

# Black River Audubon Society

# WINGTIPS

October 2010



## Program

**Tuesday, October 5, 2010, 7:00 p.m.**

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

**Scott Peters**

Assistant Wildlife Management Supervisor

Ohio Division of Wildlife

## **Black Bears in Ohio**

**Scott Peters** supervises the Human Wildlife Conflicts Section for the 19 counties in northeastern Ohio. This section deals with many potentially nuisance animal species such as deer, geese, and black bear. He spends a lot of time working with local parks, municipalities, and various landowners on nuisance animal issues. Previously, he worked five years for the Maryland Wildlife & Heritage Service. He has a BS degree in Environmental Biology from Emporia State University in Kansas and an MS degree in Wildlife/Fisheries Biology from Frostburg State University in Maryland.

Editors: Jack Smith and Harry Spencer

Photographer: John Koscinski

Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

## Field Trip

October 16, 2010 (Saturday), 8:00 a.m.

Carlisle Reservation, Hale Road Loop

### CHANGE OF PARKING LOCATION!

Lorain Metro Parks will open the parking area on Hale Road for our use. Hale Road runs between Parsons Road and Oberlin-Elyria Road west of the Black River. It is the western boundary of Carlisle Reservation. The parking lot is located on the east side of Hale Road, (approximately 13815 Hale Road) opposite the 45 mph sign, which can only be read by people travelling south on Hale Road. The numbering system differs on the east and west sides of Hale Road.

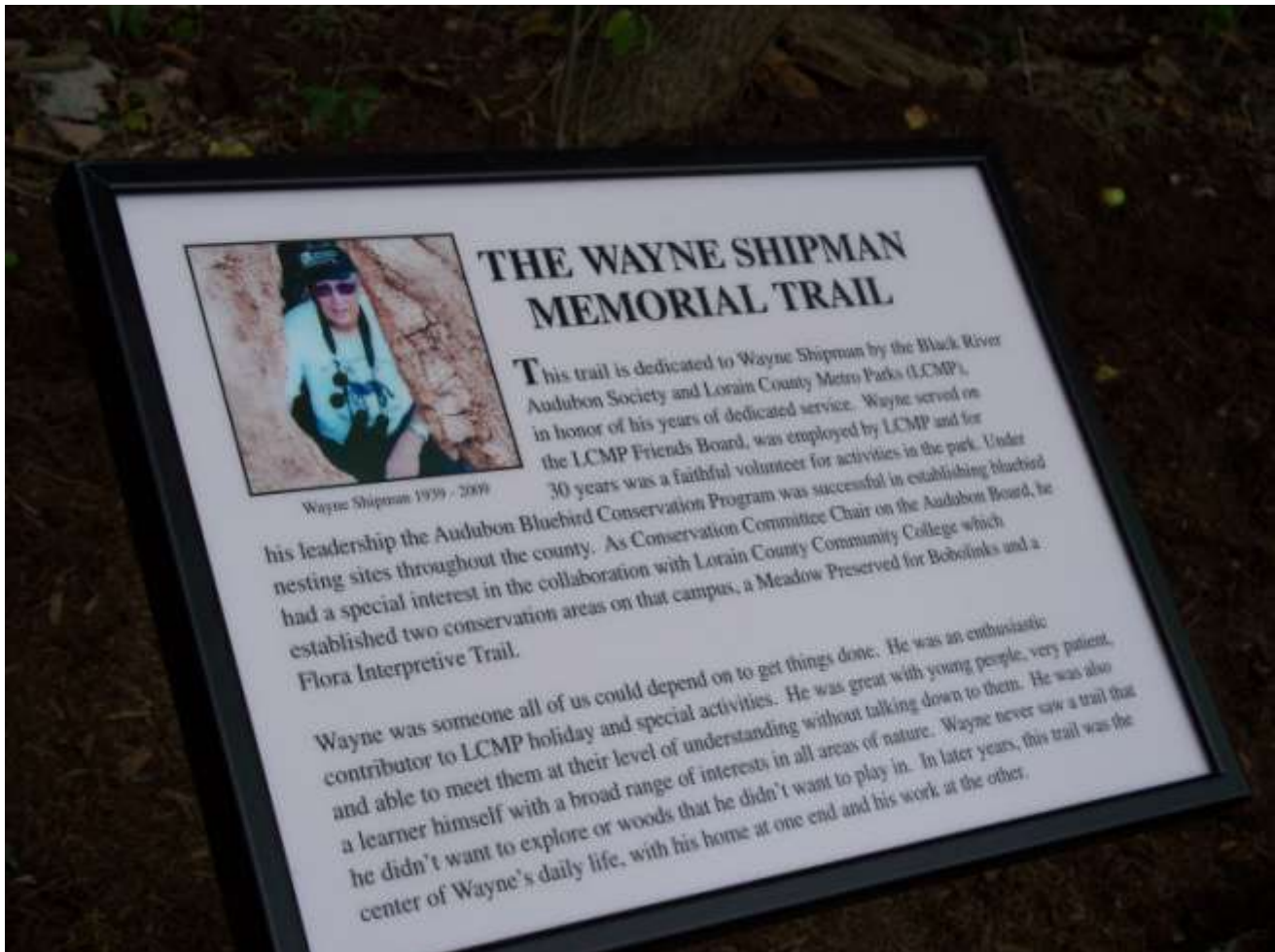
## Birding by Tram

Thursday, October 21, 9 a.m.

Sandy Ridge

Call Sandy Ridge, 440-327-3626, for information and reservation.

## Wayne Shipman Memorial Trail dedicated August 23, 2010 at Indian Hollow Reservation





Dan Martin opens the ceremony with a tribute to Wayne's park activities and contributions.



Dick Lee reviews Wayne's contributions to conservation, parks, and Audubon.



**Nancy Shipman and family unveiling the Memorial Plaque.** From left to right are son, Scott, his wife, Malinda, granddaughter, Cynthia May, Nancy, granddaughter, Jolene Swanson, and Wayne's mother, Dorothy.

Some of Wayne's family and friends.



## A Birder's Diary

By Carol Leininger

Birders can be very interesting people.

Among my memorable early field trips with Black River Audubon was not just a morning hike, but a whole weekend at Mohican State Park camping in tents and enjoying meals together over a campfire.





I decided to join a few members on a walk after our evening meal. It was very dark, but no one saw the need to carry a flashlight. We just walked and soon our eyes adjusted to the dark. I don't think there was a star in the sky and certainly there were no street lights.

Later when most of the group decided to retire, I naively accepted the invitation to hike farther into the woods with Jack Smith and Joe Strong. Jack carried a big tape player on his shoulder, and we played screech owl calls, hoping to attract owls and other small song birds that often gather in alarm to fend off a screech owl.

We hiked and we hiked -- not on trails, of course, just meandering through dense woods. A few birds such as chickadees responded to the calls, and once I thought a large bird swooped by us.

After a couple of hours we decided to return to camp. But where was it? Neither Jack nor Joe seemed certain. Fortunately I had paid more attention to our travels, mainly because I had never been in this park previously, and I was concerned that I might get lost or separated from my companions.

As we made our way to camp, we tried to play the tape one more time. Something seemed wrong -- no sound. When we reached our campfire, I looked at the tape player. Much of the tape was twisted and dangling and dragging on the ground. Then Jack mentioned that it was not his tape! Oh dear!

As I lay in my tent I began to wonder about this birding hobby.

The next morning, Jack and Joe helped prepare breakfast for the group, omelettes with fresh-picked bright orange mushrooms. Jack and Joe are fungi experts, and they assured us that the mushrooms were edible and quite tasty. But I noticed that they did not eat them, and I became leery.

Birders certainly are interesting people. You might want to venture out on a field trip sometime. Birders do look at all nature -- birds, bushes, wildflowers, butterflies, and, yes, even mushrooms.

## **Black River Audubon and Education**

**By Aaron and Gary Hawke**

The general regard by Americans for the relationships among man, nature, and land has changed dramatically during the last few centuries. Native Americans regarded the land as belonging to all and practiced taking from nature only that needed for survival. In contrast, early European settlers regarded our land as a source of wealth, independence, status, and influence. Our society has continued to use natural resources as if there were no limit to what the land might produce. We think that all of us need to adopt practices that allow sustainable land use because our current practices pose potential harm to our very existence.



Gary Hawke

We think that the Black River Audubon Society is helping to accomplish such changes. The Society's mission is to promote conservation and restoration of ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife through advocacy, education, stewardship, field trips, and programs for the benefit of all people of today and tomorrow. We were heartened recently to learn about the Society's considerable efforts to provide educational opportunities to others. Such education is vital to both conservation of natural resources and our legacy to future generations.

These educational efforts include birding walks. One of us (GH) was privileged recently to experience an unusual bird encounter while on a walk co-sponsored by the Black River Audubon. It was led in Bacon Woods by noted naturalist, Larry Richardson. During the walk one of the birders, Tammy, suddenly exclaimed, "There is a northern parula". We all froze, although most had heard nothing. Larry tried to call the elusive creature in by using a recording. I finally heard a faint answering call that seemed like a whisper from heaven. Suddenly a flash of blue brought the overhead canopy to life. The diminutive beast scolded as he observed us.



Eastern Towhee/John Koscinski



Spotted Towhee/Dane Adams

## Who Defines a Species?

By **Jack Smith**

Photos of a fairly common bird in our area, eastern towhee, and a local rarity, spotted towhee, are shown above. In Ohio less than ten spotted towhees have been recorded in more than 60 years. And on March 8, 2010 when Mr. and Mrs. Roy Miller reported one at their Ohio residence, a swarm of visitors, 346 in all, showed up to view the bird.

The two species are closely related with different songs and calls and slightly different appearance, with the white spots on the wings and scapulars of the spotted towhee missing on the eastern towhee. Their manners of foraging, behavior and traits, nesting habits, and practices of raising their young are nearly identical.

Their many similarities and minor differences have led to a constant debate for the last 125 years. Should the two related birds be *lumped* together as one species or be *split* into two species? The American Ornithologist's Union, the official arbiter of bird nomenclature in North America, lumped the birds into one species, rufous-sided towhee, in both the fifth and sixth editions of their Check-List of North American Birds but split them into spotted and eastern towhees in the current seventh edition.

I believe the debate will go on and on, because the answer depends on who decides the issue. Where the breeding ranges overlap in the Dakotas, the birds interbreed, an argument for the lumpers. The pronounced difference in songs of the spotted and eastern towhees is an argument for the splitters. The vote of the official committee of the AOU decides the designation.

A few sightings of eastern towhees have been recorded in our Christmas Bird Counts, but most of our summer residents migrate to the southern US. In late March the birds return to our area bringing their calls of



*chewink* or *towhee*, along with their familiar *drink your tea*. The males select woods with undergrowth or brushy areas at the edge of woods. Here the birds forage by scratching up leaf-litter to find insects, spiders, snails and millipedes. Occasionally the birds catch small salamanders or snakes. They eat many seeds and acorns, too.

Females are drabber versions of males with duller orange sides with brown backs and heads.

When courting, males give a soft whispered version of drink-your-tea song, chase females, and rapidly spread their tails to show off white spots (both eastern and spotted towhees).

Females build the nests, usually on the ground under shrubs or in small bushes, normally not higher than five feet above ground. Nests are open cups of grass, twigs, weeds, rootlets, and strips of bark. They are lined with finer materials such as animal hair.

Each female lays three or four creamy white eggs with spots of brown. Females do most of the incubating over the next twelve or thirteen days when the eggs hatch. Both parents feed the nestlings for an additional twelve or thirteen days when the young fledge. For a time the young remain with the parents. In our area each adult pair often raises two broods each season.

Towhee populations have seriously declined in recent years in the northeast, but not so in southern states where the numbers remain stable. Loss of habitat could be a major cause of the declining population. In addition the increasing population of catbirds could be a cause because catbirds parasitize towhee nests.

**References:** *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *Birds of Ohio* by Bruce G. Peterjohn; *Lives of North American Birds* by Ken Kaufman; *Smithsonian Birds of North America* by Fred J. Alsop III; Internet: *Bird of the Month* from the Oklahoma Audubon Society; Internet: Ohio Ornithological Society.