

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

April 2016



GREEN HERON photo by John Koscinski

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe

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## Program

**Jason Lewis**

Refuge Manager, Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge

## Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge: Conserving the Future

April 5, 2016, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center



Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, along with the other wetlands along Lake Erie to our West, have been the spring-time go-to places for birders in the Black River Audubon's home area. We all seem to travel to May's Biggest Week in American Birding as the warblers and other spring migrants pass through the region. It is only fitting that our April meeting, just weeks before the onset of the May migration, will have the Ottawa NWR manager, Jason Lewis who will highlight the spring program activities the refuge and its partners are working on for 2016.

Jason Lewis is the Refuge Manager at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, Oak Harbor, Ohio. Prior to coming to northwest Ohio in 2011, Jason spent four years at Mingo National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Missouri and nine years at Big Oaks National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Indiana. He received his bachelors and masters degrees from Ball State University. Jason is married to Gwen and they have two young girls: Willow, seven years old and Wren, six years. He is an avid birdwatcher and enjoys photography, sports, and outdoor recreation. Jason and his family live in Elmore, Ohio.

**Editors' Note: Through the generosity of Elaine Bogus, the above talk is dedicated to her father, the late Donald Lynch.**

## **Jack Smith**

### **Outstanding Speaker Series**

**Saturday, April 9, 2016, 2 p.m.**

Carlisle Visitor Center

**Paul J. Baicich**

#### **The Dozen Most Important Things You Can Do for Birds and Bird Conservation**

Popular birding writer, wildlife advocate, tour leader and author Paul J. Baicich has been an active birder since his early teens in New York City. In his presentation he will discuss the six most serious threats to birds today and offer twelve very effective recommendations that we can do to help birds, the environment and ourselves.

### **February Field Trip**

#### **Castalia Pond, Pickerel Creek, etc.**

#### **February 20, 2016**

By **Sally Fox**



What a difference a year can make! Last year our field trip was cut short due to all the snow, and we could hardly see the ducks on the Castalia Pond. This year it was warm and very windy. The ice had blown off Lake Erie, leaving open water so there were very few waterfowl in Castalia. Five of us met Paul Sherwood, who served as our guide. We started the day with the usual mix of sightings: Canada goose, redhead, ruddy duck, mallard, European starling, song sparrow, American robin, northern shoveler, American coot and house sparrow.

From the pond we traveled Rt. 269 toward Bay View. Along the way we picked up Eurasian collared dove, mourning dove, red-winged blackbird, northern cardinal, bald eagle, trumpeter swan, hooded merganser, common merganser, herring gull, and ring-billed gull.

Cruising the neighborhood of Bay View we found the resident wild/domestic turkeys and along Sandusky Bay found common goldeneye, lesser scaup, graylag goose, common grackle, American wigeon and gadwall.

Later, great blue heron, and black-crowned night heron, American crow, great black-backed gull, killdeer, turkey vulture and American kestrel were found on the west side of Sandusky.

We drove on to Eagle Point, part of the Erie County Metro Parks. Our group had never been there before. We hiked a mile long path through fields and woods back to Sandusky Bay. Here we added yellow-rumped warbler, downy woodpecker, tundra swan, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse and blue jay.

We had a scare when a tree blew down next to us. Did I mention it was windy? Luckily we were okay and had a great day birding thanks to Paul.



Standing left to right: Barb Knapp, Paul Sherwood, Marty Ackermann, and Nina Love. Front, Harry Spencer

## A Birder's Diary: User-Friendly Birding Checklists

By Carol Leininger



Which is more useful for the individual birder, the American Birding Association (ABA) checklist, your own personal list or no list at all? You decide.

The ABA checklist is revised annually due to decisions made by the **American Ornithologists Union** (AOU). Revisions can be found in ABA's *Birders Guide to Listing and Taxonomy* and in *Birding* magazine. The members of the AOU use complicated criteria when they decide to split, combine, or change scientific names of species.

As a young birder on a field trip to Texas, I saw a beautiful Altamira oriole, which was a new life bird for me. It was just across the river and after everyone got a good look we waited. I naively asked what we were waiting for and was told that we needed the bird to cross the river so we could count it! Well, the bird never crossed the Rio Grande, but I put it on my life list anyway. I am now aware that the ABA checklist includes only those seen in the continental U.S. and Canada. It also includes birds within the 200-mile territorial waters along our coasts, but does not include Hawaii, Bermuda, Bahamas or Mexico.

I have read numerous other situations like this. Norma Siebenheller of North Carolina saw a rare pink-sided junco but could not count it, as it was only a race not a species. (*Bird Watcher's Digest*, Nov.-Dec. 2014) Derek Lovitch could not add Atwater's prairie chicken or greater prairie chicken to his list. All birds that are descendants of a captive breeding population and not yet self-sustaining are not countable (*Bird Watcher's Digest*, Jan.-Feb. 2014).

Morgan Churchill (*Birders Guide to Listing and Taxonomy*, Oct. 2014) defined species as "**groups of actually or potentially interbreeding natural populations which are reproductively isolated from other such**

**groups.**” Indigo and lazuli buntings regularly hybridize where they overlap but are not considered the same species. There is still no firm decision on whether the Audubon and Myrtle warblers should be considered the same species (yellow-rumped) or separate species. It’s not clear how narrow a hybrid zone must be to constitute a barrier to speciation.

If you find all this confusing, you might want to keep your own checklist with your own rules. Most birders with their own lists do not count birds in captivity. Some birders even consider feeder birds as only a step removed from captivity. Many birders will not include BVD, or “better view desired” birds on their list especially if it is a new life bird.

Many birders keep lists – daily, field trip, or yearly lists as well as life lists. My life list includes birds of the world, not just North America. If you see an ivory-billed woodpecker and are absolutely certain about it – put it on your list. Your list is whatever you make it. There are other birders who refuse to get involved in listing at all and just enjoy watching birds and everything else in the great outdoors. Competition with other birders can be fun but so can a relaxing walk in the woods.

## GREEN HERON

*Butorides virescens*

By **Jim Jablonski**



The best thing about my introduction to birding a number of years ago was that I was able to make new identifications nearly every time out. During one of my first trips to Sandy Ridge I spotted a rather strange green bird slogging very slowly along the water’s edge. With its rather shiny back, hunched over appearance and long beak it somehow reminded me of Silvio, one of Boss Tony’s henchmen on the *Sopranos* series years ago.

I was able to fight the urge to look it up immediately, since I knew there was no way I would forget the look of this one. Sure enough, later when I finished my tour of the park I pulled out my *Peterson’s* and there I spotted it immediately – it was a green heron, or green-backed heron to some.

The green of its back and head depends upon the light. Iridescent, it often looks bluish or some vague, dark color. The red of its shoulders often stands out a bit more along with whitish streaks on its cheeks, chin and chest. Its beak looks especially powerful since its longer than the face and almost too large for a relatively small heron.

I have usually seen a green heron just as it is shown in John Koscinski’s excellent cover photo, furtively creeping along logs or in the grasses by swamps and marshes. That makes sense because its diet is made up of small fish, crustaceans, and frogs.



Juvenile green heron photo taken by Jim Jablonski in Costa Rica.

It hunts for its prey in a very quiet manner, often moving slowly or just standing still and waiting for the meal to approach. Green herons in Japan have been known to be a little more assertive, dropping a twig into the water to draw the attention of the small fish it loves. Although it doesn't need to do this, doing so seems to increase the number of fish it eats. And it is a learned skill; young herons aren't very successful at it because the twigs they drop are too large. Eventually they learn less means more.

When it comes to nesting, the green heron is not very picky. The location might be in a thicket, mangroves, or dry woods – it doesn't seem to matter. The nest itself can be placed in a tree or even on the ground but usually fairly close to water. The male begins preparing a platform of sticks but later the female finishes the construction while the male brings the supplies.

The prospective parents are also a modern couple when it comes to nesting and feeding the young. They split time incubating the three to five eggs and both feed the hatchlings by regurgitation. After fledging is over the parents continue to feed the young for several weeks.

The green heron's summer range is roughly identical with the eastern half of the United States as well as a narrow strip along the coast in the Pacific Northwest. When it comes time to migrate they very wisely take off for Central America. On a recent trip to Costa Rica I spied them standing, hunched over, on logs along the rivers in both the Cano Negro and Tortuguero National Parks. Hopefully, I will see them doing the same at Sandy Ridge this summer.

**References:** *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; "*Tool Using*" in *The Birder's Handbook* by Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye.



**WILSON'S SNIPE** photo by Sally Fox

# WILSON'S SNIPE

*Gallinago delicata*

By **Cathy Priebe**

Here we go again. Another critter that is difficult to locate since it blends in as it forages amongst the vegetation in wetland habitats. Formerly called the “common snipe”, this species was split in 2002 into the North American “Wilson’s snipe” and the Eurasian “common snipe.”



The snipe was probably given the “common” description because of the sheer numbers of this abundant sandpiper. It has been estimated that their populations are as high as 5 million plus! Although you would never know as they are usually very secretive and hard to spot unless you flush them from their feeding area.

Compared to a dowitcher, but slightly smaller, the Wilson’s snipe is a chunky bird with a brownish black striped head, neck and back with a long, straight bi-colored bill. Their sides and flanks are darkly barred and the belly is white.

Their sturdy bill is used to probe wet, marshy areas for invertebrates, larvae, earthworms as well as insects, seeds and other aquatic life. Snipe sightings occur generally during spring and fall migration, although it has been documented that there are a few rare Ohio breeding pairs of Wilson’s snipe at Irwin Prairie State Nature Preserve, according to Jim McCormac, author of *Birds of Ohio*.

If you are lucky enough to witness the courtship dance of male snipes, you may be reminded of the American woodcock breeding ritual. The snipe ascends to 500 feet or higher in the air and circles until it dives at a 45-degree angle making a “winnowing” sound as the air rushes through its feathers as it descends. Constructing a nest of grass and leaves, the female usually lays four eggs and she feeds the first two chicks while the male tends to the other two. Not a bad deal, splitting the feeding chores!!

The Lake Erie marshes and inland wetland habitats are just a few of the areas you can attempt to find the Wilson’s snipe during migration.

Some fun facts about the Wilson’s snipe:

- \* They generally forage in one space for long periods of time, walking very little.
- \* Snipe will eat during the day and night.
- \* They can be seen singly or in small flocks. In prime habitat, individuals can number in the hundreds.
- \* When flushed, they will emerge into a zigzag flight while calling, a sound that resembles a boot being withdrawn from a muddy hole.

**References:** *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *The Shorebird Guide* by Michael O’Brien, Richard Crossley and Kevin Karlson; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche.

# The Reclusive, and Little-Known, Agami Heron

*Agamia agami*

By **Jim Jablonski**

Having returned from an exciting vacation in Costa Rica, I'm obsessed with everything about the small Central American country. But it didn't take that connection to interest me in the recent National Audubon Website article about the country's reclusive agami heron. Kirsten Hines' stunning photos in the article were more than enough to do that. The colors are literally difficult to describe, both in their shading and variety.

One would think that this large bird with incredible coloring would be widely known by now. But the agami is an extremely secretive bird and is carefully protected by the environmentally sensitive Costa Ricans. But Hines, a wildlife photographer, and heron expert Jim Kushlan received permission to search for a colony of agamis in the Pacuare Reserve.

The magnificent birds are familiar with caretaker Danilo Herrera and, with his help, the researchers were able to find the colony. One result was the Audubon articles' stunning photos of the regal bird but the larger goal was to attract more attention of researchers and support for the long-term monitoring of the agami.

Check out the article, and photos, at the National Audubon website. Once there, click on the search icon and type "agami heron." Only large photos on your computer monitor can do justice to the magnificent agami.

## Hog Island Scholarships

Black River Audubon Society (BRAS) has granted scholarships to attend Hog Island birding camps for years. The awards go to educators and naturalists, who will use the knowledge and skills learned to further the causes of birds and the environment.

In the past, BRAS has given one or two scholarships per year but education chairman Dick Lee has announced a total of four recipients for 2016! Three Elyria teachers and one student from northwestern Ohio will attend the one-week camps on the island off the coast of Maine this summer. Two of the teachers also received National Audubon Society partial scholarships to attend the camp, enabling BRAS to fund a third.

Laura Chachko, Renee Hiles and Denise Hess are the three teachers who will attend the **Sharing Nature: Educators Workshop** this summer. All teach at Windsor School in Elyria. The teachers will put on a workshop for other science teachers in the Elyria district, which will give the scholarships even greater impact locally. They will also present a program on the experience to a BRAS meeting.

Tyler McClain, a student from Sycamore, Ohio, is the recipient of the student scholarship.

**Editor's note: In response to my inquiry about the operation of the center, Laura C. Jordon wrote the following description.**

**Harry Spencer**

December 5, 2015

Dear Harry,

In response to your interest in helping our raptor rehabilitation center, we would like to tell you the history of the Medina Raptor Center. We have been rehabilitating birds in the area for 28 years. We have rescued and helped birds from 17 counties across the state of Ohio this past year (2015). We typically take in and care for over 400 birds (raptors and songbirds) a year. In 2015, we took in nearly 600 injured birds, a 67% increase from previous years. There is no paid staff at the Center which operates with 40 wonderful and dedicated volunteers. All monetary income is provided by donations of cash and supplies from wonderful supporters.

In 2014, we lost a free source of food which left us struggling to have enough money to feed our patients, and as a result the costs of operating the Center increased by \$15,000. In 2015 because of the proclamation from ODA that we could not remove our birds from their area due to Avian Influenza, we struggled to meet that food bill. In addition to the rising costs of feeding our birds, we made changes to the enclosures to protect them against Avian Influenza. This restructuring has cost us thousands of dollars, but we feel with the emerging diseases and zoonotics, we need to be proactive.

This year we will be applying for grants and hopefully attending public speaking engagements to help fund our food bill. Over 50% of our donations come from our programs done offsite with our birds. The programs we provide are vital not only to the Center, but toward educating the public on raptors and songbirds alike. Our educational focus during these programs is on the species and their roles in the environment, and how the public can make small changes in order to provide a sustainable habitat for the animals around them.

We are beginning to change our enclosures so that we are both bird and people friendly in the hopes of welcoming more on-site visits to the Center in order to continue our mission of educating the public.

At the Medina Raptor Center, we have chosen that our focus is on birds, not mammals, so that we can specialize in the care of raptors and songbirds. During the spring and summer, our hospital is filled with baby birds that need care around the clock. In the winter, we care for many birds that are starved or have been hit by a car while hunting for food. Of the birds that enter our facility for care, 90% of the injuries are related to human involvement such as gunshots, power lines, poisoning, loss of habitat, vehicle collisions, window strikes, and trapping.

To more effectively rehabilitate and release the birds, in 2014 we began banding any bird that is released back to the wild. These efforts were made so that if a bird was spotted with these bands, we would know that our hard work and dedication was successful. In the past year we have banded birds such as bald eagles, barn owls, great horned owls, and many songbird species.

We thank you for your consideration to help get us through this year 2016 and continue helping all these birds.

Sincerely,

Laura C. Jordan

(330) 591-7300

PO Box 74

Spencer, OH 44275

**Editor's note: The Board of Black River Audubon Society voted unanimously to contribute \$500 to the Medina Raptor Center.**