

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

January 2013



MALE & FEMALE COMMON REDPOLL photos by DANE ADAMS

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

Program

Tuesday, January 8, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Paul Motts

Ranger, Cuyahoga Valley National Park

Yellowstone in Winter

Paul Motts, a native of Massachusetts, has worked at Cuyahoga Valley National Park for twenty years. He and his wife, Gretchen, a native of Pennsylvania and a naturalist for over twelve years at the Rocky River Nature Center, enjoy traveling. They have visited Yellowstone National Park twice, and explored Mount Rainier, Olympic, Yosemite, Denali, Great Smoky Mountain, Acadia, and Grand Canyon National Parks.

Saturday, December 29

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

Call Tom Reed 440-647-4088

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

Field Trip

Saturday, January 19

Lorain Harbor & Avon Lake Power Plant

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

Board Meeting

Tuesday, January 29, 6:30 p.m.

304 West Ave., Elyria

The Jack Smith House

Jack Smith as WINGTIPS contributor

Excerpted from WINGTIPS, November 2011

The Common Redpoll

(Carduelis flammea)

By Jack Smith

In northern states, including Ohio, we see the common redpoll only in the winter and then only sporadically, some years in large numbers and other years almost not at all. It breeds in the Arctic areas of Canada and Alaska. This bird is extremely well adapted to the severe cold weather of this region, but when food is in short supply, it migrates (mostly by day) to more southern regions where its food is more plentiful. In the Cleveland area it is considered an irruptive common migrant and winter visitor, appearing and foraging in flocks along with goldfinches and other species in open fallow fields where there is an abundance of seeds. It will also frequent feeders and is known to be very friendly. The average date of arrival is mid-October, and most birds leave by the end of April.



The redpoll is a small finch about 5 to 5 ½ inches in length with a wingspan of 7.5 to 8.7 inches. Like a goldfinch it has the ability to grasp a perch and feed upside down. A special feature of this bird is a pouch in the throat area where it can store food for several hours, allowing it to feed rapidly in open cold areas and then move to sheltered areas to rest and digest food over longer periods.

As warmer weather arrives in the spring and days become longer, redpolls begin to migrate by day to northern areas of North America. As shown by banding records, some move from our area as far northwest as Alaska, and a few travel to Greenland.

When wintering in our area, males dominate females, but in their far north breeding grounds females dominate, even to the point of taking the lead in courtship. The areas selected for nest sites are in birch thickets and tundra scrub. Not much of the nesting territory is defended, and nests of other pairs may be close at hand. The nests, believed to be constructed by females, are in dense low shrubs within a few feet of the ground. A nest is a small open cup made of fine twigs, grass, and moss, lined mainly with ptarmigan feathers. A female typically lays 4 to 5 eggs. She incubates the eggs, and the male feeds her. The eggs hatch in 10 to 11 days. The female does most of the feeding of the young, while the contribution of the male for this chore varies. The young fledge 12 days after hatching. Migration then begins in flocks by day with movement only as far south as necessary to find food, primarily seeds. Cold does not bother this hardy little bird as long as the seeds are available.

References: *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *The Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* by Roger Tory Peterson; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres; *Weeds of the Northern US and Canada* by France Royer and Richard Dickinson; *Wildflowers in Winter* by Carol Levine.

November Field Trip: Sheldon Marsh

By **Harry Spencer**

If a birding trip designed as a tool to teach beginning birders were scheduled under ideal circumstances, this November Field Trip to Sheldon's Marsh would be the model. The birds were active and plentiful, and the sun shined continuously with almost no breeze. Our leaders, Gene Wright and Sandy Wright, were pleasant, knowledgeable, and patient. The nine other birders exhibited a range of skills. Several of the accomplished birders shared their observations with the rest of us, and we thank them.



Gene illustrated the proper and effective method to tell other birders the location of a bird of interest. He spotted a belted kingfisher perched on a distant limb. How did he identify the location of that limb so that the rest of us could study the bird through our binoculars? First he identified a unique visual object nearby, exposed roots of a large up-turned tree. The he directed our gaze to the long string of huge rocks lining the shoreline from the upturned tree to the abandoned pumping plant. He told us to move our gaze to the third rock to the left of the upturned tree. The bird was a few feet above that rock.

The key to this effective method is to choose a unique visual object as the initial focus.

Typical of most groups of birders, ours worked without any formal organization, but identified birds in an effective manner. Someone spotted a bird and told the group the general area and bird description. Someone else glimpsed the bird and guessed its identity. Someone else reported another glimpse and described some mark and suggested a possible confirmation, or perhaps a different identity. This process went back and forth until consensus was reached.

A new birder could boldly question any member of the group about any aspect of this identification. The more experienced birders are delighted to help answer any questions. Beginning birders are welcomed on our

Field Trips.

Terri Martincic reported in eBird our identifications of thirty-eight species, and I here list the species identified by the ALPHA code.

Sparrows & finches: FOSP, SOSP, SWSP, WTSP, HOFI, AMGO; Woodpeckers: RBWO, DOWO, HAWO, NOFL; Ducks & goose: CANG, WODU, MALL; Raptors: COHA, BAEA, RTHA; Blackbirds: RWBL, RUBL, COGR; Gulls: RBGU, HEGU; Others: BLJA, AMCR, BCCH, TUTI, WIWR, CAWR, EABL, AMRO, COLO, GBHE, KILL, BEKI, WBNU, EUST, YRWA.

What species did Terri report? Answers are listed at the end of this WINGTIPS.

The Way to a Bluebird's Heart

By Penny Brandau

Since the Eastern Bluebird's diet is primarily insects (about 68%) and the remainder is fruit, what can we do to entice them to feed on our properties? In the winter, dried mealworms, small bits of fruits and bluebird suet are often the foods of choice for feeding backyard bluebirds.

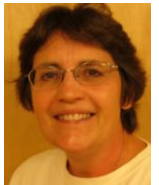
It is easiest to train bluebirds to come to a bluebird feeder in the summertime when they are nesting. Ten to fifteen live mealworms in a shallow dish about 25-50 feet from a nest box works well. Soon the adults will feed the young in the nest box. Caution: Limit the number so that the mealworms are only a supplement. The bluebirds will get used to your morning or evening feedings and can also show up at those times for their mealworm treats. They also learn to recognize and respond to a whistle or small bell, if that is consistently used each time mealworms are offered. You can substitute dry mealworms in the winter months.

Eastern bluebirds love dogwood berries and fruiting plants like sumac, wild grape, Japanese honeysuckle, climbing bittersweet, multiflora rose hips, pokeweed, viburnum species, greenbrier and poison ivy. Summer berries such as elderberries, blackberries or chokeberries are also part of their diets.

Other suitable foods are dried currants, chopped frozen-blueberries, dogwood berries, and serviceberries.

In the winter our backyard bluebirds eat crushed bluebird nuggets, a purchased mix of beef suet, roasted peanuts, raisins, corn and oats. Many recipes for homemade bluebird suet or puddings can be found in books and on websites. See: <http://www.sialis.org/suet.htm>. Avoid feeding bread and small seeds and cracked corn that attract house sparrows.

The two primary types of feeders are platform and the classic commercial available bluebird feeder.



Jack Smith as Civic-minded Naturalist

By Kate Pilacki

Jack Smith was a board member of the Firelands Land Conservancy when the FLC merged with other similar organizations to form Western Reserve Land Conservancy. In that capacity he told me that he was thinking about donating two acres to the City of Elyria along the Black River to form an Audubon Nature Preserve Park in the heart of Elyria. Jack said that he had been thinking about the park for a long time and that he had decided that the time was right. He wanted to run it by Andy McDowell and me at the Western Reserve Land Conservancy Firelands field office.

Along with some others at the land conservancy, Andy and I, made recommendations to him, and he quietly worked things out over the next year or so with the City of Elyria.

In early May 2012, Dan Buttler, a tree farmer and conservation-easement-donor from Wellington, Frank Gustoff of the City of Elyria Parks and Recreation Department, and I had the pleasure of accompanying Jack and Jean Sorton to the future park site for the purpose of discussing planting a tree in Jack's honor. It was a beautiful sunny day and Jack was very pleased when, unexpectedly, we found a large garter snake, a small



brown snake, and a salamander.

I particularly enjoyed our visit because Jack was so happy to contemplate the future park.

Later that month, the Black River Audubon Park was dedicated by planting a dawn redwood tree. City of Elyria officials, Black River Audubon members, and members of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy watched as Mayor Brinda and Jack planted the tree.

In a biological survey made soon after the dedication, John Katco, Dick Lee, John Pais, and I identified over fifty species at the park. Jack was pleased to obtain a species list including each scientific name.

In October, a small group of Western Reserve Land Conservancy and Black River Audubon folks began a clean-up of the park prior to another tree planting. It had rained a lot the night before, the hillside was slick, and we had a roaring river below us. Fortunately we had constructed a support rope to navigate the hillside. In trash bags furnished by the City of Elyria, we collected about 20 bags of trash, including much glass. To my surprise I uncovered more salamanders and snakes. Additionally we planted two pawpaw trees and two hemlock trees along the hillside. Around the dawn redwood tree, we planted about 120 tulip bulbs given to me by Jack last summer. Next spring the park should be quite a spectacle, and that would have pleased Jack.

Jack's generosity with his time, knowledge and resources will leave a mark on the region for generations to come.

Note: There will be another clean up of Jack's Audubon Park in the spring of 2013 at a date to be announced. We will continue the removal of debris and invasive plants.

A Birder's Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

Now would be a great time to head for Florida to study the wood storks of Corkscrew Swamp Wildlife Sanctuary, gateway to the western Everglades. This swamp of over 11,000 acres has been managed by the National Audubon Society since 1971. It contains the country's largest remaining stand of virgin bald cypress. Some trees are more than 700-years old, 130-feet tall, with girths of 25-feet.



Florida is the most likely place in the United States where one can find wood storks. In 1971 there were 4500 pairs nesting in the Corkscrew Sanctuary, but the population has declined drastically, and the birds are now classified as endangered.

These big, 31/2 foot tall birds are a sight to behold standing on their flimsy platform-nests high in the cypress trees. From the boardwalk, the birds can be seen flying overhead with their long legs extended backward and their naked heads, naked necks, and stout black decurved bills pointing forward.

The early winter dry season is nesting time. As the rains stop and the swamp begins to dry, the fish become highly concentrated in the shrinking water, and more food is available for the birds. But a successful nesting season depends on sufficient rain because the birds are touch feeders that walk in the water groping with their bills and swallowing any living thing (fish, frogs, snakes, aquatic insects, etc.) touching their partly opened bills.

The steadily declining population of this species is due to several factors: lumbering of big cypress trees in the swamp, drainage and lowering of water table, and drying of feeding areas. The land management and water use of the Florida sugar-cane industry, itself economically supported by federal programs, is one of the biggest problems. The man-made drainage system of southern Florida is still contributing to the destruction of the Everglades, that wonderful river of grass.

Pine Siskin

Carduelis Pinus

By Cathy Priebe

In early fall about four years ago, I noticed an unfamiliar bird on one of my thistle-seed feeders. It did not take long for me to realize that it was a pine siskin. I had seen them before, but not in my backyard.



Each day more siskins came. Within two weeks I was feeding over 100 siskins (all over the yard) and replenishing four feeders every other day. I even bought a five pound thistle feeder so I did not have to go outside as often. This feeding frenzy became a bit costly, but I was not going to stop because these little birds were so entertaining.

Fondly described by Pete Dunne as “the bratty, streaky, little pipsqueak at the thistle feeder”, siskins are a small, brown-striped finch type bird with some dull yellow throughout and a yellow lower wing bar. They also have a little, pointy bill and beady black eyes.

Pine siskins are an irruptive (meaning they show up without an invitation) species that generally breeds from southern to central Alaska across boreal Canada. They are also found year round in the northern U.S. and in the western mountain ranges. In the winter and early fall, large flocks of siskins will leave their northern ranges and head south to forage for food.

Take it from me; if you are lucky enough to host a hungry group of siskins, they will stick around as long as the buffet stays filled! Along with goldfinches, house finches, American tree sparrows and others, I kept the feed stores happy on a weekly basis.

Even though thistle-seed is probably their favorite food, siskins like to eat conifer-cone seeds, weed seeds, insects, flower buds, and nectar. They also eat on the ground and generally hang out with goldfinches. Once I became more familiar with their vocalizations, I learned to hear them before I saw them. Siskins have a wonderful and identifiable call that almost sounds like a zipper being pulled up. I describe it as zzzzziiiiippppp. Other descriptions are zzzreeee, zzzzeeee or zzzzeh.

Siskins do not regularly nest in Ohio. There have been some documented sites at several lake metro parks in the past. Since I was advised to keep a close eye out for nesting behavior, I was able to document at least two nesting pairs in my own backyard the following spring. Yes, I had siskins until June that year. I was even able to observe an adult siskin feeding a baby cowbird and a baby siskin. Amazing!

According to the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas, that year produced many nesting siskins all over Ohio. It was a banner year for siskins and fortunately there were people paying attention. Some very important data were collected on a very rare nester.

Keep your thistle feeders filled this winter of 2012-2013. According to past records, siskins have major irruptions every other year. I had about fifty siskins drop by this fall during and after Hurricane Sandy for a short time. They stayed about a week. I was sad to see them go, but I know they will be back. I will be ready!

References: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *Stokes Field Guide to Birds* by Donald and Lillian Stokes; *Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas* by Bruce G. Peterjohn & Daniel L. Rice.

Species identified on Field Trip to Sheldon Marsh

Sparrows & finches: fox sparrow, song sparrow, swamp sparrow, white-throated sparrow, house finch, American goldfinch; Woodpeckers: red-bellied woodpecker, downy woodpecker, hairy woodpecker, northern flicker; Ducks & goose: Canada goose, wood duck, mallard; Raptors: Cooper's hawk, bald eagle, red-tailed

hawk; Blackbirds: red-winged blackbird, rusty blackbird, common grackle; Gulls: ring-billed gull, herring gull; Others: blue jay, American crow, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, winter wren, Carolina wren, eastern bluebird, American robin, common loon, great blue heron, killdeer, belted kingfisher, white-breasted nuthatch, European starling, yellow-rumped warbler.

Note: The Alpha Code is called more accurately the American Ornithologists' Union Band Code.



PINE SISKIN photo by DANE ADAMS