

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS



COMMON GOLDENEYE photo by Dane Adams

March 2014

Editors: Harry Spencer, Cathy Priebe
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PROGRAM

March 4, 2014

Carlisle Visitor Center, 7:00 p.m.

Chuck Jakubchak

Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist

Creating a Kestrel Experience:

A Black River Audubon Experience



Chuck Jakubchak is a retired manager for General Electric by trade, but a naturalist at heart. He is an Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist and has spoken at many Ohio bird festivals about his nature experiences. He volunteered to document and produce a program on how the Black River Audubon Society implemented the first American kestrel conservation program in Lorain County last year. He and his wife Jeanne reside in Strongsville.

Ohio's population of American kestrels has been on the decline for the past few decades. Inspired by the final request of a Black River Audubon founder, Jack Smith, the Black River Audubon Society developed a program to help reverse the population trend of this small native falcon. "My presentation will focus on the heartwarming actions of Black River Audubon and discuss the challenges currently facing American kestrels in Ohio," explained Jakubchak. "This bird is a true friend of the farmer and desperately needs our help."

Field Trip

March 15, 2014, Saturday, 9 a.m.

Oberlin and Wellington Reservoirs

Chatham for pancakes

Meet at Oberlin Reservoir

Tammy Martin leading

Board Meeting

March 25, 2014, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.

The Jack Smith House, 304 West Ave, Elyria

Save the date:

Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker Series

Saturday, April 5, 2 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

Jim McCormac

Wild Ohio

CONSTRUCTION of CAMP PERRY WIND TURBINE SUSPENDED

By **Harry Spencer,**

According to Tom Henry, Toledo Blade writer, the National Guard has suspended construction of the Camp Perry wind turbine because of objections. This suspension was instituted just weeks after the American Bird Conservancy and the Black Swamp Bird Observatory announced their intention to sue the Ohio National Guard.



The American Bird Conservancy and Black Swamp Bird Observatory announcement, in the form of a letter sent by the public interest law firm of Meyer Glitzenstein & Crystal, stated that the environmental review process was unlawfully circumvented and that the development was taking place in violation of the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.



PIPING PLOVER photo by
Dane Adams

“The proposed development of wind power at Camp Perry ignores many concerns expressed by wildlife professionals in the US Fish and Wildlife Service and in the Ohio Department of Natural Resources,” said Dr. Michael Hutchins, National Coordinator of American Birding Conservancy’s Bird Smart Wind Energy Campaign. “If completed, this turbine would sit in the middle of a major bird migration corridor adjacent to a national wildlife refuge. The Fish and Wildlife Service has concluded it is likely to kill threatened and endangered bird species, such as the piping plover and Kirtland’s warbler, as well as other federally protected birds. We are asking the developer to immediately halt construction and take the steps mandated by federal law to prevent the illegal killing of protected species.”

American Bird Conservancy and Black Swamp Bird Observatory consider that placement of wind turbines at the Camp Perry facility represents a high risk to migrating songbirds, especially the federally endangered Kirtland’s warbler. Less than forty years ago, this species was nearly extinct. Despite costly and intensive management efforts, however, the population of Kirtland’s warblers now numbers only a few thousands.

The American Bird Conservancy created a Wind Development Bird-Risk Map that shows the Ohio Lake Erie shoreline as among the worst possible locations for a wind-power project. The configuration of water and land near Camp Perry serves to



‘funnel’ large numbers of protected migratory birds through a small area. In order to avoid a long lake-crossing the birds either hug the shoreline or follow the shortest cross-water route to the Pelee Peninsula to the north. The southern terminus of this route, including Magee Marsh, is a major stopover habitat, where migrating birds are not merely flying over, but landing and taking off, often during poor weather conditions.

Sources: Toledo Blade, Elyria Chronicle Telegram, Black Swamp Bird Observatory

A Birder’s Diary: Finches

By Carol Leininger

The Finch family contains many beautiful birds: cardinals, buntings, grosbeaks, finches, and sparrows. All have strong cone-shaped bills adapted for cracking seeds.



I had birded a long time before I realized that I needed to face the challenge of identifying sparrows, better known as little brown streaked birds (LBSB). Most field guides are helpful because all LBSB are grouped together, with similar ones on the same page.

As I began to conquer this challenge in bird identification, I found that the process of elimination works best. There are three main characteristics: breast and belly, head, and location and habitat..

Breast and belly. All LBSB have brown streaked backs, but the breast and belly may be either streaked or plain. Some species have a white throat and some have a dark spot in the center of the breast (I like to call this a tie pin).

Head. There is much to look for on the head. The crown may be a rusty color, boldly striped, or just plain. There may be an eye ring or eye lines (above or through the eye) of different colors. Bill colors vary among LBSB.

Location and Habitat. First, it helps to have an eastern field guide as opposed to a guide of all North America. Maps in the guide will let you know if a particular bird is a migrant or resident in the area of observation. Some guides indicate the typical habitat, for example, meadows, woods, or wetlands, for a species. But is also worthwhile to remember that accidentals can occur, especially during migration season.

Once you have narrowed your identification by these three features it is time to look at more details. Some LBSB vary a bit in size. Leg color and subtle shades of brown and other facial or cheek markings may help identification. The tail may vary in length, have white borders, or be forked. For many birders the songs will help immensely. (Unfortunately my ears are not very helpful to me.)

Now the bad news. The two most common LBSB at your feeder and around you home are not sparrows at all, and they are not pictured in your field guide with the sparrows. The English or house sparrow is member of the weaver family, not the finch family. It is an alien species brought to North America in the nineteenth century. It is the most common LBSB in North America. Males have a grey crown and black bib. Females are perfect examples of little brown streaked birds.

The house finch is another story. It is a member of the finch family, and looks like a sparrow in many ways. In your field guide it is listed along with other finches. It resembles closely purple finches. The males look like a LBSB with a rosy red-pink color. Females are drab and considerable examination is needed to distinguish them from female purple finches.

House finches are becoming more and more abundant in eastern North America and they add delightful color to the LBSB.

Field Trip: Lorain Harbor and Avon Power Plant

By **Sally Fox**

Thirteen members, led by John Pogacnik, bundled up for the single-digit temperature for our January 18 Field Trip. We were rewarded with wonderful views of a snowy owl sitting next to driftwood on the ice at Lorain Harbor. On the down side, the ice filled the harbor such that even with a scope, we could only see swimming birds far from shore. On open areas of the river north and south of the Bascule Bridge, however, we saw Canada goose, mallard, American black duck, American coot, black-crowned night-heron, redhead, European starling, rock pigeon, and house sparrow. At Sheffield Lake we identified long-tailed duck and white-winged scoter. At the Avon Lake Power Plant we added red-breasted, common and hooded mergansers, ring-billed, herring, and great black-backed gulls, canvasback, lesser scaup, common goldeneye, peregrine falcon, and bald eagle.



Common Goldeneye

Bucephala clangula

By **Jim Jablonski**

As a beginning birder a few years ago I took a walk in nearby Sandy Ridge to try out my brand-new binoculars. As a novice, I couldn't see much of anything along the path through the woods but hit the jackpot once I got to the marshes and ponds that are the main attractions.



I turned to my Peterson's guide repeatedly to identify the "new to me" pintails, shovelers and wigeons mixed in with the usual mallards and Canada geese. Among the various new ducks was one with an interesting white circle on its cheek that I first confused with a ruddy duck or a female bufflehead.

On closer inspection the new duck turned out to be a male common goldeneye. I was introduced to the curious naming of birds, since it seemed to me the white spot was much more obvious than the amber eye color that I could barely make out at a distance.

The goldeneye, although smaller than most ducks at eighteen inches, was interesting as its head seemed to change color in the light from black to an iridescent, muted green. Its dark head and back contrasted with the brilliant white of its sides, which were set off nicely by black stripes.

A diving duck by trade, the common goldeneye feeds on crustaceans, mollusks, fish, etc. in both freshwater ponds and coastal bays. It turns to vegetation at times and in a pinch even ducks its head in shallow water to feed.

For years, I have been under the impression that only wood ducks nested in trees, but so does the goldeneye, using tree cavities 5-60 feet off the ground. It easily takes to nest boxes, like the wood duck, and even abandoned buildings, building a nest of woodchips lined with down. Like wood ducks, the nest is used primarily for incubating; the young leave the nest a day or two after hatching and are able to feed on their own.

Often seen in flocks, the goldeneye is known to spread its reproductive wealth, often laying its eggs in the nests of other goldeneyes. This "intraspecific brood parasitism" is difficult to detect in nest cavities and boxes and has resulted in clutches of more than thirty eggs. Usually, however, female goldeneyes can adjust their egg laying to avoid over-burdening themselves when their neighbors have taken advantage of them.

This parasitism seems to be frequent among goldeneyes since they tend to return to the areas where they hatched, often to find a shortage of nesting sites. As a result they keep their children in the extended family by parasitizing the nests of their mothers and sisters.

Despite, or perhaps because of its parasitizing, the common goldeneye population seems to be stable, and possibly growing in areas where nest boxes are available.

References: *The Birders Handbook* by Paul Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye; *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *Stokes Field Guide to Birds* by Donald and Lillian Stokes.

Eastern Towhee

Pipilo erythrophthalmus

By Cathy Priebe

I first encountered an eastern towhee unexpectedly. At the dining room table, friends and I were talking casually while looking out the patio windows. It was a damp, cool late afternoon in early spring and the feeder bird activity was sporadic.

Suddenly, we all spotted a bird furtively ducking in and out of the brush pile behind the platform feeder. Digging under the leaf litter while kicking backwards was an eastern towhee!! This was a first for our backyard and the first towhee sighting for all of us.



The male eastern towhee has a dark black hood and back, with reddish brown sides and a white belly. The female is just as striking but is milk chocolate (brown) on top instead of black and is otherwise colored similarly to the male.

Towhees do not migrate very far and are often found wintering in southern and eastern Ohio.

Since our first towhee encounter, these handsome birds have been regular visitors under our feeders. Springtime males like to sit conspicuously on top of tall bushes or low tree limbs and call out their identifiable song “drink your teeeeee, chewink”. If I did not hear them calling, I would not even know they were in the yard most of the time. Towhees generally conceal themselves quite well but can be coaxed into the open by making low squeaking sounds or pishing.

Preferring dense, shrubby thickets, overgrown fields and woodland openings, towhees are very common in Ohio and breed in every county. They nest on the

EASTERN TOWHEE photo by Dane Adams

ground or low in a dense shrub. Their cup-shaped nest is made of twigs, bark strips, animal hair and grass. For two weeks the female incubates three or four pale grayish white eggs spotted with brown. Towhees find most of their food (insects, seeds and berries) by scratching through leaf litter. In the urban backyard, they can be spotted under feeders picking up fallen seed.

On spring hikes, especially at Indian Hollow Park in Grafton, I have found many of these birds. Often I hear towhee calls coming from all directions as soon as I exit the car.

This spring listen carefully for: "Drink your teeeeee!" **References:** *Birds of Ohio*, Jim McCormac; *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, third edition; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion*, Pete Dunne.

Audubon Camp Scholarship Available

Again Black River Audubon offers a scholarship to educators and naturalists to enhance their knowledge and skills at the Maine Audubon Camp at Hog Island. The camper spends one week off the coast of Maine learning from some of the most respected naturalists and environmental educators in the nation.

The scholarship pays tuition and fees plus room and board. The recipient pays transportation costs.

Contact Dick Lee: 440-322-7449 or leedck@windstream.net.

CONSERVATION EASEMENTS & FARMLAND PROTECTION

Wednesday, March 12, 6:30 to 8 p.m.
EHOVE Career Center, Room A-101
316 W. Mason Road

Milan, Erie County

This is an educational event, sponsored by the Western Reserve Land Conservancy, to provide landowners with information about conservation options, including conservation easements, the state's Agricultural Easement Protection Program, and other farmland preservation initiatives. Andy McDowell, Western Reserve Land Conservancy, western field director, is the featured speaker.

For more information, 440-774-4221 or kpilacky@wrlandconservancy.org