

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS



**CAACKLING GOOSE & CANADA GOOSE**  
Photo by DANE ADAMS

December 2012

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## **Program**

Tuesday, December 4, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

Sandy Ridge Reservation

*Note Location!*

**Christopher J. Winslow**

Assistant Director, Ohio Sea Grant Program

Ohio State University

**A Brief History of Lake Erie:**

**Why Are Harmful Algal Blooms Back?**



**Christopher Winslow** grew up in North Ridgeville, OH, and attended Ohio University and Bowling Green State University. For his PhD at BGSU he worked with invasive fish species. He has broadened his research to include nutrient loading, harmful algal blooms, and low dissolved oxygen in Lake Erie. He taught at BGSU and Kutztown State University before assuming his current position at Ohio State University where he also is assistant director of the F. T. Stone Laboratory, the OSU Island Campus at Put-in-Bay and the oldest freshwater biological field station in the U.S.

According to Winslow, Lake Erie has been called the most important lake in the world. It provides shelter and nourishment to countless living organisms, including 11 million people that rely on it for drinking water. “Unfortunately, Lake Erie also faces a number of challenges that OSU’s Stone Lab, Ohio Sea Grant and other partners are working to address,” Winslow explained.

## **Christmas Bird Counts**

Our two yearly Christmas Bird Counts are enjoyed by beginning and experienced birders as well as potential birders. New birders are accompanied by experienced birders. Most observations are made while riding, but walking is an option at several sites. Participants can spend an hour, two hours, half a day, or more as desired.

**Saturday, December 22**

**Elyria Christmas Bird Count**

Call Debbie Mohr 440-225-7601

**Saturday, December 29**

**Wellington Christmas Bird Count**

Call Tom Reed 440-647-4088

Meet at McDonald’s, Route 58, Wellington, 7:00 a.m.

More details about both Counts will be given at the December meeting.

# A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

I'm sure you have at one time or another studied the range maps in your field guide. These can be quite helpful since they tell where a bird can be found during the breeding season, in winter, or all year-around. Every good field guide should provide this information about all the birds included. But, where does this information come from? Believe it or not much of this information is accumulated by amateur birders, not professional ornithologists. It comes from bird counts and surveys such as the Christmas Bird Counts scheduled yearly by Black River Audubon.



Christmas counts provide a well organized program for birders all over North America and beyond. Participants count all the birds they identify during an entire day. When Audubon chapters all over North America count during the same week of each year, the results produce estimates of bird populations in North America and the year-to-year variations. Winter distributions of birds can be determined from accumulated data for several years.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department also sponsors a Breeding Bird Survey in spring and summer for obtaining population estimates for those seasons. The results can be obtained by birders driving along a 25-mile stretch of road, stopping every one-half mile for three minutes to record all birds sighted or heard. An alternate method is for birders visiting an area numerous times during the breeding period and counting territorial male birds. Much has been learned in Ohio during the past few years.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada sponsor a Project Feeder Watch Project and the same two organizations plus Audubon sponsor a world-wide Great Backyard Bird Count (February 15-18, 2013). Cornell and Audubon also sponsor eBird discussed in this issue of WINGTIPS. Many parks sponsor a Big Sit sometime during the year. And in Birdathons, teams of birders compete to see which team can find the most birds in a 24-hour period.

From the accumulated data, distributions of birds can be surmised, and trends including increases and decreases of populations can be monitored.

Birders of all ages and abilities can participate in these various surveys. You do not have to be a professional in the field to contribute to science, and it is fun to do so. Contact Black River Audubon or your local Audubon chapter and get involved.

## eBird: Citizen Science

By **Harry Spencer**

Cornell and Audubon jointly sponsor eBird, an online program used by birders around the world for recording throughout the year counts of birds in defined areas. Information about bird identifications recorded on eBird helps researchers track the trends of populations, migrations, and other movements of species around the world. Such information is essential for proper management of endangered species, for example.

The recorded information also is available to all birders. For example, I used eBird data to determine identification dates of cackling goose and Canada goose for the article about those species printed in this issue of WINGTIPS.

Any birder can record bird identifications at a defined area during a measured time. For example, a birder might observe her backyard feeder area, December 25, 2012 from 9:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., and record the largest number of each species observed simultaneously. Or she could go to Sandy Ridge Reservation, walk around the ponds and record the numbers of birds of each species identified. Again she needs to record the time spent identifying birds, but in addition she should estimate the distance traveled while identifying birds. Google Earth

can be used to measure the exact distance travelled.

Our birder can establish her own sites on eBird.org and record her observations there. Or because Sandy Ridge Reservation is Black River Audubon's most popular eBird site, our birder can record her observations on that site. To record identifications for Sandy Ridge or for any of the other thirty or forty Black River Audubon eBird sites, she needs our Black River Audubon ID (blackriveras) and password (birders).

Please do not alter any information other than your own stored in eBird. For orderly management of the sites, please do not add to the current site-list without consulting me (meshes@frontier.com).

## Cackling Goose and Canada Goose

*Branta hutchinsii* and *Branta Canadensis*

By **Harry Spencer**

Prior to 2004, the two similarly marked birds shown on our cover would have been identified as Canada geese. In that year, however, the relatively small cackling goose was officially recognized as a species when it was split from the Canada goose species.



Dane Adams took the photo in December 2011 at his Brighton Township home.

During the last three years, sporadic checklists reported identifications of cackling geese on eBird. In Lorain County the postings were made during December, January, February, and March, mostly at Wellington Upground Reservoir, but also at Wellington Reservation, Sandy Ridge, and Avon Lake Power Plant.

In contrast, identifications of Canada geese were posted repeatedly in all twelve months.

In spite of their similar black, white, and grey markings, the two species exhibit several distinct differences. A cackling goose is only slightly larger than a mallard duck, and a Canada goose is much larger. A cackling goose has a pronounced short thick neck, a stubby bill, and a rounder head.

Cackling geese nest along the arctic shore of North America and migrate to the USA during the winter. The Canada geese of Ohio mostly do not migrate significant distances.

In the mid-twentieth century few Canada geese lived in Ohio. Karl E. Bednarik, Jr (1923-2012) and colleagues in the Ohio Department of Natural Resources led the resurgence of Canada geese in Ohio. Bednarik, affectionately known as Father Goose, as head of Ohio waterfowl management, sponsored the introduction of giant Canada geese, *Branta Canadenis maxima* to Crane Creek, Mosquito Creek, Mercer, and Killdeer Plains management areas. The current proliferation of these large Canada geese represents the success of those re-introduction efforts. To many park users, golfers, airport managers, and others, however, Canada geese are now considered pests. And the birds are with us year-round.

**References:** *Wikipedia*; D'Arcy Egan, *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (October 13, 2012); Mark Zaborney *Toledo Blade* (June 8, 2012); *Sibley Guide to Birds*, David Allen Sibley.

## Wild Turkey

*(Meleagris gallopavo)*

By **Cathy Priebe**

Nature never fails to amaze me. While I was out feeding the birds I walked up the rise at the back of our yard to look through the woods to see what might be flitting about. A large, dark shadow suddenly caught my eye as three wild turkeys gracefully sped through the field into the adjoining woods. Wow, how cool is that?



And two hours later, I was informed that my assignment for the December WINGTIPS is the wild turkey. Hmmmmm...

The wild turkey has a story similar to many of Ohio's game birds. It was a very prevalent species before

settlers destroyed much of the birds habitat by clearing the forests of trees. It did not take long for man to find that the wild turkey was delicious food. By the early 1900s the birds were largely hunted out of the state.

Starting in 1956 wild turkeys were slowly reintroduced in southeastern Ohio forests. Their numbers have gradually increased such that turkeys are now widely found in woodlands and fields across much of Ohio.

Boasting the honor of being the largest game bird in North America, the male's bald head is reddish pink and blue. Its dark, iridescent body is much more slender and stronger than that of its domesticated cousin. Males also have a red wattle, a long central breast tassel, a copper-colored tail, and white barred flight feathers. Females are smaller, less iridescent and usually do not have breast-feather tufts.

Here are some intriguing facts about the wild turkey: It is a wild ancestor of the domestic turkey. It is wary and despite its size (3 to 4 feet tall), this gobbler is a very elegant and strong flier. Even though it is a ground feeder, it roosts high in the trees. Acorns are a favorite food. Turkeys will also eat nuts, grains, seeds, vegetation, insects, frogs and lizards. Benjamin Franklin originally wanted the wild turkey to be our national symbol instead of the bald eagle!

Turkeys often form flocks of 50 to 60 birds and can generally be found foraging in woodlands and cornfields. Their nests are scraped depressions on the ground lined with grasses and leaves. A female can lay as many as 20 eggs!

I have certainly found a new respect for this interesting bird and I look forward to its next neighborhood visit!!

**References:** *Stokes Field Guide to Birds* by Donald and Lillian Stokes; *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America*; *Birds of North America* by Kenn Kaufman.



WILD TURKEY photos by JAN AUBURN

## October Program

### Wetlands Restoration and Land Acquisition in the Metro Parks

By **Tammy Martin**

Dan Martin, my husband and recently retired director of Lorain County Metro Parks (LCMP), gave an informative, and well illustrated talk about how LCMP and Lorain County citizens prospered from the federal “No net loss wetland” law.

This landmark legislation was signed by President George H. W. Bush in 1984. Its intent was to control the massive loss of existing wetlands by requiring equal restoration of new wetlands elsewhere. This requirement effectively placed a value on “unbuildable” land. Implementation of the law began in 1994.

Dan began his tenure with LCMP in 1992, initially spending much time with his staff re-building the current parks by adding miles of trails and retrofitting and updating facilities. Their first new-park project, the Black River Reservation, opened in 1994.



During his early years at LCMP, Dan searched for ways to take advantage of the federal wetland legislation. How could he work with developers to benefit the park district and Lorain County citizens? In 1996 this strategizing led to the first wetland restoration project (20 acres) at the Carlisle Reservation, funded by Sylvester Builders.

The next project was the Sandy Ridge wetland, constructed in 1998 by the Ohio Wetlands Foundation. This 130 acre project was the third wetland project completed in the State of Ohio. The State required that the site be restored “naturally.” Today, the park attracts about 60,000 visitors annually. I’m sure many of you will agree that Sandy Ridge is one of our favorites!

The park district then restored wetlands at Carlisle, Wellington, Columbia, and Charlemont Reservations. In addition, Dan and staff also built new parks (facilities and trails) in most of these areas, in particular, Wellington and Columbia.

The Federal government classifies wetlands as Class I, II, or III, depending on their location relative to prior and current land use, and the park district has built a wide variety of wetland types: Carlisle wetlands are class II or class III wetlands; Wellington is a grassland wetland; and Columbia is a combination of different types of wetlands. The latter, funded by the Cleveland Airport expansion, resulted in the restoration of 280 acres of wetlands.

To capitalize on the early successes, in 2000 Dan promoted the establishment of the North Coast Council of Park Districts, a regional wetland-migration bank to facilitate and preserve “new” wetlands in five county park districts (Erie, Lorain, Medina, Sandusky, and Wood). North Coast staff, instead of the separate park district staffs, now handle all the legal work and negotiations with the developers and federal agencies. To date, these districts have mitigated approximately \$60 million of development into 650 acres of restored wetlands.

In the future, LCMP will be restoring sites in Sheffield, New Russia Township, and the Grafton areas.

# **Jack Smith's View**

## **Lorain County Metro Parks**

By **Harry Spencer**

On July 2, 2012 Jack talked with me about birding, the many Lorain County Metro Parks, and the history of LCMP. Here I report briefly his viewpoint.

When he started birding in the 1930s and 1940s, there were no such parks, but in 1951 or 1952 Judge Ewing held a citizens' conference to discuss the merits of establishing a park system for Lorain County.

Only two citizens came to Judge Ewing's conference, Jack Smith and a person whose name Jack had forgotten. Both told Judge Ewing that the formation of a metro-park system was a great idea. The system was soon formed.

Under various directors, LCMP did very well, but when Dan Martin was appointed, the system blossomed.

Black River Audubon has always supported LCMP, particularly promoting passage of various levies. We should continue such support.

## **Piping Plovers Continued**

This sparrow-sized species was pictured and discussed briefly in the November issue of WINGTIPS. For a visually appealing, intellectually rewarding further treatment of this endangered bird, see [www.audubon.org/plover](http://www.audubon.org/plover). H Spencer