

WINGTIPS



RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH photo by Dave Lengyel

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DECEMBER 2018

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December 2018 Program
Tuesday, December 4, 7 p.m.
Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center
Sandy Ridge Reservation
(note location change)

Tim Fairweather
“Spiders, Insects, and Other Stuff”



Tim Fairweather, naturalist at Sandy Ridge Reservation, returns to his first interest in wildlife when he presents his program, *“Spiders, Insects, and Other Stuff,”* at our December meeting.

The topic might not be every birder’s favorite but you have to admit the arachnids and bugs at one of our favorite locations definitely keep the migrants and summer breeders coming back and looking to eat more. In so doing, they should be of interest to everyone interested in birds.

The park, Lorain County Metro Parks best-known birding hotspot, will celebrate its 20th anniversary in 2019. Tim has been with the Parks since 1989 when he began as a seasonal employee.

As always, the program is free and open to the public.

December Field Trips 2018 Christmas Bird Counts

Saturday, December 15, 2018

Elyria Christmas Bird Count

Marty Ackermann to lead

Saturday, December 29, 2018

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

Paul Sherwood to lead

This year's **Elyria-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 15, 2018** and will be organized by Marty Ackermann. He may be reached at 608-334-2552.

The **Wellington-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 29, 2018**. The leader is Paul Sherwood. His telephone number is 419-202-6080.

Please call the leader of the count in which you wish to take part. Remember, you do not have to be an experienced birder to take part in either event.

Applications for Hog Island Scholarships

For the past three decades BRAS has offered educators, naturalists and community leaders the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills at Hog Island to educate our community about bird conservation, wildlife in general, and the environment.

This year we offer one scholarship that covers tuition, room, board, and travel expenses. Our goal is that the recipient will follow the example of those who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors for conservation and education in our communities.

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine, learning from accomplished naturalists, birders and educators. Past scholarship winners have loved the camp's natural surroundings and rustic nineteenth-century buildings. Delicious meals are served in a communal dining room.

For more details and description of the camping experience, go to hogisland.audubon.org. Individuals interested in applying for the BRAS scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at jjablons@lorainccc.edu, or 440-365-6465.

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH

Sitta canadensis

By Cathy Priebe

My first encounter with the small and feisty red-breasted nuthatch occurred one early fall day while I was filling my backyard feeders. I kept hearing an incessant and somewhat annoying nasally “yank, yank, yank” call coming from our oak tree. At first, I thought it was our white-breasted nuthatches scolding me, until I spotted one going up the trunk of a maple and it was not talking.

Where is this bird that is making all of this racket, I wondered? I placed the last feeder on its hook and was startled when a diminutive blue and white bird with rusty sides promptly landed on the perch, snatched a seed and flew into a low-hanging oak branch. I guess the little guy was starving and I was not filling the feeders fast enough. I could have reached out and touched him, he was so close! And that was the beginning of many encounters I had that year with a pair of red-breasted nuthatches that chose my backyard to spend the winter and early spring. I fondly named them, Skeeter and Scooter.

Even though that was the first time I had a red-breasted nuthatch in my yard, it does not mean that they were not there. Red-breasted nuthatches commonly live in northern boreal forests and only come southward in fall and winter when their food supplies dwindle, much like pine siskins. This irruptive behavior can occur almost anywhere and sometimes in great numbers. Their preferred habitat when migrating includes conifers, mixed woodlands, and of course bird feeders. I was also thrilled to observe and count them at Findley State Park for that year's BRAS Wellington CBC.

Females and males look alike except for a few minor details that could be difficult to spot without closer observation. Their face is quite expressive with its black cap and white eyebrow with a black eye line.

It has been noted that a few red-breasted nuthatches annually breed in northeastern Ohio, but it is quite common for more of them to stay and breed after a large irruption. Nesting is usually an abandoned woodpecker hole or they excavate their own hole, lined with bark, grass and fur. The female will incubate 5 to 6 brown spotted eggs. Both parents take care of the young.

The red-breasted nuthatch forages for insect larva hiding beneath tree bark as it travels up or down tree trunks. It also eats tree seeds (pine and spruce) and frequents seed and suet feeders. It is not unusual during the

winter to find them hanging out with kinglets, chickadees or tufted titmice.

According to Al Batt, author and birder, “Red-breasted nuthatches make the yard smile. The tiny birds look as if they are smiling. Who can turn the world on with her smile? Mary Tyler Moore and a red-breasted nuthatch. I enjoy their nasal voices sounding like tiny horns.”

After hosting this first pair of red-breasted nuthatches for almost six months, I have had them return almost every other year. This fall I have had multiple visits, up to six birds in one day. Two individuals are still here as of this writing. According to the Ohio birding list service, various online and firsthand sources, they are turning up all over the state. I hope they decide to stick around my backyard this winter.

I will keep my ears open for their distinctive “yank, yank, yank!”

References: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide* by Pete Dunne; *The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior* by David Allen Sibley; Al Batt’s 10/2018 column.

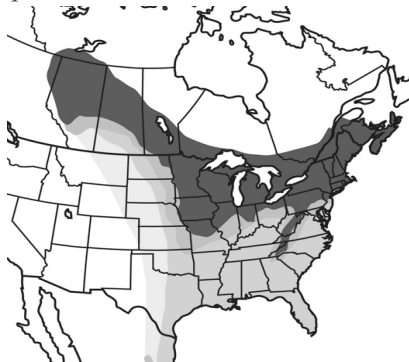
ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK

Pheucticus ludovicianus

By **Barbara Baudot**

In May 2013, a bird with a shiny black head, a bright red triangular bib, and white under belly alighted on my window feeder. It was thrilling to see in actuality what I had only seen in bird guides.

A few days later the female arrived, in a camouflage of dull brownish feathers with dark stripes, brown speckled yellowish undersides and a distinctive white stripe from brow to the back of the head. She bore nothing in common with the male except her heavy white conical beak. These grosbeaks belonging to the beautiful Cardinalidea family are dramatically dimorphic.



The breeding range of the rose-breasted grosbeak. (From audubon.org/birds)

A cover bird for Peterson's Guide to Eastern Birds, the rose-breasted grosbeak, a nocturnal neotropical migrant, breeds throughout the northeastern half of the US and the northwestern half of Canada, and winters in Mexico and Central America. It is an infrequent vagrant in Western Europe.

Among the most distinctive characteristics of rose-breasted grosbeaks is their arresting melodious singing. The multi-syllable phrases of their songs ripple in sound waves issuing from large tracts of deciduous woodlands and forest edges, enchanting the spring and summer air.

Audubon praised their songs in describing hearing the rose-breasted grosbeak one night while camping along the Mohawk River:

"... I closed my eyes, and was passing away into the world of dreaming existence, when suddenly there burst on my soul the serenade of the Rose-breasted bird, so rich, so mellow, so loud in the stillness of the night, that sleep fled from my eyelids. Never did I enjoy music more: it thrilled through my heart, and surrounded me with an atmosphere of bliss. . . Long after the sounds ceased did I enjoy them."

As aviary performers, their repertory includes whistled and warbled phrases as well as sharp and distinctive calls. They may incorporate as many as 9-11 of their 15-23 syllables in a single song that may last for 24 to 28 seconds.

Their life events are heralded in song. The male sings while courting a female for a season of monogamous family-raising. At the height of courtship, the male spreads his wings and tail, draws his head back, and warbles as he approaches the female. His calls become shrill when defending his territory and he croons when nesting. The female sings to strengthen the pair bond and during nest building, incubating, and brooding. She chirps and trills as she relieves her mate, when he has been sitting on the nest.

This bird is still classified as "of least concern" by the IUCN. Nevertheless it faces many dangers. One is its popularity as a cage bird in some countries. More serious is its increasing potential for collision with unfamiliar constructions sprouting along its migratory routes. The degradation and disappearance of its forests and woodland habitats attributed to land development and climate change pose the most serious threats.

Despite their striking beauty and gifts of song, many aspects of the life and behavior of rose-breasted grosbeaks are unknown, begging further research.

References: arkive.org/rose-breasted-grosbeak;cardinalidae-cardinals; neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/Species-Account/nb/species/robgro/overview; [Audubon.org/rosebreasted-grosbeak.](http://Audubon.org/rosebreasted-grosbeak)

In Memory of Jack Smith

By Penny Brandau

(Penny's tribute to Jack is reprinted here from the 2012 Wingtips commemorating his life.)



My husband Fritz and I have been part of Black River Audubon for about 2 years so we have only known Jack Smith for that relatively short time. However he has had a tremendous impact on our lives and we are thankful to have called him a dear friend.

Last fall we went on an Audubon field trip to Brown's Bog and Jack was able to attend the outing also. His wealth of knowledge enriched our experience that day - from his calling of birds or identifying those in the area to naming plants and trees we discovered on our hike. As we were walking the trail in the bog that day I had asked Jack about an unusual plant which was near the trail and had never seen before. He stopped to search out more of the plants and then, after identifying them, he told me many facts about the pitcher plant.

I took a picture that day which I believe illustrates many of the wonderful qualities Jack had. The picture shows Jack's open hand gently cupping a seed pod. I believe this photo shows the quality Jack had of not holding tightly to earthly things. Instead, he generously opened his hand for others to share in the beauty and wealth of whatever he had. He has given to others over and over in his lifetime.



Photo by Penny Brandau, September 17, 2011)

Looking at the actual seeds in the photo makes me imagine all the seeds Jack has planted in his life. Some of those he has harvested and some are now being cared for by others. There were so many projects and interests and people which Jack invested his time and resources in. Some of those are still seedlings, some are maturing well and some have flowered. Because of Jack's care, hard work and selflessness our world is and will continue to see the fruit of Jack's life and influence. He will be sorely missed but his legacy for good in our world continues.

My husband and I have had the privilege of tasting the sweetness of the honey from Jack's beehives, have admired the beauty of the dahlias and the garden he loved, and have walked with Jack as he offered advice in the creation of a bluebird trail which we now monitor. The seeds he has planted in our hearts continue to flourish and every time I see the brilliant flash of bluebird wings I know that more seeds from Jack's legacy live on to enrich our world. We were truly blessed to know this man!



Jack Smith (seated) with (l-r) Jean Sorton, Nan Miller, Penny and Fritz Brandau, and Marty Ackermann after one of Jack's last bird walks following a lifetime on the trails.

The 2018 Outstanding Speaker & 60th Anniversary

A wonderful speaker, a great crowd, and plenty of time for conviviality! One could not have asked for more on Saturday, November 10th when Black River Audubon Society hosted its combined Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker presentation and 60th anniversary celebration.



Julie Zickefoose addresses the large audience at the Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker and 60th Anniversary Celebration on November 10, 2018 (Photo by Kate Pilacky)

Julie Zickefoose, author, wildlife artist, and seemingly a natural public speaker, kept the 120-plus audience members entertained throughout her hour-long program.

Beginning with her family background with parents who loved nature themselves, Ms. Zickefoose wove personal history together with tips about art, writing, and natural history in a way that never lost the listener's attention.

As for wildlife art: “Start with big birds like turkeys and sketch them from real life but use dead ones if necessary. They can speak eloquently about the life that was there.” It is also wise to try new subject material. “If you don't know what they look like to begin with, you will do your most honest work.”

Throughout her program, Julie mixed such practical advice with her continuing awe of the birds she sketches. For example, “People think mourning doves are dumb due to their head to body ratio but the young are flying by day twelve!”

Most in the audience wanted to hear of her experience drawing individual baby birds daily through the nestling stage and beyond. The work was painstaking as she had to keep them warm and fed through the 15-30 minute daily process. “To know birds really well, it helps to become their mama,” she joked.

The audience members, still enthralled, were buying her books more than an hour after she finished.

Black River Audubon president Jim Jablonski had the tough job of following the main speaker. He provided a short history of BRAS and its accomplishments in recent years. The focus was on the contributions of founder Jack Smith, for whom the speaker series is named.

After the speakers, the audience members mingled, bought books, asked questions of board members and enjoyed the reception, cake, and other goodies provided by the chapter. It was simply a wonderful event.



Julie Zickefoose signs a book purchased by a young local birder.
(Photo by Tammy Martin)

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(but including Wingtips) is \$15 /Year**

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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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ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK photo by Barbara Baudot

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