

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

JANUARY 2017



RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH photo by Sue Mowatt

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe

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Program

Tuesday, January 3 at 7 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Tammy Martin

Panama or Bust



Tammy, of Vermilion, Ohio, works as a library cataloger at nearby Oberlin College. She earned a BS/MS in Environmental Interpretation from The Ohio State University based on a deep love/interest in everything “natural”...especially birds! During college, Tammy worked as a seasonal naturalist on the Blue Ridge Parkway [North Carolina], for the National Park Service. She returned to academia for employment in the library field, during which time she and husband, Dan, raised twins Sarah and Andy. After their graduation, Tammy found time to revive her interest in birding and hasn't looked back. An active member of Black River Audubon (Board member, Field Trip organizer, and Outstanding Speaker Series coordinator), the Lorain County Chapter for National Audubon, Tammy frequently leads monthly field trips. International birding is now high on her agenda, as well as road biking with Dan, retired director/secretary of the Lorain County Metro Parks. Tammy and Dan are also thrilled to be grandparents!

Field Trips

Saturday, January 21, 2017, 9:00 a.m.

Lorain Harbor and Avon Lake

Tammy Martin to lead. Meet at Jackalope Restaurant parking area

Great Backyard Bird Count Coming

The next GBBC is February 17-20, 2017

Go to www.BirdCount.org

Rocky River Reservation Metro Park

November 19, 2016 Field Trip

By Tammy Martin

What a difference a day can make in northern Ohio! Sunny Friday had temps in the 70s, but Saturday brought rain, wind, and cold temps in the 30s! Brrr. But, BRAS's first ever outing to Rocky River Reservation still occurred. Three brave Vermilionites (Sally, Barb, and me) met leader Bill Deininger and several of his fellow Western Cuyahoga Audubon members (Ken, Dave, Maryanne, and Jean) for a chilly and slightly drippy walk. Fortunately, the rain let up quickly and the walk commenced.

We birded around the nature center, picking up several species coming to the feeding station and nearby pond areas. Then, the group headed into the park, making a big loop covering various habitats (woods, fields, wetlands, etc.). Afterwards, we checked out the feeding station at a very busy nature center, which was hosting a program on Native Americans. How great to see so many youngsters enjoying this program!

One charming highlight of our outing included hand-feeding many chickadees, titmice, and one brave nuthatch! If you decide to bird or just walk at Rocky River Reservation, take a handful of sunflower seeds or raw peanuts. They love both!

Also of interest on this chilly November morning were the white-tailed deer, especially the bucks. These guys, with full racks, were definitely on the move, following the does. Our presence didn't even faze them. Bird-wise, we tallied the following 24 species: Canada goose, mallard, red-tailed hawk, belted kingfisher, red-bellied, downy, and hairy woodpeckers, blue jay, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, Carolina wren, kinglet (not sure which one, as we only heard it...no visual), eastern bluebird, American robin, cedar waxwing, American tree, song, and white-throated sparrows, dark-eyed junco, northern cardinal, red-winged blackbird, house finch, and goldfinch.

FYI—Western Cuyahoga Audubon (leaders Bill, Ken, and Dave) offers a regular walk at Rocky River Reservation the second Saturday of each month at 9 a.m. Feel free to join them, as guests are always welcome!

A Birder's Diary: Albatrosses

By Carol Leininger

Albatrosses have always fascinated me. Many years ago I signed up to visit Midway Island in the midst of the Pacific Ocean. It was an Earthwatch program where you pay for the privilege of helping a scientist with his research. I couldn't wait to see albatrosses until the week before the trip when I received a letter saying the program was cancelled – I was the only person who signed up!



Recently, I read about Noah Strycher's study of albatrosses in *The Thing with Feathers* and relived my disappointment once again. Guess I will just have to be satisfied with rereading Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

According to John Ternes in The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds, there are thirteen species of albatrosses but only three breed north of the equator; the Laysan and blackfooted albatrosses are the most abundant breeders on Midway. Albatrosses were slaughtered for their feathers for hats and to stuff pillows in the 19th century until President Teddy Roosevelt designated an island as a wildlife reservation.

These birds have long narrow wings, some spanning eleven feet, and glide gracefully in wind currents near the ocean surface, rarely flapping. They usually feed at night on squid and cuttlefish but often follow ships to feed on garbage as well.

A typical adult wanderer will have traveled four million miles in its lifetime, about eight round trips to the moon. The grey-headed albatross of the southern Hemisphere was recently recorded circling Antarctica in 42 days.

Albatrosses spend 95 percent of their life soaring over the open ocean only landing on remote islands to breed. The birds are monogamous, laying eggs each year starting at age five. In large colonies, they nest in scrapes of sand surrounded by low vegetation. What I had really wanted to see on my hoped-for visit was their elaborate, courtship ritual, which gives them the name of "gooney birds."

Can you imagine a Laysan Albatross nesting on a tropical Pacific island routinely gliding 2,000 miles up to Alaska and back just to grab a quick snack for their hungry chick? Now that is truly albatross love or what Strycker called “wandering hearts.” If you get the chance to visit a breeding colony of albatrosses, do it now. With global warming and the rise in sea level, some of these islands may soon disappear.

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

Sitta canadensis

By Cathy Priebe

My first encounter with the small and feisty red-breasted nuthatch occurred one early fall day while I was filling my backyard feeders. I kept hearing an incessant and somewhat annoying nasally “yank, yank, yank” call coming from our oak tree. At first, I thought it was our white-breasted nuthatches scolding me, until I spotted one going up the trunk of a maple and it was not talking.



Where is this bird that is making this racket, I wondered. I placed the last filled feeder on its hook and was startled when a diminutive blue and white bird with rusty sides promptly landed on the perch, snatched a seed and flew into a low hanging oak branch. I guess the little guy was starving and I was not filling the feeders fast enough. I could have reached out and touched him he was so close! And that was the beginning of many encounters that year with a pair of red-breasted nuthatches that chose my backyard to spend the winter and early spring. I fondly named them, Skeeter and Scooter.

Even though that was the first time I had seen a red-breasted in my yard, it does not mean that they had not been here before. Red-breasted nuthatches commonly live in northern boreal forests and only come southward in fall and winter when their food supplies dwindle, much like pine siskins. This irruptive behavior can occur almost anywhere and sometimes in great numbers. Their preferred habitat when migrating include conifers, mixed woodlands, and, of course, bird feeders. I was also thrilled that year to observe and count many red-breasteds at Findley State Park for the Wellington Christmas Bird Count.

Females and males look alike except for a few minor details that could be difficult to spot without closer observation. Their face is quite expressive with its black cap and white eyebrow with a black eye line. Pete Dunne says the black eye stripe gives the bird “a cross, mean expression”. I disagree, but I am obviously biased.

It has been noted that a few red-breasteds annually breed in northeastern Ohio, but it is quite common for more of them to stay and breed after a large irruption. Nesting is usually an abandoned woodpecker hole or their own hole, which they excavate and line with bark, grass and fur. The female will incubate 5 to 6 brown spotted eggs. Both parents take care of the young.

The red-breasted nuthatch forages for larval and other insects hiding beneath tree bark as it travels up or down tree trunks. It also eats tree seeds (pine and spruce) and frequents seed and suet feeders. It is not unusual during the winter to find them hanging out with kinglets, chickadees or tufted titmice.

After hosting this first pair of red-breasted nuthatches for almost six months, I have had them return approximately every other year. This year I had a very short-lived visit from one individual who stayed for only one day. According to the Ohio birding list service and other sources, red-breasteds are turning up all over the state. I hope that they decide to stop by my backyard this winter for a short visit. I will keep my ears open for their distinctive “yank, yank, yank!”

References: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide* by Pete Dunne; *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior* by David Allen Sibley.

RED-TAILED HAWK

Buteo jamacensis

Barbara Baudot

I've had close encounters with red-tailed hawks. Once, in a field on the edge of a woodland, I met one perched on a branch just above me. It remained motionless as I took several photos of the cooperative subject. Another time, while walking with a companion on a path beside a field, we found one caught in barbed wire. It was still alive and obviously exhausted and bloodied from struggling to be free. It is indeed a regal species with a keen sense of its situation and patience to endure.



Photo by John Koscinski

however, are regulated and protected by law. Ordinary citizens have had wonderful encounters with this bird. One urban red-tailed hawk, named "[Pale Male](#)," became the famous subject of a non-fiction book, *Red-Tails in Love: A Wildlife Drama in Central Park*. He is the first known red-tail in decades to successfully nest and raise young in [Manhattan](#). Born in 1990, [Pale Male](#) was still raising young in 2014.

Maturing at 2 to 3 years of age, the male red-tail searches for a mate with whom he will remain for life, possibly, as long as 30 years or more. During courtship, the male and female fly in wide circles while uttering shrill cries. The male performs aerial displays, diving steeply, and then climbing again. After repeating this display several times, he can sometimes grasp her [talons](#) briefly with his own.

The hawks build nests, which also serve as lookout towers, at the time of their pre-nesting courtship. The couple may build them on the crowns of large trees, the ledges of cliffs, or even on the tops of buildings. Rather than build new nests each year, the couple may refurbish their previous home. The nests, as large as 3 feet in diameter and nearly six feet high, are constructed of twigs, and lined with [bark](#), pine needles, or other plant lining matter. The mates may defend the same nesting territory for years.

In March or April the female lays one to three white, buffy, blotched or speckled eggs. (The number of eggs depends on the latitude and availability of food.) Both parents are actively involved, the male doing most of the hunting, the female incubating and taking the main responsibility for feeding the young nestlings. About six to seven weeks after fledging, the young begin to capture their own prey. They are fully independent at four months. Afterward, the parents remain together and often hunt as a pair, guarding opposite sides of the same tree to catch squirrels.

Red-tailed hawk plumage comes in a variety of shades and patterns of white, rufous, and brown depending on subspecies and geographic regions. The red tails are cinnamon or brick red above and light buff-orange below. Their bills are short, dark and hooked shaped. They have relatively short, broad tails and thick, chunky wings. Their legs and feet are all yellow. Females, similarly plumed, are somewhat smaller than the males.

Now all across North America and south as far as Central America, red-tailed hawks [colloquially called chicken hawks] with their wingspans between three and four feet wide, are easily observed as they fly slowly, their wings dipping deeply and deliberately. They then glide seemingly motionless, in circular patterns high and low above grasslands, scrublands, woodlands, and deserts, even rain forests, emitting their shrill cries described as kree-eee-ar. Abruptly, these carnivorous birds dive to the ground to capture some unsuspecting rodent, bird or snake. Often too, they can be spotted at rest perched on utility lines, telephone poles or on the outer branches of trees bordering meadows and woodlands. The red-tailed hawk is likely the most common raptor in North America. Of least concern on the IUCN list of endangered species, its population is generally stable, even increasing in some locations. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act legally protects it in Canada, Mexico and the United States.

References: Wikipedia, *Red-tailed hawk* in Wikipedia; *Red-tailed Hawk* in Cornell Lab of Ornithology, allaboutbirds.org/guide/Red-tailed_Hawk.

Water is Life

We clean with it, we bathe in it, we drink and cook with it and biologists say it makes up about sixty percent of our bodies. It is the reason all life exists on our planet. We are most definitely water!

The Standing Rock Sioux nation is certainly aware of this fact, as they have been protesting the construction of Dakota Access Pipeline that is planned to carry oil across their reservation, in violation of water and treaty rights.

The pipeline was originally planned to pass through Bismarck, North Dakota but was deemed too risky to the water of its residents but is now being built across land that is sacred to the Sioux and water that is necessary for their survival. Future pipeline breaks would also threaten the Sioux but all downstream communities along the Missouri River.

Presiding Episcopal Bishop Michael Curry issued a statement calling the growing movement to protect the Sioux water and treaty rights “the New Selma” in reference to the famous protest for voting rights in the 1960’s. It is also a warning and reminder to all of us of the importance of water to the environment and to all of us.

The protestors, in action since this past spring, are now facing harsh winter conditions at the construction site. Those among our BRAS members who support this cause for both racial and environmental justice can donate at website “standingrock.org.” **JJ**

Hog Island Birding Camp Scholarships Available Again

This year we offer two Hog Island scholarships to adults. Each scholarship covers tuition, room and board, and travel expenses. Our goal is that the recipients will follow the examples of those who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors of conservation and education in our community.

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine learning from accomplished naturalists, birders and educators.

The following camps have been particularly valuable to past participants: *Joy of Birding* (June 4-9), *Field Ornithology* (June 18-23), and *Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week* (July 16-21). For details and registration go to hogisland.audubon.org. Individuals interested in applying for the BRAS scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at jjjablon@aol.com or 440-365-6465. *JJ*