

WINGTIPS



SNOW BUNTING IN WINTER COLORS, photo by Ken Busch

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NOVEMBER 2021

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Elyria, Ohio
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November 2021 Program

Tuesday, November 2 at 7 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Note that meetings are subject to local Covid regulations.

The Magnificent Behavior of Shorebirds

Brian Zweibel



Brian Zweibel at work

Join Brian for an exploration into the magnificent behavior of shorebirds. From migration to the breeding grounds and beyond Brian will share his passion for shorebird behavior through his awardwinning photography and personal experiences on the breeding grounds of the high Arctic. Be forewarned, you may never look at a wintering shorebird on a beach or mudflat the same way again!

Brian began his journey with birds by enrolling in an Ornithology class at Hocking College in 1993. For years he largely ignored shorebirds. That changed when he experienced them on their breeding grounds in Alaska for the first time. Brian has since returned to Alaska year after year, always in pursuit of new and exciting shorebird images. Brian is co-owner and photo tour leader at Sabrewing Nature Tours. His award-winning photography has been displayed at the National Center for Nature Photography and his work has been internationally published in books and magazines including Birder's World, Bird Watching and Birds and Blooms.

Notes from the President

By **Rob Swindell**

With all its beauty, fall is easily my favorite time of the year. Nature trail hikes offer the changing colors of leaves, the thrill of fall migration, and a cool brisk air which seems to invigorate the soul. Fall is also the start of the Black River Audubon programs and field trips.

Programs have begun again, though the situation is tenuous—as evident by the late change of the October meeting from in person to Zoom. We are doing the best we can and just have to hang in there a little longer. Please always check the website for potential changes to the schedule.

We were able to get outside and see some birds with the first field trip of the year to Wendy Park. In addition, about two dozen members joined us at our Fall Picnic for “Burgers and Birds” at Bacon Woods in the Vermilion Reservation for a bird walk and cookout.

Plastic pollution threatens birds and other wildlife, and we are working on some beach/river clean-ups as well as local advocacy to raise awareness about the problem of single-use plastics. We would love to hear from members who would be interested in volunteering. More information will be coming.

Our online store continues to grow, and we are excited to now offer memberships, books, and other merchandise. We just received another shipment of the popular Lake Erie Birding Trail Guide. Through Threadless we offer a wide range of clothing--in a variety of designs, colors, and sizes. I often share that my goal is to pull into a Lorain County Metro Park and see Black River Audubon car decals and window clings in the parking lot, and shirts and sweatshirts while out walking the trails. I want all our members to be proud of the work we do and to share that pride in the community.

As always, feel free to reach out to me directly with any questions, concerns, or suggestions at my email address: robwindell@roadrunner.com.

November Field Trip Notice
Saturday, November 20, 2021, 9:00 a.m.

Oberlin Reservoir

43885 Parsons Road, Oberlin

Diana Steele to lead

*Editor's Note: Field trips are subject
to the local area's Covid rules.*

September Field Trip Reports

Wendy Park, September 18

By **Paul Sherwood**

A clear, breezy day welcomed the 10 participants at Whiskey Island's Wendy Park. A total of 23 species were seen, totaling 466 individual birds, many of which were spotted near the parking lot.

The species were: mallard, rock pigeon, mourning dove, ruby-throated hummingbird, ring-billed gull, herring gull, great black-backed gull, double crested cormorant, great blue heron, turkey vulture, osprey, northern flicker, peregrine falcon, eastern wood pewee, alder/willow flycatcher, warbling vireo, blue jay, European starling, northern mockingbird, American robin, song sparrow, American redstart, chestnut-sided warbler.

BRAS Picnic Walk

Bacon Woods, September 25

By **Chad Wilson**

Twelve birders took time from the picnic festivities to take a birding hike that yielded a total of 20 species. Those seen were quite different at this inland park from those identified in the previous week's hike.

The species were: turkey vulture, red-bellied woodpecker, northern flicker, warbling vireo, blue jay, American crow, tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, gray catbird, American goldfinch, Tennessee warbler, Nashville warbler, American redstart, magnolia warbler, bay-breasted warbler, blackpoll warbler, black-throated green warbler, northern cardinal.

SNOW BUNTING

Plectrophenax nivalis

By **Jim Jablonski**

I must admit that I have never seen a snow bunting, at least not knowingly. Perhaps my uncertainty is due to the change in the bird's colors to a less striking brown, beige, and white pattern during its winter residence in the northern United States.

The male sports an impressive black and white pattern while on its summer breeding range along the northern shores of Hudson Bay and the Arctic Ocean. The summer design, as seen in the photo below, would undoubtedly catch even my inexperienced eye.



Snow Bunting in summer colors on its far northern breeding range.

(Photo by William Wingfield, Audubon Photography Awards)

According to BRAS field trip leader Paul Sherwood, the male snow bunting is still very recognizable in its winter colors. He added they can be seen in large numbers throughout northern Ohio but tend to be much more numerous to the west of Lorain County. Farm fields are larger and more prevalent in those counties, and flocks of buntings can be seen feeding on fallen grain in the fields. Sunflower seeds are another favorite fall and

winter food of these snowbirds as are the seeds of grasses, weeds, and sedges.

Snow buntings are short-term migrants in our area. They arrive in late fall and leave in early spring. The males leave earlier and arrive in the far north of Canada weeks before the females to claim prime breeding areas. When the females arrive and courtship begins, the male glides down while singing to catch the prospective mate's attention. On the ground, he turns his back and spreads his wings to show his impressive black and white wings, while running short distances from her.

When breeding is about to begin, the female builds a nest of grass, moss, and feathers in a hole in the ground. There she deposits between four and seven eggs. Although she does all the incubation, the male helps by feeding her. This arrangement enables the female to remain longer on the eggs in the arctic climate.

The northern tundra produces hordes of insects in summer. They enable both parents to provide plenty of protein to their young. The young leave the nest 10-17 days after hatching. With only one brood per year, the parents and fledglings have time to fatten up for the migration south to the farm fields of southern Ontario and the northern tier of states in the U.S.

The snow bunting is considered "common and widespread" according to Kenn Kaufman's **Lives of North American Birds**. Its breeding range, far distant from human population centers and economic activity, is credited with preserving its stable numbers.

It's about time I make a point of getting out of the house this winter to spot this hardy snowbird!

Reference: Kaufman, Kenn, **Lives of North American Birds**.

Birds and Pest Control

By **Jim Jablonski**

Most of us have heard of the dangers to the environment from the widespread use of neonicotinoids, or neonics. These pesticides, first marketed in the 1990's, have become the dominant form of agricultural pest control in the United States. Although less toxic

to vertebrates, relatively small concentrations of neonics effectively control insect pests.

The major problem, according to Holly Holt of Penn State's Department of Entomology, is that the dust generated during application is harmful to pollinating insects in a variety of ways, such as lower reproduction, failure to build nests, reduced foraging, and impaired immunity. It seems to be more than a coincidence that widespread use of these pesticides coincides with the decline of pollinators such as bees and butterflies.

So, if not neonics, what should be used to protect our crops? It seems the old, natural ways may be the best. Research from the cherry orchards of Michigan to the vineyards of California and New Zealand may provide the answer.

The summer 2021 issue of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's **Living Bird** magazine describes the effective use of birds, from raptors to songbirds, in the elimination of insect and other pests. The article "*In Orchards, Vineyards and Other Farms, Birds are Best at Pest Control*" by Greg Breining provides examples, including the use of kestrels to control mice in cherry orchards and bluebirds and other songbirds to control insects.

Cavity nesters, such as bluebirds, have been so effective that the Wild Farm Alliance has the goal of establishing a Songbird Farm Trail of nest boxes along the Pacific Coast.

But the reestablishment of natural wooded habitats on farms is also crucial as they attract a wide variety of species. With a natural environment around the farms, the raptors and songbirds eat the pests and, in the absence of neonics, hummingbirds and bumblebees continue to pollinate.

As the article concludes: "*It's a plan for working with nature instead of against it that will benefit farmers and society as a whole . . .*"

References: Holt, Holly, PhD, "Neonicotinoids: a dangerous harvest," Penn State Department of Entomology at ento.psu.edu; Breining, Greg; "In Orchards, Vineyards, and Other Farms, Birds are Best at Pest Control," in *Living Bird*, Cornell Lab of Ornithology.



LONG-EARED OWL

Asio otus

By **Barbara Baudot**

While living near woodlands and open fields in the US and Europe, I have often heard the calls of long-eared owls at night. Ornithologist Karel Voous considers them the most diverse owl vocalists in the northern hemisphere. Males repeat a deep *whoop*, followed by lower pitched hoots. Females offer weaker, but higher pitched calls. Long-eared owls are rarely spotted because they are nocturnal and roost in dense foliage.

The owl's feather tufts give the appearance of 'ears'—a defining characteristic. These tufts, possibly used for inter-bird communications, are narrowly spaced on their crowns. This feature together with unique facial disks, and rounded beaks provide camouflage in the form of a rabbit's head. J.J. Audubon's painting of the long-eared owl suggests this resemblance. Sadly, Audubon's original painting was destroyed in the 9/11 attack in New York.



Long-eared Owl, J.J. Audubon

Asio is the genus of 'eared' owls considered typical, or true owls. The range of the four subspecies of long-eared owls extends from the Americas through the Far East. *Asio otus wilsonianus* is the visitor, although infrequent, to Ohio, where they can be seen in winter or during migrations.

Long-eared owls are slender crow-sized birds, 12–18” in body length with long 31–41” wingspans. Males are smaller and paler than females. Their hearing is perhaps ten times more sensitive to high and medium pitches than humans. They have relatively large ear-slits asymmetrically set on the sides of their heads. The left slit, higher than the right, enables absorption of sounds from above and below. They hunt in darkness, their hearing pinpointing prey, while helping them avoid predation themselves. They prefer dense foliage for roosting and nesting and open country for hunting, such as conifer forests bordered by prairies. Over the open spaces they fly low and slowly, detecting prey by the sound of rustling movement.

Monogamous pairing is renewed annually. Males declare their territory by calls and display flights featuring wing clapping under their abdomens. Females respond with song and wing clapping. Singing, in flight or from perches near the canopy of trees, continues through the night, preferably when it’s clear and moonlit. Rather than build nests, females adopt abandoned stick-nests built by corvids or herons. Normally they lay 3 to 5 eggs per brood, and incubate, feed, and nurture them. Males hunt for food for the female and their young. This consists primarily of rodents, specifically voles, whose populations can influence nest location and the annual number of broods.

During non-breeding season these owls share roosts with small flocks of others of their species. They congregate in dark stands of trees near open spaces.

Given their wide geographic range and large populations, the IUCN classifies these owls among birds of ‘least concern’. Nonetheless, strong declines, attributed to habitat destruction and climate change, have become evident.

Halloween brings reminders of evil legends attached to owls, creating markets for owl feathers and body parts that, not long ago, caused near extinction of long-eared owls in some areas. This danger is a warning to all to protect this “wise owl.”

References: “Long-eared Owl” in Wikipedia; “Long-eared Owl” in The Cornell Lab of Ornithology, allaboutbirds.org; lakepetroparks.com/birding-blog/October-2020/owls-of-ohio; “Long-eared Owl,” birdsoftheworld.org.

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(but including Wingtips) is \$15/Year

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trips, and programs for the benefit of all people
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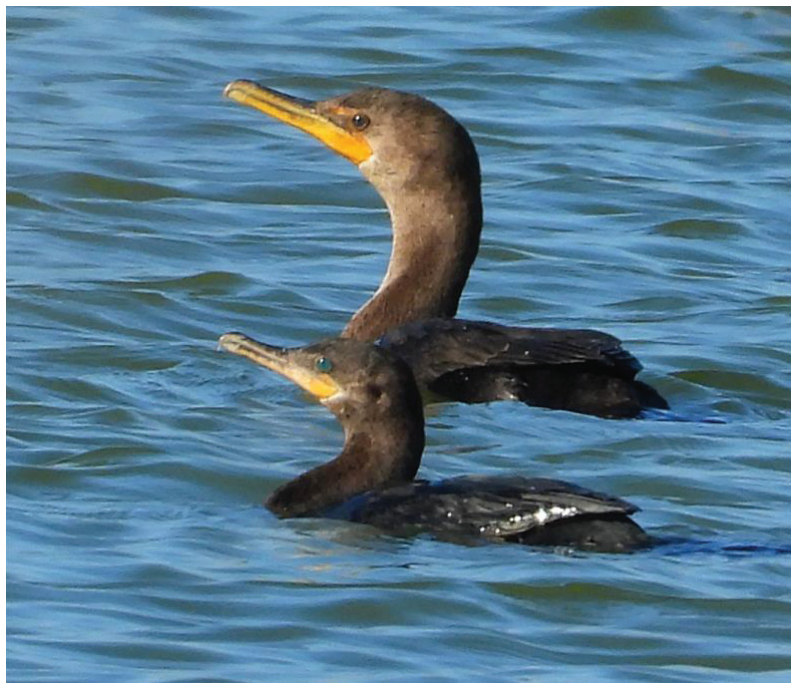
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A Different Kind of Cormorant

By Chad Wilson



**Neotropic Cormorant (bottom) and Double-crested Cormorant
(Photo by Chad Wilson)**

Double-crested cormorants are a dime a dozen along the Lake Erie coast. However, on September 7th I was lucky enough to take this photograph of a rare neotropic cormorant on the inside pond of the Lorain Impoundment. Anthony Rodgers originally spotted this bird on September 4th from a boat on the Black River. It was the first recorded sighting for Lorain County.

Although similar in appearance to the double-crested, the easiest way to tell the two cormorants apart is by their size, a difference seen easily in the above picture. The neotropic also has a more pronounced triangular shape to the gular (upper throat just behind the bill) and darker lores (area between the eye and bill).

The neotropic cormorant's usual range, as implied by its name, consists of the neotropical region of the western hemisphere, in their case Texas, Cuba, and areas south. So, getting one in Ohio is a rare treat! Sightings have been increasing in recent years, but usually only a handful are seen in any year. This neotropic cormorant stayed at the impoundment during the morning and afternoon for about three weeks, and in the evening, it would roost at the great blue heron rookery on the Black River in the evening and overnight.



LONG-EARED OWL, photo by Chad Wilson



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