

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS



Northern Wheatear/  
Dane Adams



January 2010

Editors: Jack Smith and Harry Spencer

Photographer: John Koscinski

Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

## Program

Carlisle Visitor Center

Tuesday January 5, 2010 7:00 p.m.

**Andy McDowell and Kate Pilacky**

Firelands Chapter, Western Reserve Land Conservancy

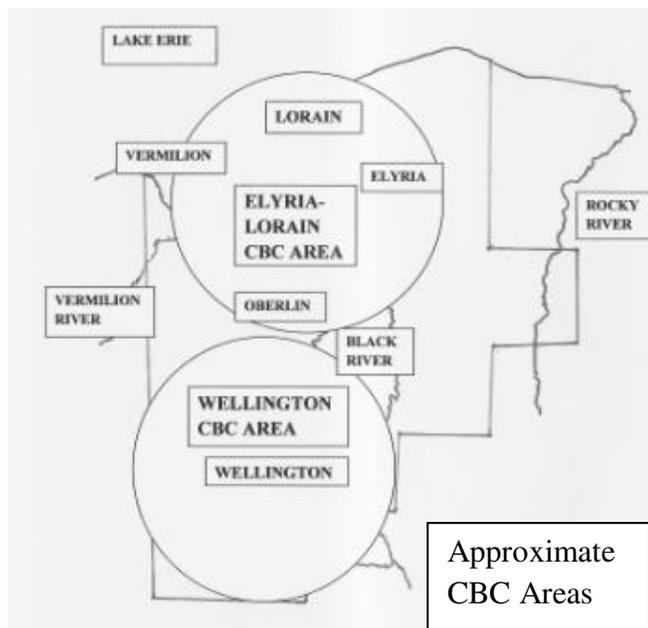
### Land Preservation: It's for the Birds

**Andy McDowell** was raised in Pennsylvania and has a naturalist education background. His prior job was with the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland. He has been the field director with the Land Conservancy since June 2006 after eight land conservancies merged to form the Western Reserve Land Conservancy.

**Kate Pilacky** grew up in the Cleveland area. In 1997 she and several others formed the Firelands Land Conservancy. Kate operated the land conservancy from her Oberlin home until Firelands Land Conservancy became part of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy. She is a nature artist and enjoys gardening.

Their talk will feature highlights of land protection projects the Land Conservancy has implemented in the Black River watershed and beyond with some birding highlights. As of June 2009, nearly 2700 acres have been protected by the Land Conservancy in the Firelands region.

### Christmas Bird Counts



Nationwide tens of thousands of observers participate each year in this all-day census of early-winter bird populations. The results of their efforts are compiled into the longest running database that represents an unbroken set of data revealing trends in bird populations. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is citizen science in action. The Black River Audubon Society conducts counts within two different areas.

You can join us in the field or count the birds coming to your feeder at home, if you live within one of the two count-circles. No experience is needed, and birders of all skill-levels are welcome. If you are new to birding or the CBC, we'll assign you to work with an experienced team of birders. You do not need to participate for the whole day. We'd be happy if you can join us, even if it is just for a few hours. Some areas in a count circle are best

counted on foot and others are more suitable to be counted from a vehicle. We can accommodate birders of nearly all mobility levels.

#### Ways to obtain further information:

Contact one of the coordinators, or register online at

[http:// www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.htm](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.htm)

Select *Get Involved*.

The **Elyria-Lorain** count code is **OHEL**.

The **Wellington** count code is **OHWE**.

## **Elyria-Lorain CBC**

Saturday, December 19, 2009

Coordinator: Jack Smith 440-322-0820

Call Jack to participate.

At the end of the day we will be meeting at Jack's house, 304 West Avenue in Elyria at 6:30 p.m. for a potluck dinner. We'll compile the results and share stories from the day's activities. Bring a dish to share. Soda, coffee, water, and tableware will be provided.

## **Wellington CBC**

Saturday, January 2, 2010

Coordinator: Erik Bruder 440-808-1970 or erik.bruder@gmail.com

Come to the McDonald's in Wellington at 7:30 AM on January 2, 2010. We'll assign you to a count area at that time.

At the end of the day we will be meeting at the Oberlin Depot on SR58 across from McDonald's in Oberlin at 6:30 p.m. for a potluck dinner. We'll compile the results and share stories from the day's activities. Bring a dish to share. Soda, coffee, water, and tableware will be provided. You do not have to participate in the count to join us at the potluck dinner.

## **Field Trip**

January 16, 2010 (Saturday)

### **Lorain Harbor and Avon Lake**

Meet at Spitzer Lakeside Marina at 9:00 a.m.

## **November 14, 2009 Birding**

In an unorganized survey, eight Black River Audubon members in three groups recorded in eBird identifications of 56 species at six sites, Avon Lake Power Plant, Lorain Harbor, Sandy Ridge, Black River Reservation, Wellington Upground Reservoir, and Wellington Reservation. At the Wellington Upground Reservoir, Dane Adams photographed a male surf scoter. Dick Lee spotted an evening grosbeak at Black River Reservation.

Surf Scoter/Dane Adams



## **Photographers Record Two Unusual Visitors**

### **Northern Wheatear by Dane Adams**

I learned of the northern wheatear on the internet website for Ohio bird sightings (<http://birdingonthenet/maillinglists/OHIO.html>) at about 2:00 p.m. on September 12, 2009. I left immediately for Bunker Hill, Ohio, east of Millersburg, OH and arrived about an hour and 45 minutes after I had read the posting. The bird was reported by an Amish family. When I arrived, about 20 other birders from all over Ohio were already there. The northern wheatear was perched on a log, part of quite a large pile near the Amish gentleman's barn. I set up for digiscoping and took many pictures with differing lightings, exposure settings and f-stop settings in hopes of getting a few good shots. The photograph on the first page of this document was taken while the bird was on that pile (though it did fly to a nearby dirt mound and to the ground and to the gravel driveway from time to time). The bird was in brilliant sunlight (almost too bright) and the very dark background was created by the shadows of the stacked logs behind the bird.

### White-faced Ibis by Jan Auburn



I spent the morning of June 29, 2009 with Terri Martincic working on the projected Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas when a friend called. A white-faced ibis had been reported at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. So, off I went. I was just learning to digiscope, so, believe it or not, the photograph on the left is one of my first digiscoped photos. Naturally, I was thrilled with the results. For digiscoping I use a Canon A590 attached to a Swarovski spotting scope. The photo was taken in late morning or early afternoon and has not been digitally enhanced.

White-faced Ibis/Jan Auburn

## A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

Sometimes seeing a new bird is just a case of being lucky!

One winter I returned to Ohio after the Christmas holidays. It was a winter wonderland, and I decided to drive through Findley State Park. Way back then the park featured feeders at several sites along the road. One could drive through and see many birds from the car. On a sunny Sunday afternoon I drove into the park and noticed more cars than usual, perhaps because of the nice day. A variety of birds was dining at the feeders. As I turned onto the road leading to picnic point, I met a traffic jam! Cars were bumper to bumper, and people with binocs studied one particular feeder. I looked too, and saw the usual winter birds plus a robin, but it was a robin with a dark band across its breast!



What's that, I thought as I reached for my field guide. Although my book covered the eastern U.S., like all good guides, it included accidentals. Sure enough, on the robin page was the bird, a varied thrush, normally seen in Washington and Oregon in winter.

Wow! I went home and called some birding friends. Although news media often do not include nature sightings, hot lines for birders are sometimes listed.

I was just a lucky birder on a Sunday afternoon drive.

## Great Backyard Bird Count

Bird watchers coast to coast are invited to take part in the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 12, through Monday, February 15, 2010. Participants in the free event will join tens of thousands of volunteers of all levels of birding experience to count birds in their own backyards, local parks, or wildlife refuges.

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novice bird watchers to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). For more information about GBBC, visit [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org). Or contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at 800-843-2473.

## Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*)

By Jack Smith

This month's first-page photograph represents an extremely rare accidental bird in Ohio, an adult female northern wheatear. In 1988 Mark Shieldcastle banded a northern wheatear, but I found no other reference to identification of a northern wheatear in Ohio. The bird is slightly smaller than an eastern bluebird, which is a member of the same family, Turdidae or thrushes. It has a small sharply pointed, tweezers-like bill used to capture small invertebrates from crevices and holes in the rocky tundra and barren slopes of the far north of North America and Asia, where wheatears are found in reasonable numbers during the summer breeding season. Its feet are also equipped for gripping rocks and limbs and for running along rocky terrain searching for insects. Three toes point forward and one backward. The bird also snatches insects out of the air like a flycatcher and eats some berries.



Its scientific name, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, is derived from the Greek words oene (vine) and anthos (blossom). Aristotle named the bird because it appeared in Greece while vines were flowering. The word wheatear has nothing to do with either wheat or ears, but is a euphemism for the Anglo-Saxon "white arse" in reference to its distinctive white rump. In flight the bird is easily identified with its inverted black T on the tail against the contrasting white rump. It is most frequently found in barren rocky tundra running after spiders, insects, and centipedes.

It nests in crevices among large stones in the tundra or in a hole under a rock. A pair of wheatears display elaborate courting rituals. For example, in one the female crouches on the ground while the male leaps rapidly back and forth over her while displaying his outstanding tail patterns. The male defends his territory by song, including imitations of other bird-songs. The nest, probably built by the female, is composed of an untidy shell of dried stems, rootlets and grass surrounding a cup composed of fine grass, moss, and lichens. She lays 5 to 8 pale blue eggs and dominates the 13-day incubation. Both parents feed the nestlings until the young fledge at about age 15-days.

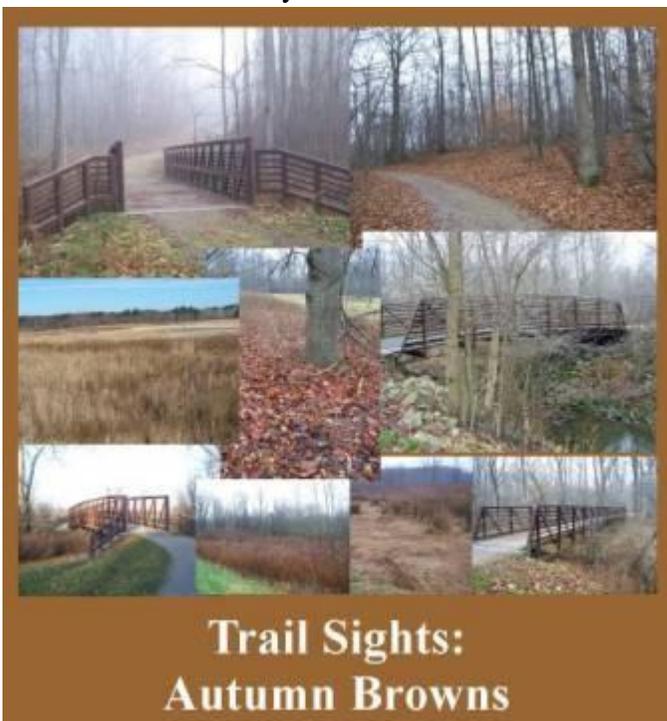
Soon the family begins its arduous migration to Africa.

Eastern Arctic birds swing across Greenland and Iceland to reach sub-Sahara Africa via Europe, and western Arctic birds fly via Asia to reach sub-Sahara Africa.

Some ornithologists argue that the northern wheatear was an old-world species that expanded into North America along two different routes, one along the coast of Greenland to eastern Canadian-Arctic tundra, and one across Siberia and the Bering Straits to Alaskan and Canadian tundra.

In North America wheatear population numbers seem stable although possibly increasing. In Europe population numbers are declining partly due to increased use of pesticides and partly due to hunting, particularly in Mediterranean countries. Reforestation of European upland areas also reduces the birds' favorite open-land habitats.

**References:** *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *Encyclopedia of Birds*, Laurie Likoff, Editorial Director; *Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn



## Quarterly Financial Report Summary:

7/1/09 – 9/30/09

(Excerpted from Treasurer Steve Chavez's report)

Expenses	\$7,715.07
Income	
Restricted	\$ 609.69
Unrestricted	\$ 8,734.63
Total	\$ 9,344.32
Checking Acct. 9/30/09	
Restricted	\$1,868.76
Unrestricted	\$15,319.26
Total	\$17,188.02
Trust Fund Investments 9/30/09	\$157,750.04

### Hog Island Camp Scholarship Available

By **Dick Lee**, Chair, Education Committee

After a one year hiatus for financial reasons, Audubon offers week-long summer programs for adults and teens at Hog Island in Maine. Featured instructors will include Steve Kress, Kenn Kaufman and Scott Weidensaul. Five sessions are scheduled: *Field Ornithology I (Joy of Birding)*, *Field Ornithology II*, *Maine Seabird Biology and Conservation*, and *Maine Coast Birding Studies for Teens*.



For two decades Black River Audubon has funded many local educators, naturalists and community leaders. Black River Audubon Scholarships include tuition, room, and board. Winners provide their own transportation.

For **additional information** about Hog Island camp:

<http://www.projectpuffin/OrnithCamps.html>.

For **scholarship application** contact Dick Lee at:

leedck@windstream.net or 440-322-7449

### Black River Audubon Invests \$3822 in Educational Materials for Young Students

By **Harry Spencer**

During the current school year Education Committee Chair Dick Lee has distributed Audubon Adventure kits to 117 Lorain County schools and educators at a cost of \$3,822.35. These numbers are Chapter records for the several years that the Chapter has been making annual donations of Audubon Adventures. The numbers may challenge the records for all chapters of National Audubon.



One of our trust funds, Audubon Adventures Trust Fund, is focused exclusively on these donations, but the few hundreds of dollars paid as dividends by the fund fall far short of this year's expenses. Because of the need to support and educate third, fourth, and fifth grade students about nature and its many fascinating characteristics, and because of the current popularity of Audubon Adventures, Black River Audubon spends general funds to supplement the dividends received from the Audubon Adventures Trust Fund. This year a grant from Audubon Ohio provided welcome additional support. In our grant application, we set a goal of twenty additional kits for the current school year. Chairman Dick Lee reports "We have done that and hope to continue beyond that goal."

The use of Audubon Adventure by third, fourth, and fifth-grade educators, whether teachers in public, private, home, or elsewhere, has increased greatly during the last decade. In Lorain County, two explanations of this increased use are important. First, National Audubon has keyed our kits to the State of Ohio standards needed for successful performance in the state mandated exams. Second, and equally important, Dick Lee, a retired high-school science teacher, employs his skills and devotion to advertise the advantages of using the kits.

The diversity of users is illustrated by recent recipients of kits: Avon, Elyria City, Keystone, Avon Lake, Midview West, Amherst St. Joseph, and Christian schools; homeschoolers, Findley State Park, Master Gardeners Youth, and Oberlin College Graduate Teacher Education Program.

## Rio Grande Valley Birding

By **Erik Bruder**

In early November 2009, I attended the Rio Grande Valley Bird Festival in Texas for four days and birded on my own for four days. Sites I visited on my own included Laguna Atascosa NWR, Santa Ana NWR, Anzalduas County Park, Estero Llano Grande SP, Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, Quinta Mazatlan, Hugh Ramsey Nature Park, and the Harlingen Thicket. Sites I visited on field trips during the RGVBF include return visits to Santa Ana and Bentsen along with trips to Weslaco for parrots and visits to the Nature Conservancy's Southmost Preserve, Boca Chica beach, the Lower Rio Grande Valley NWR, and the Norias Division of the King Ranch.



I saw 176 species that are listed on my blog site,  
<http://boringbirding.blogspot.com/2009/11/rio-grande-valley-species-seen-list.html>.

Highlights start with the Rio Grande Valley specialties: green jays, great kiskadees, and plain chachalacas. Everyone should experience the raucous calls of dozens of chachalacas at least once in their life.



Ferruginous  
Pygmy-Owl/  
Erik Bruder

The volume and intensity is amazing. Other highlights include excellent views of two different ferruginous pygmy-owls at the King Ranch. There were also rarities that made well timed appearances including hook-billed kite and masked duck, a Mexican species only rarely seen north of the river. A real treat was a barn owl that flew no more than ten feet over our heads. We had good views of northern beardless tyrannulet, tropical parula, least grebe, buff-bellied hummingbirds, and verdin. I saw an Audubon/altamire oriole hybrid at Bentsen that the staff had nicknamed Smudgy due to its streaky hood. The March/April 2008 *Birding* magazine had an excellent article on

these hybrids. It can be found at

<http://www.aba.org/birding/v40n2p42.pdf>.

For travel to the Rio Grande Valley, I heartily encourage you to align travel dates with the Rio Grande Valley Bird Festival. Its field trips and leaders were outstanding. Speakers, including Don Kroodsmas, Lang Elliot, and Jeff Gordon, were excellent and entertaining. Traveling birders were abundant at the festival and the state of Ohio was well represented. I counted birders from sixteen states and three Canadian provinces. Camaraderie among the participants was great. Staff and volunteers did an amazing job and deserve a huge round of applause. The festival is held in early November each year.

If you decide to go, say hi to Marci for me.



Javelina/  
Erik Bruder