

WINGTIPS

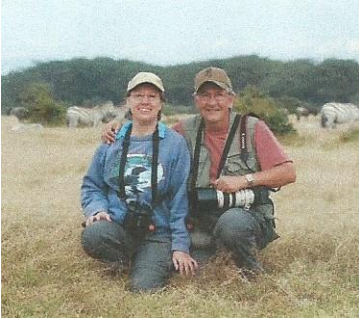
MARCH 2015



RED CROSSBILL (female) photo by Dane Adams

Editors: Jim Jablonski, Cathy Priebe, Harry Spencer

Program
John and Judy Wilkinson
Kenya, the Whole of Africa
March 3 2015, 7 p.m.
Carlisle Visitor Center



John and Judy Wilkinson became interested in birding fifteen years ago, along with their son Brad who will be starting work on his master's degree at San Jose State University, specializing in seabirds and island habitat conservation. With Brad, they have birded many of the birding hotspots across the continental United States.

Although they are not serious life-listers, they enjoy seeing new bird species and experiencing the wide variety of natural places where birds are found. They have been to Mexico, Ecuador, Panama, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, Thailand and Madagascar. They are members of the Akron Audubon Society, the Black Swamp Bird Observatory, the Kirtland Bird Club and the Ohio Ornithological Society.

Their program will offer Africa "in a nutshell" by concentrating on Kenya's flamingo-filled Rift Valley lakes to alpine Mt. Kenya and the western lowland forests at Kakamega. According to the Wilkinsons, these habitats, combined with bird-rich savannas make Kenya a logical choice for anyone planning their first African birding adventure.

Field Trips

Saturday, March 14, 2015, 9 a.m.
Oberlin and Wellington Reservoirs
Meet Sally Fox at Oberlin Reservoir

Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker Series

March 21, 2015, 2 p.m.
Carlisle Visitor Center
Joy M. Kiser, librarian and author
will speak on
"America's Other Audubon"

April 11, 2015, 2 p.m.
Carlisle Visitor Center
Dave Horn, Professor Emeritus of Entomology at
The Ohio State University
will speak on
"A Forty Year Survey of Birds in Northwestern Hocking County, Ohio"

**Elyria Approves Plan for
Black River Audubon Park**

Frank Gustoff, the City of Elyria's Director of Parks and Recreation announced in January that a plan has been approved for the landscaping of Black River Audubon Park on West Bridge Street above the west branch of the

Black River. BRAS Conservation Chairman Craig Limpach created the plan. The work, according to Gustoff, will be paid for with a federal Community Development Block Grant that the city will receive.

“The plan is a simple one that provides for passive recreation, a place to sit and watch birds and butterflies in the heart of the city,” Gustoff added. “My staff and I really like it and it does not require that much work. It will be presented as part of the city’s master plan as we move forward.”

Jack Smith, one of the founders of Black River Audubon, donated the land for the park to the city. “I have always had great respect for Jack; he taught me so much,” Gustoff said. “He never wanted to be recognized for his work. This park will always have a special place in my heart.” (For a map of the park-plan, go to www.blackriveraudubon.org.)

AMERICAN WOODCOCK

Scolopax minor

By **Cathy Priebe**



The American woodcock is one of the most fascinating birds I have ever seen. However, they are not the easiest of birds to find. You have to inadvertently stumble (not literally, of course) upon them and flush them from their leafy, camouflaged hiding place or better yet, go on an organized early spring “woodcock walk”.

And so I did. Many local metro parks offer this unique experience and Sandy Ridge Reservation, in North Ridgeville, is where I saw my first woodcock aerial mating dance. Before I tell you about my walk, here is a little background on our subject.

The woodcock is a very secretive, nocturnal creature and is also our only woodland shorebird. It is commonly described as having a plump, oval-shaped body with an extremely long straight bill, large gentle dark eyes, large head, and a short neck. In all of its plumages, upper parts are a gray, black and buff pattern. The under parts are an orange buff. Not the prettiest kid on the block, but uniquely beautiful. Pete Dunne fondly calls the woodcock a “meatloaf on a stick” while others may call it a “timberdoodle”.



American “timberdoodle”

The species breeds from southern Manitoba and southern Newfoundland south to northeastern Texas and southern Georgia. They winter from central Oklahoma and southern Connecticut south to central Texas and southern Florida.

Damp second-growth forest, forest openings, overgrown fields and bogs are prime breeding and nesting areas for woodcocks. Males usually reach their northern breeding grounds between mid-March and mid-April.

Earthworms are their main source of food although they do consume insects and seeds. The nest is a scraped depression in the ground and is lined with twigs or grasses. The female, who alone incubates and raises the young, will lay up to four eggs, buff with brown splotches. The nestlings emerge after 21 days and fledge within 28 days.

Displaying males will perform at dawn, dusk, and all night when the moon is full. A loud “peent” call usually signals the beginning of an aerial display that has to be seen to be believed.

Back to the walk:

A small group of us braved a chilly, but calm evening last April. We patiently waited and listened for the first “peent” that would direct our gaze toward the imminent courtship flight. I missed the first flight of the evening, my eyes getting lost in the hazy darkness. Luckily, the field contained more than one displaying male.

After a loud “peent”, the woodcock initially rises in the air in wide circles. Once it reaches around 50 feet, the wings make a “twittering” sound as he flies higher. Finally, upon reaching 200 to 300 feet, the twittering lessens and he descends in a zigzag pattern to the ground. Wow, what a thrill to witness such a dance!!

According to Larry Rosche, “No birdwatcher who has watched the antics and courtship flights of the timberdoodle has ever regretted it.” I wholeheartedly agree.

References: “*Birds of the Cleveland Region*,” Larry Rosche; “*Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion*,” Pete Dunne; “*The Shorebird Guide*,” by authors Michael O’Brien, Richard Crossley, and Kevin Karlson; “*Stokes Field Guide to Birds*,” by Donald and Lillian Stokes.

A Birder’s Diary: The Diversity of Bird Nests

By **Carol Leininger**

A nest is a place, not always a structure. Its function is to provide protection from predators and the weather. Evolution indicates that the first bird nests were scrapes, depressions scratched out on the ground as shorebirds, nighthawks, and terns make today. Scrapes led to burrows for better protection as with kingfishers and puffins. Platform nests evolved next as birds began to add vegetation and/or feathers. Platform nests may be on the ground (Canada geese), in trees (eagles and herons), or on floating vegetation (loons and grebes).



Cup nests, which evolved last, are the most common nests today and may vary a great deal depending on sites and materials available. Cups may be on the ground (ovenbirds), supported by branches in a tree (robin), mud against a vertical surface (phoebe), or in a cavity (nuthatch). The most common building materials come from plants, but could also include saliva, spider webs, pebbles, mud, regurgitated seeds, and even paper and plastic!

The significance of a specific site is very important to the success of the nest and may vary with the season. Song sparrows usually build their first nest on the ground and their second nest in a shrub once the shrub has leaves to hide it. A lack of suitable nesting sites may limit the population size of a particular species such as eastern bluebirds.

Both platform and cup nests tend to have two layers – coarse material in the bottom or outer layer and softer material on top or inside. A cup nest usually takes six days to build or three days per layer. Site selection and building of a nest varies with the species – both sexes may be involved or in some species only one sex does all the work. Few birds use the same nest twice except for large platform nests and even then they add and remodel each time. Most nests are not sturdy enough to survive the winter and it’s always better to start with a new, clean nest each year anyway.

To me the most interesting nest of all is that of the malleefowl of Australia. Check it out!



Malleefowl in *Wikipedia*

RED CROSSBILL

Loxia Curvirostr

By **Jim Jablonski**



Much like the woodcock, its *Wingtips* cover companion, the red crossbill is one of the stranger North American birds. With a beak that looks like it ran into a truck, the crossbill is able to thrive as far north as James Bay and the Yukon but is only periodically seen in Ohio.

Actually, its strange, crossed mandibles are a wonderful evolutionary adaptation to its preferred food source – pinecone seeds. The bird simply inserts both mandibles into the cone and spreads its bill, forcing the scales to separate. The tongue then lifts the seed out and the crossbill moves on. Interestingly, the mandibles might cross either way, causing the birds to be either “right” or “left” billed as they eat. The hatchlings bills begin to cross only after fledging as they prepare to feed on their own.

Although the red crossbill will eat the buds of deciduous trees, berries and an occasional insect, its peculiar bill makes it dependent upon coniferous forests, limiting its traditional territory to a wide swath that spans the continent between the Great Lakes and the tundra in Canada and down the Rocky Mountains into the U.S.



From www.birdfellow.com

Discussing the red crossbill’s range leads to other interesting issues. Ornithologists are starting to think there may be as many as eight to ten species of red crossbills in North America. According to Kenn Kaufman’s *Lives of North American Birds*, small differences in birdcalls may be enough to keep different “species” from mixing in the same area or attempting to interbreed.

These crossbills have always been recognized for their diversity. They vary from smaller billed birds that specialize in feeding on spruces to larger billed varieties that prefer pines. Their coloring, time of nesting and migration patterns all vary. All have dark wings and tails but some have wing bars. Females are a variable olive-green and can show some orange or red while the male is mostly red. First-year juveniles have heavy streaks underneath that remind one of a female house finch.

Depending upon location and coniferous seed crops, the red crossbill may breed at nearly any time of the year. The nest, built by the female, is usually high in a conifer. She usually lays three or four eggs and incubation is relatively short, just 12-15 days. The male feeds his mate during the incubation and the nestlings after hatching.

Red crossbills seem happy with their location as long as pine seeds are plentiful. Their migration is nomadic – they follow the seeds. This leads to periodic irruptions to the south. They, and their cousins the white-winged crossbills, are the best known species for this phenomenon, despite the furors over the arrival of snowy owls the last two winters.

Large failures of pine seeds over wide areas in Canada periodically occur following very good years. It seems the good years lead to population explosions and the abundance of young are forced to find seeds south of the Great Lakes during the following years of poor seed crops. Other factors also play a role in irruptions and precise predictions are not always possible.

Red crossbills also have an addiction to salt. So much so that they are known to seek out and eat road salt during the winter. Perhaps they did get those bills from truck collisions!

References: “*Lives of North American Birds*,” Kenn Kaufman; “*The Birder’s Handbook*,” Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryle Wheye; “*The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds*,” Richard Crossley; Map from “*Red Crossbill*,” www.birdfellow.com

January Lorain Impoundment Walk

By **Sally Fox**

Western Cuyahoga and Black River Audubon Societies came together for a field trip to the Lorain Impoundment on January 17th. A total of twenty-two members and guests hiked the dike and were rewarded with good looks at snow buntings, Lapland longspur, common redpolls, song sparrows, tree sparrows, white-crowned sparrows, bald eagles, Canada geese, mute swans, tundra swans, white-winged scoters, common mergansers, red-breasted mergansers, common goldeneyes, buffleheads, great black-backed gulls, herring gulls, and ring-billed gulls. Several people added life birds to their lists.



From the impoundment we drove east to Sheffield Lake, where we only added the European starling, and then went on to the Avon Lake power plant. There a nice raft of canvasbacks, a few redheads, greater scaups, lesser scaups and a single coot were observed. We had a total of twenty-four birds for the day. Not bad for a cold and windy winter morning!



Wishing You Bluebirds!

“At the end of winter, when the fields are bare and there is nothing to relieve the monotony of the withered vegetation, our life seems reduced to its lowest terms. But let a bluebird come and warble over them, and what a change!” **Henry David Thoreau**

Board member Penny Brandau concluded her January BRAS Bluebird Newsletter with that wonderful quotation from Thoreau. But for all of us who are trail monitors, just the thought that the bluebirds will be returning soon is enough to get us through the mid-winter doldrums.

And it helps even more to know our monitoring efforts are paying off. The Ohio Bluebird Society’s statistical map showed that Lorain County ranked second in the state in recorded bluebird fledglings reported to that organization in 2014!

Other cavity-nesting birds are also benefiting from the efforts of Black River Audubon Society monitors. While 460 eastern bluebirds fledged there were also 800 tree swallows, 230 house wrens, 33 black-capped chickadees and even six tufted titmice for a total of 1,529 fledglings.

It is almost as satisfying to note that the monitors recorded 97 nesting attempts by house sparrows but no fledglings were produced. *Now that’s addition by subtraction!*

Plans are well underway for the 2015-monitoring season. A public meeting for anyone interested in bluebirds was held in January at the Grafton Library and was well attended. The annual spring kickoff meeting for the Black River Audubon members will be held Sunday March 1 at the Brandau's home. The BRAS bluebird program needs and welcomes new volunteers and will hold a training class in mid-March. Contact Penny Brandau at 440-670-3684 to register. There will be a new bluebird trail on land that the MetroParks acquired at the former Royal Oaks Golf Course.

Some bluebirds stay in our area during the winter as Thoreau mentioned. You might hear one warble and experience the same thrill he described!

JJ

Newly hatched bluebird photo by Jim Jablonski



AMERICAN WOODCOCK photo by Diane Devereaux