

WINGTIPS



COMMON GRACKLE, photo by Bill Naiman

Or Current Residents
ADDRESS LABEL
HERE

MARCH 2022

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March 2022 Program

Tuesday, March 1, at 7 p.m.

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Note that meetings are subject to local Covid regulations

Owls of Ohio and Other Curious Owl Trivia

Jim Tomko



Jim Tomko while kayaking

Jim Tomko has been an avid birdwatcher and nature walker since he was a young child. He has been interested in the scientific study of birds since 1978. Although interested in all of nature, owls are one of his favorite bird groups. He has studied and read about them extensively. With that background, Jim leads “owl prowls” during the fall and winter to bring them in close for others to be fascinated with them!

Jim’s hour-long power point presentation will emphasize the amazing adaptations of owls that have enabled them to be so successful in their ecological niche. The program will concentrate on the owls of Ohio, including when, where, and how to find them.

March Field Trip
Saturday, March 19, 2022, 9:00 a.m.
Killdeer Plains
19100 County Highway 115, Harpster, OH
Paul Sherwood to lead

January Field Trip Report
North Coast
8701 Lakeshore Blvd., Cleveland

Two hardy birders braved temperatures in the 20's with a northeast wind along Lake Erie on January 15th. They were rewarded with the sighting of a huge flock of 8,500 red-breasted mergansers!

The 15 species sighted, and their numbers are: Canada goose 45, mallard 5, lesser scaup 1, red-breasted merganser 8,500, ring-billed gull 450, herring gull 6, common loon 1, downy woodpecker 2, blue jay 1, tufted titmouse 1, European starling 21, American robin 10, dark-eyed junco 5, song sparrow 2, northern cardinal 2.

BRAS Board Member Applications Requested

Black River Audubon Society (BRAS), which serves the Lorain County area, is seeking a passionate and energetic board member to help protect wildlife and their habitats through science, education, advocacy, and conservation.

The BRAS board provides nature speakers, conservation programming, birding field trips, and other opportunities to its members and the community. Specific skills an applicant may have include previous nonprofit or board experience, fundraising, event planning, strong community connections, newsletter experience, and a passion for birds and conservation.

If interested, please contact [*blackriveraudubon@gmail.com*](mailto:blackriveraudubon@gmail.com) or text to 440-610-8626 for a Black River Audubon Society Board Member Application.

BRAS is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society. Incorporated in 1905, National Audubon is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the world.

BRAS to offer Hog Island Scholarships in 2022

Black River Audubon Society is offering scholarships to National Audubon's Hog Island birding camp to adult educators and naturalists. The successful applicants will acquire additional skills to educate students and the public about bird identification, wildlife in general, conservation, and the environment. The scholarships will cover tuition, room & board, plus \$500 in travel expenses.

The goal of the scholarships is that the recipients will follow the examples of others who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors for conservation and environmental education in our communities.

Reservations have been made for the scholarship winners for the **Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week** camp, July 17-22, but other camp topics are also possible, if available. Those interested should visit the Hog Island website at hogisland.audubon.org to review the information provided about the various camps and the schedules for the summer of 2022. All applicants must indicate on their application that they are vaccinated for COVID-19 and agree with the requirements spelled out in the Hog Island website's COVID-19 Camp Guidelines page.

All application materials must be sent to Black River Audubon by March 15, 2022. Individuals interested in applying for a scholarship should contact Charlie Weil at 440-864-1617 or send an email to him at blackriveraudubon@gmail.com for the application materials.

Notes From the President Cromwell Park, What Happened? By Rob Swindell

A nearby resident and frequent visitor of Cromwell Park reached out to us about plans to put a Kart Racing track in the park, a project which consisted of selling 204 acres of that area (and an option to sell many more). Cromwell Park is one of the last remaining large greenspaces in Lorain—designated an Important Bird Area and near a great blue heron rookery. Much of the property known as Cromwell Park is a former landfill, which over decades became natural habitat—not just for birds, but also other mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and insects.

A mission of Black River Audubon is to promote conservation and restoration of ecosystems, focusing on birds and other wildlife—through advocacy—for the benefit of all people today and tomorrow.

Specifically, the mission of the advocacy committee is to be Black River Audubon's voice for bird conservation, speaking for the birds who cannot speak for themselves.

Our advocacy efforts to save Cromwell Park were driven by these commitments—to be the voice of birds and to promote the conservation of a local ecosystem. We did not oppose Kart Racing as an activity or business, we opposed the destruction of an important bird area as a location for the racing tracks.

We did everything we could in the spirit of democracy to share our position on the issue—we spoke at meetings, wrote letters, and collected a petition of signatures. We also received and shared support from other local Audubon chapters, birding groups and American Bird Conservancy. We presented our argument that not only is Cromwell Park an important area for birds and other wildlife, but also that green spaces are good for communities—both physically and as an aspect of mental health.

We appreciate our members who contributed to our advocacy efforts—we are of course stronger together. The birds cannot speak for themselves, but the larger our voice, the more they will be heard.

I love the quote by Wes Jackson, "*If your life's work can be accomplished in your lifetime, you're not thinking big enough.*" Here at Black River Audubon, we will continue to work for, and dream of, a better tomorrow.

Underbirded Gems: Cromwell Park

By Chad Wilson

Lorain County is one of the best birding counties in Ohio (we are 5th in Ohio all-time bird species seen at 334 species!). In fact, we have so many great places to bird that some people aren't even aware of some of the lesser-known ones. Thus, "Underbirded Gems" will be a semi-regular feature in Wingtips going forward.

Today we turn our focus to Cromwell Park!

Where is it, and where to park?

The easiest way to Cromwell Park is to go to the Drug Mart on Colorado Avenue in Lorain and go down the street opposite the Drug Mart at the light. The street's name is River Bend Drive, but on the Drug Mart side of the road it is called Missouri Ave. Shortly after driving south on River Bend Drive there are three parking spaces on

the right, but if those spaces are full, you can just pull over on the road past them.

Then where do I go?

After parking, there is an all-purpose trail that goes east and west from the parking lot. If you walk west, the trail goes through beautiful woods and will end up around the Wendy's and McDonald's up the road on Colorado. If you walk east, you'll go through a mix of field and forest habitat that gets close to the Black River. The trail connects to the Steel Mill trail. From there you could keep walking all the way to High Meadows Metro Park in Elyria if you wanted.

Why is Cromwell Park so fantastic?

Part of what makes Cromwell Park so fantastic is its history. A section of the grounds of the park used to be the old Lorain city landfill. But a clean-up effort encased the dump in over 6 feet of clay soil and if you walk around the park looking at the natural beauty you would never know what it was at one time!

Next there is the habitat. This is a riparian (situated on the banks of a river) area. Birds absolutely love migrating along rivers, so in migration season you need to keep one eye on the sky and one in the park itself. On one group walk last September we had a northern harrier fly over and then a few minutes later a broad-winged hawk flew about 20 feet over our heads right over the trail!

An autumn walk yielded a pair of vesper sparrows in the ditch next to the trail just east of the parking lot! Vesper sparrows are very difficult to find in Lorain County outside of Margaret Peak Nature Preserve.

Even the field just to the left of the parking lot with fallen trees (remnants of an old, abandoned development plan) is an area that sparrows, warblers, and many other species love. Matt Hall found a mourning warbler right off the trail in that field last year.

There is also a spot a bit east from the trail where deer enjoy bedding down for the day. I saw them in the same place every time I hiked there, and they were far enough into the woods to not be disturbed by my presence.

Hiking is totally flat and accessible to all...there are bike riders occasionally but not a huge number. All in all, it is a very pleasant place to walk and explore a vast unbroken wilderness along the river!

VIRGINIA RAIL

Rallus limicola

By **Gina Swindell**

It was a beautiful day in October 2019 when I decided to chase a bird that would have been a lifer for me, the Nelson's sparrow. After the 64-mile drive to Wake Robin Trail within Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve, my GPS insisted that I had arrived. I saw nothing but residential homes and car lined streets. I drove around until I finally found a park building for guidance. A nice lady told me that the entrance is in a residential area.

I headed back to where I started and discovered the sign and parking area. I parked and excitedly made my way carefully down a steeply descending, natural pathway laced with many exposed tree roots. Very quickly a stunning sight came into view. There were grasses, trees, a pond, and a fabulous boardwalk straight through this gorgeous habitat. What a hidden gem! I first noted mallards in the pond along with turtles. I next saw bald eagles flying overhead and a red-tailed hawk, too.

Of course, I was in search of a sparrow. I never found it, but I did hear a sora calling, which made me wonder if there might be a Virginia rail among the reeds, as it is common to find them in the same area. It wasn't long before my hope came to fruition. There it was—the stunning Virginia rail! I was excited to see that it was larger than the tiny, hard to see sora, which I had the pleasure to first discover at Sandy Ridge, earlier that year, with the help of Matt Hall.

I was aware that a Virginia rail had been at Sandy Ridge but had failed three times to locate it. Although they are very secretive, they will pop out from under the grasses or reeds on occasion before quickly falling back under cover. It's not hard to hear them when in the right habitat, but to see them is something else. I first took note of the piercing red eye and then the body shape which was like that of the sora, but larger and not all that similar in overall appearance. I watched for several minutes as it foraged for invertebrates in the mud just under the shallow water that lined the boardwalk. It seemed a bit shy, but I had great views and enjoyed every second.

These birds are said to be weak fliers and most of North America's populations are considered "short-migrants," but travelling as far south as Mexico doesn't seem short to me. They pair up and are monogamous for the breeding season. The chicks are born ready to swim almost immediately and will grow to have the highest ratio of

leg-muscle to flight-muscle of all birds, according to animalia.org. They thrive in wetlands and are losing habitat quickly, but, surprisingly, are still doing well and are of least concern on the IUCN list.

I have yet to see a Nelson's sparrow, but the entire experience is one that I will always remember. I cannot wait to make a return trip to Mentor Marsh in search of sparrows, rails, and any other wildlife that may be there at the time. Happy Birding!

Reference: Animalia

COMMON GRACKLE

Quiscalus quiscula

By **Barbara Baudot**

Three species of grackles are native to North America. Originating in Mexico, they followed human populations as they spread north. Today, common grackles are widely dispersed east of the Rockies. The birds inhabiting the northern states of the United States are migratory, traveling south in huge mixed flocks with red-winged blackbirds, starlings, and cowbirds. They are equipped by nature with a special sense generated by magnetite, a magnetic mineral in their heads enabling guidance by the earth's magnetic field.

Although disliked by some, other birders often enjoy the clownish behavior and appreciate the intelligence, extreme sociability, and self-confidence of common grackles.

The appearance of grackles is striking. They have long black legs, long-pointed gray bills, and luminous yellow eyes. Minute reflectors in their glossy black feathers reflect sunlight in sheens of purple, blue/green iridescence on their heads, and iridescent bronze on their backs and wings. Sexually dimorphic, the significantly smaller females are dark wood-brown with lighter undersides and a stripe above their eyes.

In city parks, small towns, and suburbia, groups of grackles satisfy their omnivorous appetites while pecking the earth for insects, small rodents, seeds, and acorns. Other groups find shallow waters where they forage aquatic invertebrates, frogs, and minnows.

Many farmers consider grackles destructive pests. Large flocks forage through large fields of corn and other grains. In spring they are enticed by tender green sprouts and in summer they feast on grains. This behavior has serious consequences for the birds as some farmers use lethal control methods to reduce crop losses. The North American

grackle population has declined more than 60 percent since 1970, prompting the IUCN to classify grackles as ‘Near Threatened.’

‘Controversial’ summarizes the grackles relationship with humankind. My experience in Oberlin with grackles, the largest members of the *Icteridae* [“American blackbird”] family, was sheer wonderment. In early March, noisy flocks, emitting guttural croaks and occasional whistles, arrived from the southeast. Several grackles visited our feeders; the closest, barely two feet from the window, facilitated camera close ups. Other grackles gracefully perched on nearby pines beside starlings and redwings.

During March grackles choose their partners for the breeding season. Courting consists of flying in tandem and performing gracious displays to solidify their bond. Grackles nest in well camouflaged colonies of 30 to 100 pairs, often in thick pine groves. While females sit on the nests they built, flocks of males roost on nearby treetops while calling out their unmelodious raspy notes.

Common grackles also indulge in ‘anting’. Lying on the ground near an ant hill, they allow the ants to crawl through their feathers to coat them with formic acid. Thus, ants help grackles repel lice and other parasites. Grackles also dab their plumage with repellents they derive from marigolds, walnuts, and chokecherries.

In concluding, I must mention being particularly impressed by John James Audubon’s insights on the life of the common grackle. His lyrical essay contains many pages of poignant prose accompanying common grackles through phases of their lives. Audubon seems to have been particularly enchanted by this bird.

References: Team eBird, Grackles-Are you getting them right, ebird.org; ebird.org/news/grackles; Audubon, J.J., Ornithological Biography, or an Account of the Habits of the Birds of the United States of America; abcbirds.org/bird/common-grackle; birds-of-north-america.net/grackles.



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

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Email address _____

Send with \$15 check to Black River Audubon
P.O. Box 33, Elyria, OH 44036

“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.”

*****OR*****

National Audubon Membership Application Only

(Includes membership in Black River Audubon and subscriptions to WINGTIPS and AUDUBON magazine: \$20/year)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____

Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8

Send your check to: National Audubon Society,
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014

Attention: Chance Mueleck

To pay online, go to *blackriveraudubon.org/membership* and select the type of membership you prefer.

Black River Audubon to Display Members' Artwork



If you have nature-oriented artwork you would be proud to display, here's your chance! Black River Audubon will decorate the gallery walls at the Carlisle Visitor Center throughout the month of May with photographs, drawings, paintings, etc. created by BRAS members. The art must feature the nature of Lorain County and can be on canvas, metal or be framed.

If interested, please email ginaswindell@roadrunner.com for the details. Consider helping us fill this wall so the public can see what talented members we have!

Where have all of you been?



American robin photo courtesy of Gina Swindell

Birders know robins have been in the area throughout the winter, we just don't see them often in our backyards as they hide in sheltered areas. Still, they always seem to provide hope that better weather and greater birding opportunities are just around the corner. With pandemic concerns subsiding can there be a more hopeful season than the coming Spring of 2022?



VIRGINIA RAIL, photo by Gina Swindell



BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

"Birding Since 1958"

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