

WINGTIPS



BELTED KINGFISHER, photo by Debbie Parker

SEPTEMBER 2021

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September 2021 Program
Tuesday, September 7 at 7 p.m.
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center
The Magic of Hog Island
Dr. Lara Roketenetz



Lara Roketenetz scanning for puffins near Hog Island, Maine

Lara Roketenetz has lived in Lakewood for almost 25 years after moving to the area to finish her undergraduate degree at Case Western Reserve University. She has a master's degree in biology from John Carroll University and a PhD in Integrated Biosciences from The University of Akron. She is the manager of The University of Akron Field Station, where she conducts K-12 and public outreach programs on nature and science. She also works part-time for the Pollinator Partnership where she is the state coordinator for Project Wingspan, a native seed collection campaign. She has co-authored the Bath Bird Blitz Book, a book for youth, highlighting the 80 most common birds found at Bath Nature Preserve with her colleagues, John and Alexander Landis. She was a 2020 recipient of the Hog Island Scholarship from Black River Audubon Society!

Lara will present a slide show about her week on Hog Island with a special focus on the sessions she participated in as well as the stars of the show, the Atlantic puffins. She will also discuss the Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion theme that was an important part of this educator's camp. Spoiler alert – she can't wait to go back!

September Field Trip
All trips are on Saturdays
Guests Are Always Welcome!

September 18, 2021, 9:00 a.m.
Wendy Park
2800 Whiskey Island Drive, Cleveland
Meet in the parking lot.
Paul Sherwood to lead

“Birds and Burgers” Fall Picnic
Sept. 25, 4:00-7:00 pm
Mill Hollow-Bacon Woods Memorial Park, Shelter #4

Catch up with fellow birders!

Black River Audubon invites members to a fall cookout to welcome everyone back! We will take a short hike and then enjoy veggie burgers on the grill, snacks, and cold beverages.

Meet at Shelter #4 in the back by the trails for prizes and fun! Registration is required by September 20 to order food. Please respond to Gina Swindell at ginaswindell@roadrunner.com.

Notes from the President
By **Rob Swindell**



Welcome back!

We are excited to bring back in-person meetings and field trips. We hope this will continue, but we will, of course, keep the safety of our members in mind and follow the guidelines of local and state health officials.

As of the May board meeting, we have a few new members: Marlene Sundheimer, Chad Wilson and Courtney Brennan. Larry Wilson returns to the board for another term.

The new board also means losing some wonderful board members who donated their time to Black River Audubon Society. Three board members termed out their board service— Jim Jablonski, Sally Fox, and Doug Cary, all have served as president. Sally did a wonderful job holding the organization together through the challenges of the pandemic and Jim has been instrumental in his commitment to the community and representing BRAS on other boards. Doug has been a solid team member.

After nearly a year and a half hiatus, we have an ambitious year planned. We think we have a great list of speakers lined up this year, starting with Dr. Lara Roketenetz on September 7. We are also excited for our field trips—and we are exploring some special upcoming trip locations.

On September 25, we will have a social picnic for members, called “*Birds and Burgers*,” at Bacon Woods at Mill Hollow. BRAS will supply the food and cook on the grill as members get a chance to catch up and take a guided bird walk. More information and how to register are provided in a notice on the previous page.

This coming spring, we expect to resume the *Outstanding Speaker Series* with a nationally known speaker. In addition, we are pursuing a major project—we are trying to bring a MOTUS Wildlife Tracking System, which gathers information on bird migration, to Lorain County. There will be more to come on this.

As you may have seen on our website, BRAS apparel is finally available. We’ve started with our logo but will be offering some other fun and meaningful designs in the future. These items are available online at blackriveraudubon.threadless.com. The proceeds will benefit our education and conservation programs. It is my hope to see our organization proudly supported in the community.

Black River Audubon Society is a membership organization and without you we wouldn’t exist. Thus, our dedication is twofold—to share our passion for birds and nature with each other as a social organization and to make a difference in our community by fulfilling our mission and commitment to education, advocacy, and conservation. We want you to have fun and enjoy your membership and at the same time be proud of the work done by our organization in the community. We are all in this together and the birds are counting on us.

Please feel free to share your thoughts and ideas. You can email us through the website or me directly at robwindell@roadrunner.com.

Board Members and Officers for 2021-22

Three new board members were elected for three-year terms during Black River Audubon's monthly meeting this past May. They are Courtney Brennan, Marlene Sundheimer, and Chad Wilson. In addition, Larry Wilson will return to the board.

The following individuals were elected as officers during the May 25 board meeting: President Rob Swindell, First Vice-President Dale Preston, Second Vice-President Chad Wilson, Treasurer Charlie Weil, and Secretary Gina Swindell.

Standing committee chairs are as follows: Membership – Barb Knapp, Programs – Larry Wilson, Conservation – Danielle Squire, Field Trips – Paul Sherwood, Education – Gina Swindell, Funding – Rob Swindell, Advocacy – Marlene Sundheimer, Marketing & Publicity – Rob Swindell, Audit – Paul Sherwood, MOTUS – Rob Swindell, Outstanding Speakers – Gina Swindell.

BELTED KINGFISHER

Megaceryle alcyon

by **Barbara Baudot**

I've spotted belted kingfishers poised on dead branches and high snags above the edges of ponds, brooks, and lakes across the United States, including in Ohio. They prefer these perches that enable them to search for prey in clear waters below. These slate-blue birds, with big heads, topped with shaggy crests, hover over open waters while targeting their aquatic meals. Suddenly, they dive head-first into the water to spear the prey with their long beaks. So exciting to witness!

The female belted kingfisher, unlike most birds of her gender, is more colorful than the male as she sports an additional belt of rusty brown. Scientists are not sure why these birds demonstrate this rare, reverse dimorphism. There are two hypotheses. First, since the male returns first, or has remained year-round in his territory, he can easily identify a female flying above and invite her down. Second, since the female more furiously defends the territory during the breeding season, it has been suggested that she may have a higher level of testosterone than a male and hence has an additional, more colorful belt. Neither hypothesis has been tested.

There are 114 species of kingfishers in the world, but the belted kingfisher is the only one whose winter habitat reaches north of the Mexican border. They are one of North America's most widespread and abundant land birds, with a population exceeding 1.5 million and are listed

as of least concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Nevertheless, their populations are in decline in some areas.

Belted kingfishers are extremely territorial and are solitary except during mating season. They can be sighted throughout North America, except Canada's northern tundra. They migrate south when their ponds and marshes freeze. Females leave first and move farther south. Males often remain on their breeding grounds to defend their territories.

Belted kingfishers are monogamous over a breeding season and sometimes for several years. Courtship begins with loud raspy calls as they chase each other in flight. Once settled, the male feeds the female, demonstrating his capacity to provide for her and the future family. Both birds use their fused front toes as shovels to dig a tunnel into a bank bordering their territorial waters. The nest is carved into an upward slanting tunnel where 5 to 7 white eggs are laid. Both parents care for the hatchlings, which remain dependent for 2 months. The fledglings reach maturity in a year.

The belted kingfishers' binomial Latin name, *Megaceryle alcyon*, recalls the mythical story of an ill-fated couple. Alcyone and Ceyx died after incurring the wrath of Zeus but kinder gods brought them back to life as *halcyon*, Greek for kingfisher. Thereafter, they were said to nest on moonlit and tranquil seas, blessed by the morning star.

References: Belted Kingfisher, Wikipedia; allaboutbirds.com; audubon.org/birds&guides; Belted kingfisher, britannica.com

Underbirded Gems: Margaret Peak Nature Preserve By Chad Wilson

Lorain county is one of the best birding counties in Ohio (We are 5th in Ohio's all-time list at 331 species!). In fact, we have so many great places to bird that some birders aren't even aware of a number of them. Thus, this column, "*Underbirded Gems*," will be a semi-regular feature in Wingtips over the coming year.

First stop, Margaret Peak Nature Preserve!

Where is it and where does one park?

Margaret Peak Nature Preserve is located at 36585 Butternut Ridge Road in North Ridgeville. Parking is a little confusing, as many people are tempted to park at the red barn, but the parking entrance is just east of that in a gravel lot. Once you park, hike toward the red barn and then hang a left across the bridge to begin your birding adventure!

Why is Margaret Peak so fantastic?

Margaret Peak has a habitat that is different than all the other birding areas in Lorain County. Just a few years ago, walking the preserve was very reminiscent of walking farmland (it was a soybean farm for many years before Mrs. Peak donated the land). However, in 2019 it underwent a dramatic transformation thanks to a grant from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. Native prairie grasses were planted, over 800 feet of the creek was widened into a wetland area, and over 400 oak trees were planted! The goal is to create an oak savanna. The oak trees won't be mature for another 30 years, but the small trees and the native grass planting has been a boon to the birds!

The new habitat attracts birds you can see nowhere else in this area. Highlights include dickcissel, grasshopper sparrow, and vesper sparrow. And the birds love the new oak trees! It is actually possible to see a variety of species posing in them now. Previously, catching sight of them was very difficult as they would remain hidden in the grass.



Dickcissel

(Photo by Chad Wilson at Margaret Peak Nature Preserve)

The preserve is also a great place to watch American woodcock flight displays in spring, and one of the easiest places to see a northern harrier.

As for rarities, this summer there was a blue grosbeak hanging around! In 2020, the preserve hosted short-eared owls and black-bellied whistling ducks. Aside from the birds, late summer and autumn produce a great variety of butterflies and dragonflies as well!

In addition to the wetland area at the front, there are 3 ponds in back to attract waterfowl, rails, and marsh wrens. There is also a trail that leads into a small wooded area behind the back ponds. That is quite a bit of landscape diversity!

Hiking is easy as the ground is totally flat, but wearing a hat is recommended as there won't be much shade there for about 30 years! Enjoy exploring this unique park in our neighborhood!

BREWER'S SPARROW

Spizella breweri

By **Jim Jablonski**

“The plainest life bird you will ever see.”

That's how a friendly birder described the Brewer's sparrow that drew hundreds to Cleveland Metroparks' Whiskey Island Trail this past spring. It was certainly an apt description for the tiny bird that found itself in northern Ohio on May 12, more than a thousand miles from the closest point of its normal range in the Rockies and high plains of Colorado. Perhaps it was brought to our area by the days of rain that preceded its sighting at the small park.

My friend and I, disappointed with the birding, were about to leave the small park when we ran into Andy Jones of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History and Tim Jasinski of Lake Erie Nature & Science Center.

Andy had just spotted the vagrant sparrow minutes before, setting off a frenzy of activity among the small crowd of birders. Tim pointed us in the direction of a group watching, discussing, and taking photographs of the small migrant.

Life birds aren't always as colorful as painted buntings or harlequin ducks. Often, they are pale browns and grays with a “blank expression” as Kenn Kaufman describes the Brewer's in his **Field Guide to Birds of North America**. It hardly matters. This lone little sparrow still drew hundreds to the trail just off downtown Cleveland, an exotic despite its sedate appearance.



Brewer's sparrow in sagebrush steppe habitat, North Park, Colorado
(photo courtesy of Evan Barrientos of Audubon Rockies)

One has to wonder what it thought of the lush foliage and rainy, cool weather of May in northern Ohio. The Brewer's winter habitat is in brushy, desert areas while it spends the summer in sagebrush flats often near the tree line of the Rockies.

This bird's appearance doesn't mean it is shy and retiring. According to Kaufman in **Lives of North American Birds**, "*The plainness of its plumage is compensated for by the remarkable variety of its song.*" Brewer's will even form small choruses that sing together, "*creating a jumbled chorus.*"

Like other sparrows, the Brewer's will eat whatever is in season: insects, caterpillars, and beetles in summer and seeds in winter. It migrates early to the borderland with Mexico and will spend up to nine months there until migrating north along the Rockies and plains in May. Or, in the case of one surprising individual, to the Lake Erie coastline.

References: Kaufman, Kenn, **Field Guide to Birds of North America**; Kaufman, Kenn, **Lives of North American Birds**.

Black River Audubon Apparel is Now Available

Black River Audubon Society now has apparel and accessories available! They provide a chance to share your passion and pride for our organization in the community. T-shirts, sweatshirts, tote bags, hooded and zipped sweatshirts, long-sleeve t-shirts, mugs, and more are available in a large selection of colors and sizes. Designs currently feature our logo in color, black & white, and white. More fun designs are coming.



Sample of Black River Audubon apparel

Black River Audubon has its own Artist Shop at Threadless, which offers convenient, on-demand printing. All orders are processed and shipped by Threadless and Black River Audubon receives the proceeds to help fund conservation and educational programs. Just go to blackriveraudubon.threadless.com. Threadless is also the chosen artist shop for National Audubon.

Black River Audubon Membership Only
(but including Wingtips) is \$15/Year

Name _____

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Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon
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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
of today and tomorrow.”

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**Send your check to: National Audubon Society,
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To pay online, go to blackriveraudubon.org/membership
and select the type of membership you prefer.

A Teen's Hog Island Experience

By Helena Souffrant



Helena painting decoy



Campers in front of Hog Island's historic meeting hall.

I'm not alone in saying that COVID-related shutdowns delayed my 2020 plans. I was meant to attend Hog Island on a Black River Audubon Society scholarship last year. But despite the worldwide pandemic, Hog Island in 2021 was one of the most memorable, reflective, and unique experiences I have ever had. It was definitely worth the wait!

For five days, I participated in activities designed to immerse each camper in Maine's coastal beauty. Seals swam around the shore, northern parulas sang from the treetops, and tiny green crabs scuttled across the beaches. I went on hikes, boat trips, painted a common tern decoy, learned about nature journaling, discovered that I like nature sketching and, of course, saw lots of Atlantic puffins! I even learned how to crack and eat an entire Maine lobster!

This fall, I intend to major in Environmental Studies at Bowdoin College, just an hour away from the island. This connection wasn't planned, so what a coincidence it was to attend camp in Maine just to return three weeks later for college! Attending Hog Island Audubon Camp gave me a preview of the ecosystems I will soon be studying in school. Perhaps attending camp a year later wasn't such a bad thing. I only wish it had been longer.

Thank you so much to Black River Audubon for helping me to attend Hog Island! I know the memories and friends I made on the island will fly with me well into my conservation career. I hope to see you in the field!



BREWER'S SPARROW, photo by Luke Robertson, Wendy Park



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