

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

November 2009



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# Program

November 3, 2009

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

## Jennifer Brumfield

Naturalist and Scientific Illustrator

### How Not to Go Birding: Bloopers and Outtakes from the Field

**Jennifer Brumfield** is a naturalist and scientific illustrator for Cleveland Metroparks, a birding tour guide for Birding America and Tropical Birding, and Editorial Advisor for the ABA's young birder newsletter, "A Bird's-Eye View". She has written and illustrated three field guides to the flora and fauna of Cleveland Metroparks and recently designed and illustrated a children's coloring book. Some of her finest work is featured in the form of more than 100 detailed odonate illustrations in the second edition of "The Dragonflies and Damselflies of Northeast Ohio." Her work can be seen at her website [www.meadowhawkart.com](http://www.meadowhawkart.com).

## Field Trip

November 21, 2009 (Saturday)

Pittsburgh Aviary,

Departing Jack Smith's home, 304 West Ave., Elyria

9:00 a.m.

## Board Meeting

Tuesday, November 24, 6:30 p.m., 304 West Ave., Elyria

## Sandy Ridge Field Trip

By **Nancy Miller**

On September 19, seventeen Black River Audubon Society participants walked around the marshland and through the woods at Sandy Ridge Reservation. No really outstanding birds were seen, although we did find 47 species.

The only raptor was a flyover red-tailed hawk. Ducks included mallard, northern shoveler, wood duck, American wigeon, and green-winged teal. There were green and great blue herons and many great egrets. Both greater and lesser yellowlegs gave us great views and made sizing easy by posing next to killdeer. Warblers included Tennessee, Nashville, chestnut-sided, magnolia, American redstart and common yellowthroat.

Other birds seen were: turkey vulture, mourning dove, chimney swift, belted kingfisher, red-headed, red-bellied and downy woodpeckers, northern flicker, eastern wood-pewee, eastern phoebe, warbling and red-eyed vireo, blue jay, northern rough-winged swallow, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, eastern bluebird, wood thrush, American robin, European starling, song and swamp sparrows, northern cardinal, common grackle, brown-headed cowbird and American



goldfinch.

We enjoyed many wild flowers, especially the yellow tickseed sunflowers and goldenrod. At first we thought a 10K race through the park might be a problem, but there were very few runners.

A beautiful, sunny day to take a walk in a park!

## Birding Moment

On September 25, 2009, Nancy Miller recorded in Ebird thirty-five species identified during a two hour morning hike in Carlisle Reservation. Included were ruby-crowned kinglet, Tennessee warbler, Nashville warbler, magnolia warbler, black-throated blue warbler, yellow-rumped warbler, black-throated green warbler, palm warbler, bay-breasted warbler, blackpoll warbler, black-and-white warbler, American redstart, and ovenbird.

She commented: “Equestrian Center, South Loop only. Most of the time I stood with my mouth open looking at a stunning number of migrants, with some beautiful males, chiefly black-throated blue and green. A black-throated green even sang. The ovenbird was fairly high in a tree.”

## A Birder’s Diary

By **Carol Leininger**

It’s fun to go birding with a group, but sometimes the best sightings are when you are off on your own. Once while birding in Peru, I was alone on well marked trails and I ventured onto a trail with no outlet. It ended in a scrubby area in the rain forest. A rustling and squawking caught my attention. I saw a big brown-streaked bird with a long tail, a fan-shaped crest, and a bare, blue face! It appeared to be climbing up from the bushes. I looked closely. It was climbing using both its feet and claws on its wings!!



This was exciting, and I could not share it with anyone. I thought the bird was a relative of Archaeopteryx, but I found out later that it was a hoatzin, closely related to cuckoos. Only young hoatzins have claws, and they are excellent swimmers as well. When they are two to three weeks old they lose both claws and swimming ability. Hoatzins are poor flyers that glide and land awkwardly. They feed on vegetable matter and prefer bushes and low trees along forested streams.



They certainly are interesting birds – too bad there was no one around to share my sighting

## BRAS Board Supports Scout

By **Harry Spencer**

At our regular September 28 Board meeting held at Jack Smith’s residence in Elyria, the Board made two important decisions. We agreed to support Brad Bement of Boy Scout Troop 414, Wellington, with a \$500 donation for use in his Eagle Scout Project. He will lead a group of scouts in building and installing bat boxes at Wellington Reservation. The scouts will also install purple-martin nest-boxes in the same park. In addition, we recommended naming a Lorain County Metro Parks trail in memory of late Board member, Wayne Shipman. Final approval rests with the LCMP Board.



Brad Bement  
Harry Spencer

# birdJam

By **Harry Spencer**

That is a white-eyed vireo calling, I concluded one mid-summer morning while walking in a brushy area of Carlisle Reservation. Then uncertainty crept into my thoughts. I had little hope of spotting the bird that seemed to be some twenty or thirty feet back in a tangle of brush and small trees.



Quickly I removed my new birdJam device from its small case suspended from a shoulder strap, and listened to a recording of white-eyed vireos. The live-bird and the electronic calls were identical, and for a couple of minutes my device and the bird mimicked each other.

BirdJam is most useful for confirming identifications or deciding among a small number of possible species. Highly skilled birders who can identify almost any bird call do not need such a device. At the other end of the skill abilities, beginning birders, might better concentrate on learning the calls of birds visually identified. For me, with some ability to recognize many, but not all, bird calls, however, it is a useful (but expensive) addition to my birding equipment.

## *Jack's World of Nature*

### **American Avocet (*Recurvirostra Americana*)**

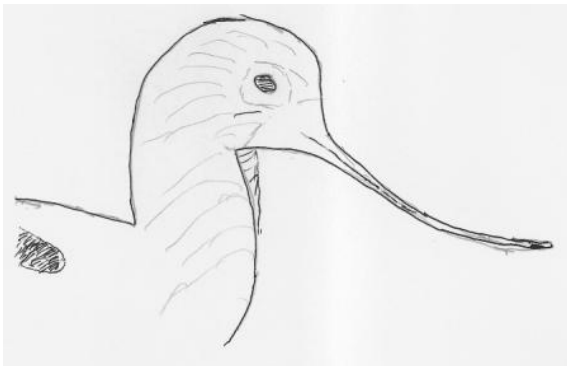
By **Jack Smith**

Over the years I have seen our front-cover bird, American avocet, in both spring and fall wading in shallow marshes void of most vegetation. The spring bird probably is coming from the Atlantic coast on its way to breeding grounds in Western North America. These breeding grounds cover an area from the Western Great Plains to California and from Texas to Southern Canada. There the birds are found in bodies of shallow fresh or salt water. The fall birds are heading back to their wintering grounds along the Atlantic coast stretching from Delaware to the tip of Florida. Some avocets winter along the Pacific Coast.



Taxonomists have placed the American avocet in the order *Charadriiformes*, which includes plovers, sandpipers, gulls, skimmers and auks. Its family is *recurvirostridae*, pronounced ree-cur-vih-ROS-trih-dee. In Latin *recurvus* means bent back and *rostrum* means bill. The other North American family member is the black-necked stilt that belongs to another genus, *Himantopus*.

I experience a great thrill whenever I see this striking bird with its long upward curved thin bill and long blue-gray legs, which in breeding plumage has a rusty orange head and neck with a black-and-white patterned back.



An unforgettable sight is a feeding avocet that often sweeps its head from side to side with the upturned part of the bill barely under water. Often several avocets feeding together sweep their bills in the water in unison as if choreographed. They locate their food, midge larvae, aquatic insects, small crustaceans, and some seeds, both by sight and by their sensitive bill-tip.

Avocets have partially webbed feet enabling them to swim and upend similar to behavior of dabbling ducks. Avocets, however sometimes dive in deeper waters.

Males and females look alike, although the male is slightly larger, 17 to 18 ½ inches long with wing spread of 27 to 38 inches, and bill 3 ¼ to 3 ¾ inches long. A slight dimorphism between male and female exists in length of bill and its shape. The female bill is slightly smaller and more upturned. Only if male and female

are observed side by side can the sexes be identified.

In our area we seldom hear the migrating call, but on breeding grounds it is a piercing musical whistle, wheet or pleep.

When the birds arrive at breeding areas near fresh or alkaline marshes, they begin to pair. The mating rituals involve a number of intricate displays before copulation. The most endearing display after copulation involves the male draping his wing over the back of the female as they walk away a short distance with bills crossed.

Both male and female have a hand (or a wing) in building a nest which usually is just a small hollow lined with small amounts of grass in sun-baked flats and marshes bordering shallow lakes. If the water begins to rise, the pair adds plant material until; the nest is elevated by a foot or so. Usually avocets nest in a rather loose colony.

If a predator attacks, several adults use the broken-wing routine to attempt to draw the intruder away. If unsuccessful, the birds fly directly at the intruder while calling loudly to make the rascal as uncomfortable as possible.

The female lays 3 to 5 eggs that are olive-buff, blotched in brown and black. Both sexes take turns incubating eggs during daylight, but the female alone incubates at night.

After 23-25 days the eggs hatch. Within a short time the precocious chicks are up, moving around, and feeding themselves under the watchful eyes of the parents. After four or five weeks the young fledge.

Both parents and juveniles migrate to wintering grounds, and during this migration flight the adults molt into non-breeding plumage. Essentially the adults lose the orange neck and head feathers and assume a gray-feathered appearance.

The American avocet seems to be maintaining an approximately constant population. Nevertheless, in their breeding grounds in the arid areas of the west, accumulation of heavy metals such as selenium causes alarming deformities in chicks.

**References:** *Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, illustrated by David Allen Sibley; *Lives of North American Birds*, by Kenn Kaufman; *Shorebirds of North American Birds* by Dennis Paulson; *Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds* by John K. Terres.

## **Board Member Wayne Shipman 1939 – 2009**

By **Harriet Alger**

In his quiet, good-humored, friendly way, Wayne Shipman was someone we could all depend on to get things done. As a volunteer on Black River Audubon and Metro Parks projects, he was always willing, always capable, translating good ideas into practical solutions. Those of us who knew him well found him fun to work with, comfortable to be with, and his help was invaluable.

Dick Lee remembers that after their first retirement in 1983 from operating Dari-Land in Oberlin, Nancy and Wayne volunteered with Lorain County Metro Parks (LCMP) as Volunteer Naturalists and Program Assistants. Nancy was with Dick in the first 'class' that trained as Volunteer Naturalists in the early 80's with Christy Varga. Wayne soon joined them, leading hikes and doing programs for the public, school groups, scouts etc. Dick says, "He was great with the young people, very patient, and got down to their level of understanding without talking down to them. He was also a learner himself with a broad range of interest in all areas of nature."

Nancy remembers that, because of his enthusiasm for promoting the Parks, he never just sat at exhibits but went out in front to interact with people, especially children. She quotes him as saying, "If we get the kids interested, the parents have to be interested, too."

Wayne's enthusiastic contributions to LCMP holiday and special activities were noted by Nancy, especially Halloween and Holiday Lights at Carlisle and Pioneer Days. One year in the Halloween display he played the part of a troll under a bridge until his voice became too hoarse to continue. He loved listening to the comments of those who could not decide whether there was a person or a recording under there. In the pumpkin lagoon, when lights in pumpkins went out, it was often his job to wade out into the water and relight them. He enjoyed freezing in a position in the water, again triggering doubts on the part of spectators about whether he was real or a prop.



Wayne and Nancy  
Shipman photo by  
Larry Morton

After Wayne and Nancy bought the Country Mug in Grafton, Wayne didn't have as much time for volunteering until they retired a second time. Then he again became active with the Friends of Metro Parks, and he and Nancy joined Black River Audubon. Wayne developed an interest in the Audubon bluebird conservation project and helped Jack Smith build bluebird houses. In 2003 he became a member of the Audubon board and for the past six years served as Co-Chair of the Conservation

Committee and coordinator of the bluebird program. Under his leadership, the number of bluebird boxes placed and monitored steadily grew, until last year there were 280 boxes and 18 monitors. Nancy says that he was amazed and gratified at the dedication of many of the monitors and the diligence with which they replaced nests and

performed other needed conservation tasks.

Wayne also had a special interest in the two collaborative conservation projects with Lorain County Community College on the college campus, the Meadow Preserve and the Flora Interpretative Trail. He worked with other members of the Conservation Committee on maintenance: With Joe Strong when a tree would fall over the trail or when the fence needed to be repaired, and with me on the display case at the edge of the meadow when we had trouble opening it or propping it open while we worked on the display. Many late afternoons, after he came from work in New Russia Township, or on Saturday mornings, we had quick trips to the closest hardware store for paint or nails or tools.

In addition to conservation activities, Wayne was a regular participant at events in which Audubon had a display table. Always he initiated friendly interactions easily with folks stopping to observe our display. He was a regular attendee at our hikes and special activities, although he was often busy with other community service. At various times he served the community as Scout leader, Red Cross volunteer, advisor to the food service program at Lorain County Joint Vocational School, member of the Exchange Club of Oberlin, and member of First Church of Christ Scientist in Elyria. He served in the U.S. Army Reserve and the Ohio National Guard.

Again quoting Dick Lee, "He was a great supporter of Young Birders, going out in some of the most horrible weather to help the young people learn about birding. He will be missed dearly."

Wayne grew up in Oberlin, Nancy in Lakewood. They met at Oberlin College in 1958 when, as a student, she was "hanging out" at the campus restaurant where Wayne sometimes helped his mother. Casual conversations developed into a relationship and then marriage in 1960. They would have celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary next January. Their two children are Scott and Cheryl.

For the past six years, Wayne and Nancy spent the winter months living in their camping trailer at O'Leno State Park in Florida as volunteer camp hosts at a primitive equestrian camp site called River Rise Preserve. There the campers live in their own horse trailers, and their horses are housed in a barn. In answer to my question, Nancy said that she and Wayne have occasionally ridden horses in the past, but they had no horse in Florida. They were not "horse people", just hosts to those who were.

Nancy describes Wayne as "a wonderful person with a quiet way, very special to me". She has been amazed and moved to discover how many people agree with her and have let her know their feelings. The Black River Audubon Board has sent a proposal to Dan Martin, Executive Director of LCMP requesting the

establishment of a Wayne Shipman Memorial Trail. A trail at Indian Hollow was chosen for this proposal at Nancy's suggestion because it is close to their home and property.

Although none of us is irreplaceable, all who knew him agree that Wayne Shipman leaves a place that will be harder than most to fill.

**2010 Calendars Available**

**At General Meetings, \$5**



Female Hooded Mergansers  
Dane Adams



Female Wood Ducks  
Dane Adams

