

# WINGTIPS



AMERICAN WIGEON, photo by Chad Wilson

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FEBRUARY 2022

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## **February 2022 Program**

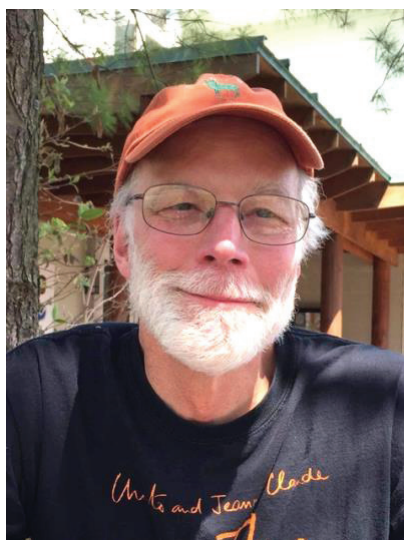
**Tuesday, February 1 at 7 p.m.**

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

*Note that meetings are subject to local Covid regulations*

### **Planting is for the Birds: A New Primer on Bird Feeding**

**John Barber**



**John Barber**

How can we best feed birds in our yards? Feeding birds commercially grown seeds is increasingly seen as one of the less effective ways to help birds. Are we only supporting invasive birds by doing so? The answer lies in planting a wide array of native trees, shrubs, and perennials to host the widest possible array of native insects, while avoiding the temptation to plant non-native and potentially invasive plants sometimes sold as ‘bird-friendly.’ John Barber will talk about turning yards of any size into truly bird-friendly habitats.

A native of Shaker Heights, John has been a citizen scientist for over fifty years and is active in green space preservation, the recovery of peregrine falcon populations, and the continuing recovery of eastern bluebirds. Now retired, he serves as a member of the Council of the Native Plant Trust. John is a Certified Watershed Steward with the Cleveland Metroparks. He is co-leading the Friends of Lower Lake, a volunteer program of the Doan Brook Watershed Partnership, working to restore habitat around Lower Lake Park in the Shaker Parklands.

## **February Road & Field Trip**

### **February 11, 2022**

### **Sax-Zim Bog**

### **Northern Minnesota**

The Black River Audubon Society is going on the road! We are heading to the Great White North to look for great gray and boreal owls, as well as winter finches. Our destination is the Sax-Zim Bog in northern Minnesota. We will leave early Friday morning, February 11, and will drive straight through to Minnesota. After birding all day Saturday, we will leave Sunday morning to return to Ohio. All travel will be in a 15-passenger van. Accommodations have been arranged at Alesche's in Meadowlands, Minnesota. Paul Sherwood is the tour leader.

Proof of Covid vaccination is required since the participants will be in close contact for long periods of time. Trip registration is first come/first served and Black River Audubon membership is required. The cost of meals is the individual participant's responsibility but travel and accommodations are included in the \$300 price. See the Black River Audubon website ([blackriveraudubon.org](http://blackriveraudubon.org)) for further information and to register.

## **Elyria/Lorain Christmas Bird Count 2021**

It rained all day on December 18, count day, but 36 individuals braved the elements and counted for 64 hours, covering 32 miles on foot and 354 miles by car, while another 9 persons counted at their feeders. The result was 74 species, 73 on count day and 1 during count week (cw). There were 30,226 individual birds reported. Highlights were the first ever great egret and only the second harlequin duck since the circle started in 1958.

The species seen and the number of each are: tundra swan 1, Ross's goose 1, Canada goose 2153, mallard 179, American black duck 12, harlequin duck 1, green-winged teal 8, lesser scaup 7, white-winged scoter 2, bufflehead 30, red-breasted merganser 69, hooded merganser 4, common merganser 7, ruddy duck 51, double-crested cormorant 2, common loon 2, Bonaparte's gull 8, ring-billed gull 17,733, herring gull 787, great black-backed gull 10, glaucous gull 14, great blue heron 11, American coot 1, sandhill crane 3, great egret 1, wild turkey 71, ring-necked pheasant 1, bald eagle 9, Cooper's hawk 5, sharp-shinned hawk 1, red-shouldered hawk 10, red-tailed hawk 15, American kestrel 8, barred owl 1, snowy owl (cw), rock pigeon 318, mourning dove 271,

belted kingfisher 4, red-bellied woodpecker 58, downy woodpecker 51, hairy woodpecker 4, northern flicker 8, blue jay 158, American crow 56, northern mockingbird 1, eastern bluebird 56, American robin 765, cedar waxwing 213, black-capped chickadee 65, tufted titmouse 82. white-breasted nuthatch 46, red-breasted nuthatch 4, brown creeper 4, Carolina wren 4, marsh wren 1, golden-crowned kinglet 7, yellow-rumped warbler 2, dark-eyed junco 248, field sparrow 2, American tree sparrow 317, song sparrow 49, swamp sparrow 8, fox sparrow 1, chipping sparrow 1, white-throated sparrow 178, white-crowned sparrow 2, house sparrow 270, house finch 141, American goldfinch 125, pine siskin 2, northern cardinal 223, European starling 5228, red-winged blackbird 3, common grackle 9.

## **Wellington Christmas Bird Count Results**

The 15 Wellington counters covered 210 miles by car and over 6 miles were walked. The 49 species seen and the numbers of each are: Canada goose 320, lesser scaup 5, bufflehead 23, hooded merganser 4, mallard 65, ruddy duck 450, rock pigeon 44, mourning dove 41, wild turkey 1, pied-billed grebe 2, horned grebe 2, ring-billed gull 101, herring gull 25, common loon 1, American coot 1, Cooper's hawk 2, bald eagle 3, red-tailed hawk 5, belted kingfisher 1, yellow-bellied sapsucker 1, red-bellied woodpecker 13, downy woodpecker 7, pileated woodpecker 2, northern flicker 5, American kestrel 14, American crow 19, blue jay 53, black-capped chickadee 14, white-breasted nuthatch 10, red-breasted nuthatch 1, Carolina wren 2, European starling 870, American robin 20, cedar waxwing 12, snow bunting 2, house finch 22, American goldfinch 12, white-throated sparrow 4, white-crowned sparrow 4, song sparrow 8, house sparrow 109, dark-eyed junco 97, common grackle 17, yellow-rumped warbler 1, northern cardinal 32.

## **AMERICAN WIGEON**

*Mareca americana*

By **Barbara Baudot**

American wigeons are medium-sized dabbling ducks with rounded heads and short, grey beaks. When floating on water, heads pointing down they seem to have no neck. This appearance reminds me of a plastic ducky afloat in a child's bath water. But this cuteness hardly captures the character of these unique, noisy, cautious migrating ducks, also noted for aggressiveness, opportunism, and evasiveness.

American wigeons are wary birds taking flight the instant they are disturbed. Drakes give a loud three-note whistle that signals danger, courtship, or location. They also alert their flock to peril by loud quacking, erratic flight patterns, and rattling wings. Females make loud, hoarse grating sounds when threatened or during courtship. She feigns a broken wing when protecting her nest.

Drakes are recognized by their bold-patterned plumage except when molting. They are called baldpates because their heads are crowned with a patch of white feathers. Their breeding plumage also comes with green eye stripes and brown backs. Hens are less colorful and smaller with rusty-brown mottled feathers.

Wigeons migrate when their wetlands begin to freeze. They fly south in mixed flocks to the southern states where they settle near inland marshes, lakes, slow-moving rivers, and coastal estuaries. They are among the earliest waterfowl to reach their wintering destinations.

Wigeons are adaptable foragers and even aggressors when competing for food. They dabble for floating plant matter and regularly snatch roots and other submerged vegetation from the beaks of diving ducks including redheads, canvasbacks, and coots, and even from swans. Unlike most ducks, wigeons also waddle on dry upland fields grazing on grasses, clovers, and some agricultural crops.

One may find wigeons breeding in late spring from Alaska throughout most of Canada and the northwestern United States. They nest in the relative secrecy of remote landscapes near boreal forests, farther north than most other dabbling ducks. Hens select nest sites well hidden by dense tall grass, near ponds and abundant food supplies. While preparing to breed, hens consume protein from animal matter, such as insects, snails, and water beetles.

Nests, constructed from grasses and weed stems, are lined with feather down. Hens lay 9-12 eggs and spend the 25 days of incubation sitting on their nests. Drakes remain with their hens only two weeks after the eggs are laid. Hatchlings are born virtually self-sufficient. The day after hatching they leave the nest with their mother and feed by dabbling.

From late summer, wigeons may be seen throughout most of the United States. Their population appears stable at around 1.4 million. Although on the least concern list of the IUCN, they suffer from encroachment, loss of habitat, climate change, and from hunting pressure.

During their migrations south, thousands of these succulent ducks fall victim to hunters. According to Ducks Unlimited, "Harvest

statistics reflect their migration and wintering distribution. The largest wigeon harvest occurs in the Pacific Flyway, with an average annual harvest of 370,000 birds since 2000; followed by the Central (190,000), the Mississippi (150,000), and the Atlantic (30,000).” Wigeons are the fifth most hunted duck in the United States.

**References:** [fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/birds/american-wigeon](https://fws.gov/southeast/wildlife/birds/american-wigeon);  
[American Wigeon in Cornell Lab’s allaboutbirds.org](https://allaboutbirds.org); [American Wigeon in audubon.org](https://audubon.org);  
[birdweb.org/birdweb/bird/american\\_wigeon](https://birdweb.org/birdweb/bird/american_wigeon); [ducks.org/hunting/waterfowl-id/american-wigeon](https://ducks.org/hunting/waterfowl-id/american-wigeon).

## **Progress in the Park By Danielle Squire**



**Black River Audubon Park sign, May 25, 2018**

Black River Audubon Park, located near historical downtown Elyria at 360 West Bridge St., is a quaint space to have a picnic, catch up with an old friend, or simply soak in nature. Proudly displaying the Black River Audubon’s title on a handsome sign, the space was dedicated in May of 2012 by BRAS founder Jack Smith. Jack wanted to reclaim it from years of litter and disregard. Since then, community volunteers have worked together to convert a once-polluted space into a wildlife haven. Jack donated the small parcel of land as a place to enjoy the diversity of nature, using native plants to attract, host, and feed wildlife. Twelve trees, donated by the National Audubon Society, were planted opening day, and are still growing strong. Most recently, BRAS has been discussing ways to bring in even more wildlife diversity to this small but special park. Replanting the wildflower species that once grew at the park was an easy step to choose. But we took that step and

turned it into a leap by agreeing to install a large official pollinator patch!

Most of us have heard the buzz about pollinators in recent years. We know that pollinators are not only important but imperiled. As awareness is increasing, more and more people are converting their lawns to wildlife areas and pollinator-friendly gardens. But their generosity doesn't end there! By facilitating the life cycles of pollinators and other insects with native plants, we are supporting the entire ecosystem. We are creating habitat, shelter, nesting materials, and various forms of food along the whole food chain. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) for example, is a grass we chose for the pollinator patch for several reasons; skipper butterflies depend on it as a host plant and pollinators like leaf-cutter bees use the hollow stems for a place to nest and overwinter. The queen bumblebee hunkers down into the thick base of this grass to wait for spring. The many insects that use little bluestem and other native grasses help to feed birds such as the black-capped chickadee who can eat up to 9,000 caterpillars a clutch! Meanwhile, you will see small woodpeckers working the stems for the insects within and songbirds feasting on the grass's seed. This grass is also used by wildlife as a strong and flexible nesting material. All of this in just one plant! How does one provide all these various needs for thousands of vertebrates and invertebrates? The key is, you guessed it, diversity!

The new patch at the Black River Audubon Park will be sown with 30-plus native ecotypes, and others will be added to the park's perimeter, including the famed common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*). Among those in the patch will be such popular names as purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*), black-eyed-Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), and Ohio spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohioensis*). Lesser known but equally important names include hoary vervain (*Verbena stricta*), goat's rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*) and New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus*).

Collectively, the trees at Black River Audubon Park have potentially fed thousands of different species by being host plants for insects and food for animals in the form of fruits, nuts, and flower buds. There even have been reports of red fox living at the park (perhaps feeding on the chestnut oak acorns)! With the new pollinator patch, the Black River Audubon Society aims to bring even more life to Jack's vision of a diverse wildlife haven right near the heart of downtown Elyria.

# NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD

*Mimus polyglottos*

By **Jim Jablonski**

This gray bird certainly makes up for its appearance with its voice. Its scientific name, *Mimus polyglottos*, translates as ‘many-tongued mimic.’ It can sing continuously for hours, all the while providing renditions of scores, if not hundreds, of other birds. The larger the number of songs a male can belt out during mating season seems to be important in the female’s choice of a mate.

Unfortunately, that singing ability also put it in harm’s way. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the mockingbird fell victim to the caged bird trade, which drastically reduced its numbers, especially in the northern reaches of its range. Those of us of a certain age have all heard the old lullaby lyrics, “*Hush, little baby, don’t say a word, Mama’s gonna buy you a mockingbird.*” As a child, I always thought those words were meaningless, after all, who would want to cage a wild bird? Well, Thomas Jefferson was one. He kept several, including one he named Dick. In the last century, with the end of the wild bird trade, the mockingbird has been expanding its range northward again.

The mockingbird seems to like towns and suburban backyards but also is attracted to farms as well as brushy areas and thickets. It rarely comes to feeders, however, since its diet consists largely of insects in the late spring and summer along with spiders, snails, and earthworms. Despite its reliance on insects and similar fare, mockingbirds don’t seem to migrate, or at least not very far. Berries and wild fruits seem to be able to carry them through northern winters. Storms have played a role in limiting its range. Severe storms in the past led to its decline in Ohio but it is now recovering here.

Among the many birds the northern mockingbird mimics are the cardinal, eastern bluebird, tufted titmouse, Carolina wren, blue jay, and even house sparrow. But it doesn’t restrict itself to birds. Cats, dogs, frogs, and even crickets can be part of its repertoire.

It’s wonderful that the mockingbird is making a comeback. As Atticus Finch said in Harper Lee’s novel **To Kill a Mockingbird**, it’s a sin to kill one because “*they don’t do one thing for us but make music for us to enjoy...they don’t do one thing but sing their hearts out for us.*”

**References:** Kaufman, Kenn, *Lives of North American Birds*; “Northern Mockingbird” in Wikipedia; Northern Mockingbird in [allaboutbirds.org](http://allaboutbirds.org).



# Big Years Were Really Big in 2021!

By Chad Wilson

I had no plans to do an Ohio Big Year in 2021, but I knew I was seeing a lot of birds the first few months of the year. During May I looked at my eBird totals and saw that I was 30 birds ahead of 2020's pace, a year in which I finished with 283 species seen in Ohio. I unleashed my math skills and realized that  $283 + 30$  would put me at 313 birds for the year if I could keep up the pace!

So, I shifted gears from Lorain County birding to chasing birds wherever they were found in Ohio. I was of course confined a bit by the shackles of my job, but I tried to chase as many birds as I could, no matter the distance.

My favorite bird of the year was the magnificent frigatebird at Lakewood Park. When Theo Bockhorst got the word out, I was at my home in Avon Lake, about a half hour drive from the park. I had conflicting voices in my head...one was saying "That bird will never stay put a half hour, it's just gliding along the lakefront and will be gone before you can get out the door." The other voice simply said, "*What if it does stay?*" In the face of such crushing logic, I raced out the door and before long I was taking a video of the bird for about 10 minutes before it drifted away to the east in almost total darkness. Wow!

One bird was particularly difficult to locate. I chased a worm-eating warbler, a life bird for me, down to Summit County. A two-and-a-half-hour battle ensued when I got there. I had never met a bird that could dodge light waves before but this one seemed to be able to bend space and time to stay completely unphotographable. I finally got an incredibly distant shot of it in the undergrowth of a bush, and when I cropped the picture, it looked pretty good. (Ed. note. You can see the photo Chad took on the back inside cover of this issue.)

I ended up my Big Ohio at 317 species (248 of them seen in good old Lorain County), good for tenth place in the state for 2021. I will probably try again once I am retired, but I'm not sure if I will ever beat that number! Happy birding to everyone for 2022!

Following up on last month's interview with Josh Yoder, his final record-breaking total for 2021 was 333 species seen in Ohio! His last bird of the year was the Cincinnati Allen's Hummingbird (2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio record ever).

**Black River Audubon Membership Only  
(Including Wingtips) is \$15/Year**

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Email address \_\_\_\_\_

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**“The mission of the Black River Audubon Society  
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  
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\*\*\*\*\*OR\*\*\*\*\*

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To pay online, go to *[blackriveraudubon.org/membership](http://blackriveraudubon.org/membership)*  
and select the type of membership you prefer.

**Chad's Most Difficult Bird**  
**Worm-eating Warbler**  
*Helmithoros vermivorum*



**No wonder it took Chad more than two hours to get this photo!**

**The Great Backyard Bird Count is Coming!**  
**February 18-21, 2022**

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), perhaps the largest citizen science project of them all, is celebrating its 25th year recording the presence of hundreds of millions of birds around the world.

Sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and Birds Canada, the event celebrates birds by counting and recording them during mid-February each year for four days. As its name implies, the work can be done by simply looking out your back window and tabulating your sightings on eBird through the GBBC's website. The only time commitment is a minimum of 15 minutes of observing birds for one or all four days. To learn more, go to [birdcount.org](http://birdcount.org).



NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD, photo by Chad Wilson



## **BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY**

*"Birding Since 1958"*

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