

WINGTIPS

October 2014



HARRIS' HAWK photo by Dane Adams

Program

Chuck Jakubchak

Certified Volunteer Naturalist

The Hog Island Experience

Tuesday, October 7, 2014, 7 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center



Chuck Jakubchak has devoted his life to nature in many and varied ways. He is a certified volunteer naturalist and regularly conducts educational nature programs throughout Ohio while also serving as a trustee for the Ohio Bluebird Society and The Wilderness Center in Wilmot. He is a freelance writer and contributes to local newspapers and Heart of Ohio magazine. Chuck is on the staff of Cuyahoga Community College and teaches nature-related classes to seniors over the age of 55.

In 2014 Chuck was awarded the Hog Island Audubon Scholarship by Black River Audubon Society. His program will present his back to nature experiences as he “dramatically increased his ornithological knowledge.”

Field Trip

Saturday, October 18

Sandy Ridge Reservation

Meet at the Sandy Ridge nature center at 9 a.m.
Marty Ackermann of BRAS will serve as the guide.

A Birder’s Diary: HAWK WATCHES

By **Carol Leininger**

Need a break from all those confusing fall warblers? Why not join the thousands of birders who witness one of nature’s greatest events – the migration of raptors. Join professionals and skilled amateurs challenged by the identification of birds that are little more than specks in the sky. The competition, the I.D. skills you will gain and the contribution to scientific research can all be yours at a hawk watch.

Raptor migration is directly related to the availability of food. The birds head north March through May and return south September into November. Geographic and wind features of the landscape are important for soaring and riding updrafts. As the sun rises, thermals form and raptors rise on these columns of warm air, gaining lift that costs them little energy. Thermals do not occur over water, so raptors tend to avoid crossing large bays or lakes and instead migrate around them.

In raptor identification, streaks on breast and belly and the color, length and bands on the tail are most important. During a hawk watch, you will see the birds mostly from below so it also helps to recognize differences in flight and head-on profiles. Some do a lot of wing flapping, others soar in circles and still others glide in a straight line.



There are sixteen species of raptors that migrate through the eastern U.S. Buteos soar a lot with very long wings and broad fanned tails. Accipiters tend to flap and glide, have short rounded wings and long narrow tails. Falcons also flap and glide, have tails of medium length and long pointed wings. Vultures and eagles spend more time soaring, as they are large, heavy birds. They often have white patches on their wings and body. Ospreys are almost eagle-size and usually soar in pairs, showing patagia on their wings. The northern harrier rocks from side to side with uplifted wings held in a V-shaped dihedral. The best place to get further identification help would be from *The Crossley ID Guide: Raptors*.

Some of the earliest sightings of raptor migration were documented in Kempton, Pennsylvania where thousands of birds passed over the mountain ridges and were shot by hunters. Today Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has been set up and hunting is banned. Up to 18,000 raptors have been sighted passing Kittatinny Ridge in the annual migration. The mountains provide the right thermals and updrafts.

Raptors do not enjoy crossing the Great Lakes, as there are no thermals to help them along. The best places to see them here are narrow points where the lakes connect. Hawk watches are popular at Magee Marsh in Ohio and Whitefish Point in Michigan. Cape May on the east coast is another good spot, as raptors tend to fly around rather than across Delaware Bay. According to Bird Watchers Digest (July/August 2013) hawk watches are becoming more common out west as well. Why not join a hawk watch this October?

A Purple Martin Odyssey

By **John Ryan**



It's hard to believe that summer has gone by so quickly and the purple martins are on their long journey back to Brazil, six thousand miles away. Watching and listening to the martins swirl in the summer sun, managing my home colony and the one at Lakeview Park and sharing the wonders of this magnificent bird with my family and friends has been most rewarding.

My journey in some ways has been even longer. I have worked toward this goal for twenty-three

years! Putting up a house or a gourd rack definitely does not guarantee a purple martin colony, but years, and then decades, of patience and growing knowledge have led me to the success of my personal colony. Seeing my first purple martins last year, I knew I was no longer a "wannabe" but a genuine purple martin landlord!



Photo by John Ryan

This year, my personal colony had four pairs of parents and fledged nineteen babies. That doubled the previous year and I anticipate triple that number next year. It was awesome for us to see and hear them every morning and evening while sitting in our lawn chairs. Now the silence is deafening.

My passion for the martins expanded from my home colony in Carlisle Township to the Lorain County Metroparks. We have a pair of twenty-four unit gourd racks and an eight-gourd unit at Lakeview Park! I would like to express my gratitude to naturalist Grant Thompson and the Metroparks staff for their support and cooperation with the Black River Audubon Society in this project. But we are always looking for volunteers to help.

Now after years of patience and work I can look forward to the purple martins return next April. I truly miss their melodious sound, their 3 “chortling”, and their acrobatic aerial displays. If anyone wishes to bring purple martins to their home, I would be happy to mentor you, as so many have mentored me . . . especially my good friend Andy Troyer! I wish you good luck and lots of patience!

HARRIS’ HAWK

Parabuteo unicinctus

By **Jim Jablonski**

I have to be honest with you. I have never laid eyes on a Harris’s hawk, unless they were some of the distant, soaring birds I saw on a trip to Tucson a few years ago.

Even worse, I have never been that impressed by raptors, most of which seem to be largely brown or nearly-black birds which are often flying too high to get a good view of their identifying marks.

The advantage of research, however, is that misconceptions can be corrected. In reading various sources, I have come to appreciate this hawk and some of its rather un-hawkish behavior.

A native of the Southwest, the Harris usually nests in small trees such as the mesquite or in the arms of the saguaro cactus. No wonder I haven’t seen one in northern Ohio!

Larger than many buteos at twenty inches, the Harris is rather striking in its colors as can be seen in Dane Adams’ cover photo. Although mostly dark, the hawk has reddish-brown shoulders and wings. The long, tail of the adult displays pure white bands at base and tip with a dark, black band between.

The legs are long and the body has a sleek look for a buteo. The body’s shape may be what gives the Harris hawk its agility as it chases its typical prey of squirrels, rabbits, wood rats, insects and birds such as woodpeckers through the scrubby, tangled brush of the American southwest.

Still, the prey is agile, too, and a little help is useful. Unlike other hawks, the Harris often breaks the rules by hunting cooperatively with one or more partners in order to chase the prey into the open. And that’s not the only un-hawkish behavior the Harris exhibits.

I have always thought of hawks as something like that American icon – the loner - going his own way in a harsh, unforgiving environment. But the Harris is sociable in more ways than hunting. It also favors rather open mating arrangements. Perhaps taking a cue from some western humans, this hawk is often polygamous. And no feelings seem to be hurt as everyone pitches in to help feed the brood of hatchlings and defend the nest.



The female usually lays three to four bluish-white eggs. The male, or males, usually catch the food, which the female gives to the young. The young move out of the nest after about forty days but help the parents feed the later broods. Blended families work quite well with this species.

This cooperative spirit is even extended to humans. It seems a Harris hawk helps out at the Wimbledon tennis tournament, the most prestigious of them all.

Halfway around the world from his cohorts in the American Southwest, Rufus the Hawk plays what is considered a crucial role in protecting the Queen and other spectators from being befouled by the pigeons that roost in the area. The pigeons, attracted by the ryegrass seed that is used on the courts, have even been known to interfere with play.

Something had to be done! That's where Rufus came in. Before each day of the tournament, he flies above the courts, chasing off the pigeons, and protecting the Royal Family, the players and even the commoners attending the matches. His forty-inch wingspan is enough to spook the pigeons into doing their dirty business elsewhere.



His reward is a few bits of chicken or quail, just enough for him to maintain his soaring weight of one pound, six ounces. A bit more and he becomes lethargic, any less and he's inclined to hunt for more substantial fare like rabbits.

Rufus's career does highlight a trend toward using hawks as a relatively non-lethal, environmentally safe trend toward pest bird control around airports and cities.

Wimbledon's Rufus the Hawk

References: *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *Field Guide to Birds* by Donald and Lillian Stokes; "A hawk, some dogs and several hundred people help prepare Wimbledon each day" in the Washington Post online; *Pigeons Fly in Fear as Rufus the Hawk Guards Wimbledon's Grass* in npr.org.

A DISMAL CENTENNIAL

By **Jim Jablonski**

This past Labor Day marked perhaps the saddest environmental anniversary but one that needs to be remembered both now and well into the future.



On September 1, 1914, Martha, the passenger pigeon, died in the Cincinnati Zoo at the age of 29, the last in a species that numbered in the billions less than a century before. The last male died in April 1909, guaranteeing the extinction of the species whose flocks once blocked the sun for days.

Male passenger pigeon

An extremely social bird, nesting in such huge flocks, the passenger pigeon was easy prey for humans. Although Native Americans feasted on them, they saw them as a gift from the gods and showed their gratitude in religious beliefs, dances and festivals.

On the other hand, whites believed the arrival of the large flocks foretold ill fortune and sickness. In addition, the tasty meat led to daylong slaughters with much of the kill shipped to restaurants in the East or used to fatten hogs.

Early conservationists attempted to stop the destruction but were totally ineffective. As early as 1857, the Ohio Legislature considered a bill to protect the bird but issued a report stating, “The passenger pigeon needs no protection. Wonderfully prolific . . . no ordinary destruction can lessen them,” - an attitude that is disturbingly familiar a century and half later.

Loss of habitat may have been just as harmful. It seems the pigeons were unable to breed except in huge woodland colonies and the extensive spread of modern agriculture spelled their doom. Naturalist Aldo Leopold eulogized the passenger pigeon in 1947 in words that are meaningful today when we consider other threatened species.

“Men still live who, in their youth, remember pigeons. Trees still live who in their youth, were shaken by a living wind. But a decade hence only the oldest oaks will remember, and at long last only the hills will know.”

References: *Passenger pigeon* in Wikipedia; *Saving Our Birds* in The New York Times online edition, August 29, 2014.

RED-TAILED HAWK

Buteo jamaicensis

By Cathy Priebe



Often called the highway hawk, this common buteo can usually be seen along interstates perched on dead trees, poles and even road signs at any time of the year in Ohio.

This big, stocky, broad-shouldered bird is easily recognized by its signature short, rusty red tail and usually white chest with some brown streaking and dark upper parts, in flight, hunting red-tails fly in slow, circular patterns, which is also a clue to help identify them from a distance.

Females (L. 20-25 in.) are slightly larger than the males (L. 18-23 in.) and have similar plumage. Both birds have 4 to 5 foot wingspans. Mated pairs build a bulky stick nest in woodlands near open fields in deciduous trees or sturdy poles. After the 2 to 4 eggs hatch, the male brings food to the



RED-TAILED HAWK photo by Dane Adams

female and young until they are ready to fledge. Red-tails will often stay in the same nest each year after it has been suitably remodeled with additional sticks.

I used to believe (early on) that hawks only ate birds, but red-tails primarily hunt small mammals, such as mice, voles, squirrels, chipmunks, rabbits, amphibians and snakes. They will snag the occasional bird, gull or waterfowl when other prey options have failed. Despite their meal preferences, red-tails are habitually mobbed by crows that obviously do not realize that they are not a favorite on the red-tail's menu.

Red-tails have a loud, fierce and unique vocalization that is often used in movies (primarily westerns); however the bird flying in the cloudless blue sky is generally a bald eagle! No respect! I'm sure there would be some infringement claims if they ever found out!!!

References: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Birds of North America* by Kenn Kaufman.

AUDUBON NOTES

Audubon Adventures is now digital

In order to provide a more efficient tool for educators who have become dependent upon digital formats, Audubon Adventures is now being presented digitally. Audubon Adventures is an award winning environmental educational resource produced by the National Audubon Society.

The materials are presented at the third to fifth grade levels but can be adapted to other groups and special needs students. The teacher is provided with various resources, activities, evaluation tools and worksheets. New this year is a newsletter with additional information about how Audubon Adventures can be used.

This new format is also cheaper for our local chapter to provide since the cost per educator is \$16 instead of \$35 for the printed format.

If you teach 3rd to 5th grade, please contact Dick Lee at leedck@windstream.net to be signed up for free-to-you Audubon Adventures.

Birding by tram

Black River Audubon Society and Lorain County Metro Parks are cosponsoring Birding by Tram every Thursday in October from 9am to 11am at Sandy Ridge Reservation.