000.
- *Expect sightings in March through early June.
- *Their flight call is a rapid “tu, tu, tu or d’d’d” the latter which may sound like a mallet sliding quickly down the keys of a xylophone according to Pete Dunne.

Spring migration is just around the corner. Hope you are fortunate enough to see a short-billed dowitcher this season!!

References: Ohio Cardinal, Vol. 37 No. 3 Spring 2014; Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion, Pete Dunne; Birds of the Cleveland Region, Larry Rosche; The Shorebird Guide, Michael O’Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson; Birds of Ohio, Jim McCormac.

Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz Is On



Many of us know that the rusty blackbird has experienced an 85-99% population drop in the last half-century. The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group has been doing research and working on conservation strategies over the last fifteen years to protect this very vulnerable species.

However, many questions still remain and the Working Group points out that rusty migration habits are largely a mystery. Answers are needed to many questions. Are there hot spots where rusties congregate during migration? Are similar migratory stopover areas used by rusties each year, and are these protected?

The International Rusty Blackbird Working Group has launched a spring migration Blitz, the objectives of which are: to identify stopover sites, determine consistency of numbers and timing of migrations, to strengthen relationships with governmental agencies to advance conservation and to engage the birding community regarding rusty blackbirds.

This, of course, is where we come in. As the Working Group says, “its easy to participate: just go birding! In Ohio the Blitz is between March 1 and mid-April. For complete information, vis <http://rustyblackbird.org/outreach/migration-blitz/>. **JJ**

Black River Members Excelled During Great Backyard Bird Count

The numbers are in and numbers don't lie – right? Lorain County's participation in February's Great Backyard Bird Count was great as 160 reports were made, ranking the county fifth in the state of Ohio. The species rankings didn't keep pace however, as only sixty separate species were recorded from the county, ranking it twelfth statewide.

Black River newsletter and website volunteers did well in the individual rankings. Cathy Priebe was first in the county with twenty-five species sighted. BRAS website editor Arlene Lengyel ranked seventh with sixteen different species. Meanwhile yours truly was extremely lucky in counting a flock of thirty wild turkeys across from a friend's house in Pittsfield for the second highest number of a single species. **JJ**

Audubon Prints Available For Downloading!

The newsletter "*Audubon Chapter Leader Update*" announced the availability of prints from John James Audubon's *Birds of America*. According to the newsletter:

"John James Audubon's Birds of America comes to life in a vibrant digital library on Audubon's new website. You can enjoy and download a free high-resolution version of all 435 prints. Share these beautiful watercolors with your network and spread the legacy of Audubon's namesake and inspiration."

To get to the site, go to audubon.org, then go to the Birds tab and click on John J. Audubon's *Birds of America* and enjoy! **JJ**



WARBLERS from the *Birds of America* collection.

