

WINGTIPS



RING-BILL GULLS Photo by Gina Swindell

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DECEMBER 2019

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December 2019 Program
Tuesday, December 3, 2019, 7 p.m.
Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center
Sandy Ridge Reservation
6195 Otten Road, North Ridgeville
(note location change)

“20 for 20 at Sandy Ridge”



Tim Fairweather
Park Manager and Senior Naturalist

Tim Fairweather has seen it all – at Sandy Ridge Reservation that is. The Lorain County Metropark has been celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, having opened just prior to the turn of the century in October 1999. Tim was there at the beginning and ever since, managing the park, leading the bird walks, and doing everything else in between.

On December 3rd at 7 p.m. he will share his favorite memories from twenty wonderful years with the Black River Audubon Society members and guests.

The stories will include birds, bugs, people . . . and more birds. And there may even be audience participation with a birding trivia game. As always, his programs are free and come with a money-back guarantee!

2019 Christmas Bird Counts

Saturday, December 14, 2019

Elyria Christmas Bird Count

Marty Ackermann to lead

Saturday, December 28, 2019

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

Meet at Wellington McDonalds, Rt. 58

Paul Sherwood to lead

This year's **Elyria-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 14, 2019** and will be organized by Marty Ackermann. He may be reached at 608-334-2552 if you wish to take part.

The **Wellington-area CBC will take place Saturday, December 28, 2019**. The leader is Paul Sherwood. His telephone number is 419-202-6080.

Please call the leader of the count you prefer. You do not have to be an experienced birder to take part in the event. **JJ**

Field Trip October 19, 2019

By Sally Fox

It was a glorious fall day when 24 of us gathered at Sandy Ridge Metropark for our walk led by Park Naturalist, Tim Fairweather. This park is such a gem. With habitats of open grassland, wet woods, diked ponds, and mudflats, it draws in a wide variety of birds. This day was no exception with a total of 62 species seen. Many familiar feathered friends were seen, some only at this time of the year.

The feeders at the nature center were active with tufted titmouse, white-breasted nuthatch, house finch and house sparrow. In the woods, we found five woodpecker specie - red-headed, red-bellied, downy, hairy and northern flicker.

The mudflats gave us good views of killdeer, greater and lesser yellowlegs, and least and pectoral sandpipers, while tree and rough-winged swallows swooped about. The end of the trail to the housing development yielded three hawks, Cooper's hawk, red-shouldered and red-tailed.

The edges produced Carolina, winter and house wrens, mourning dove, black-capped chickadee, northern cardinal, European starling, American robin, blue jay, American crow, ruby and golden-crowned kinglet, eastern bluebird, and American goldfinch along with chipping, song, swamp, white-throated, and white-crowned sparrows. The first of the dark-eyed juncos appeared and one rusty blackbird. In the back corner were yellow-rumped and palm warblers. The resident sandhill cranes showed up with the family of trumpeter swans.

And of course, we saw ducks, wood duck, gadwall, mallard, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, green-winged teal, ruddy duck, along with Canada goose and red-winged blackbird. A double-crested cormorant posed on a stump and might have been the one seen later in the talons of the bald eagle!

Thanks to Tim for a delightful morning.

Applications for Hog Island Scholarships

BRAS is again offering a Hog Island birding camp scholarship to an adult educator or naturalist. The successful applicant will acquire additional skills to educate students and the public about bird conservation, wildlife in general, and the environment. The scholarship will cover tuition, room & board, plus travel expenses.

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

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine, learning from accomplished naturalists, birders, and educators. In off hours, they can explore the camp's natural surrounding and rustic buildings that have a long history with National Audubon. And no one has ever returned with complaints about the quality of the meals served during their stay.

A reservation has been made for the BRAS scholarship winner for the **Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week** camp, although other camps might be possible.

All application materials must be sent to Black River Audubon by February 15, 2020. Individuals interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Jim Jablonski at jjablons@lorainccc.edu or call 440-365-6465 for the application materials. Be sure to leave a message if calling.

For more details and description of the camping experience, go to hogisland.audubon.org.

RING-BILLED and HERRING GULLS

Larus delawarensis and Larus argentatus

By **Gina Swindell**

My husband and I have lived in Lorain for twenty years, but we only discovered the fantastic birding areas that Lorain has to offer when we took new jobs near the lake in 2015. Wow, what we were missing! Between the Lorain Impound, fishing piers, and harbor areas the number of migrant species is fantastic. However, the gulls are what caught my attention. They are super plentiful and at my first visit I thought there were 8 or 10 species. I had to go home and figure out what I was seeing. My head was spinning.

There are more than 50 species of gulls, 20 of which may be seen in Ohio. Both the herring gull and ring-billed gull breed here. They can be challenging to correctly identify since, in addition to a winter plumage change, it takes them several cycles (years) to mature into their adult plumage. They are the two most common gulls seen around Lorain County.

When viewing these two species crowded together in a parking lot, they look very similar. But once you take a closer look you will begin to see some obvious differences. For instance, the herring gull is quite a bit larger, though this may not be so obvious unless you see the two species in the same vicinity. Also, the mature herring gull has a large yellow bill with a red mark on the lower mandible that sometimes spills upward onto the upper mandible.



A mature ring-billed gull checks itself out. (photo by Gina Swindell)



A mature herring gull. Notice the lack of a ring around the bill but overall similarity to the ring-bill gull. (photo by Gina Swindell)

In contrast, the ring-billed has a smaller bill that has a subterminal ring around it, almost resembling a black rubber band. Another obvious difference is the leg color. The herring gull has pink legs at the mature cycle while the mature ring-billed gull sports yellow legs. However, both of these field marks differ during the immature stages. The first cycle plumage and the eyes are dark in both species, lightening in color as the gull cycles through to its mature plumage.

They are stunning at every cycle and some would argue smart, yet they are seen by most to be a common nuisance. You may have heard them referred to as flying rats, dump chickens, and bait stealers among other names, and understandably so, since it's common to find them in landfills, parking lots, and around fishing piers waiting for a handout or stealing a free meal. They have been known to snag food from picnic tables. I have even witnessed them stealing from one another. Look for the story that floats around Facebook where a gull in Scotland was taking daily strolls into a store to steal cheesy Doritos.

Sadly, there is a health concern where gulls concentrate. In her article "*Gulls Be Gone: 10 Ways to Get Rid of Pesky Birds*," Jennifer S. Holland says:

“Microbiologist Elizabeth Wheeler Alm and colleagues at Central Michigan University recently found that in the Great Lakes region, where gull populations have been growing by 10 percent a year since the 1970’s, the birds bring bacteria such as Salmonella and Campylobacter and protozoa such as Cryptosporidium and Giardia to beaches.”

It has also been widely noted that, for some beaches, gulls are a key source of E. coli. As a result, many cities employ tactics to deter gull concentrations.

A few of the many methods to scare away gulls include the use of dogs to chase them from the area (they do not hurt or kill the gulls), the use of hawks or falcons for the same purpose, water guns, and the use of scents/noises that are irritating to gulls. While I understand the purpose of these tactics, it is often the fault of humans that the birds are in this situation. We offer them food and they partake; they have become scavengers and appreciate an easy meal.

While it may seem common sense to see gulls negatively, you may care to look at the flip side and consider that they often clean up the mess that humans leave behind. We must understand nature and our own impact. Take time to notice their plumage and challenge yourself to identify the species and its cycle but admire from afar and do not feed them. ***Happy gulling!***

References: Audubon.org/news/are-gulls-jerks; Scientificamerican.com/tetrapod-zoology/your-awesome-neighborhood-herring-gull-and-its-many-cousins/

TUFTED TITMOUSE

Baeolophus bicolor

By **Barbara Baudot**

Flitting about between snow-covered branches of a white pine illuminated by winter's sunlight, a pair of tufted titmice are magical reminders of the beauty of nature during the Holiday Season. Their satiny grey feather cloaks, matching head crests stunningly set off by shiny black eyes, black forehead, white cheeks and an underbelly edged by rusty orange flanks offer inspiration for glossy silver Christmas ornaments. Such was my thinking when I glimpsed such a pair shortly before Christmas.

The tufted "titmouse" meaning "little bird" is one of the eleven North American species in the Paridae family, composed of titmice, tits, and chickadees. Researchers strongly suspect that these North American species descended from Eurasian lineages that crossed the Bering land bridge and were fragmented by inter-glacial movements during the Pleistocene epoch (2,580,000 to 11,700 years ago). Tufted titmice thrive throughout the eastern half of North America, including Canada.

These highly adaptable, much beloved birds are reputed to be among the world's most intelligent. They adapt their many melodious

songs and calls to different situations. Times of silence indicate avoidance of predators. According to Cherokee teachings, tufted titmice are mystical creatures, symbols of good luck. Other legends tell of their powers as keepers of knowledge. There is no doubt that these small birds are quite wily and known for their toughness.

Titmice are hardy year-round residents. Provided food is available, they cheerily endure all types of weather. Although essentially woodland birds, they also frequent urban parks and back yard bird feeders. They can be tamed to accept peanuts and sunflower seeds from human hands.

Omnivorous with a strong instinct for seasonality, these intelligent, little acrobats and their hatchlings feed on insects and caterpillars in the spring and summer. Titmice also consume seeds and nuts.

In 1817, J.J. Audubon captured in poetic detail the special process whereby titmice collect and shell seeds and nuts:

“It [the titmouse] moves along the branches, ... flies to the end of twigs and hangs to them by its feet, whilst the bill is engaged in detaching a beech nut... an acorn..., removing it to a large branch, it holds it with both feet and breaks the shell by repeated blows of its bill...”

In late summer and fall, titmice meticulously cache their shelled seeds or nuts, one by one, in bark crannies of nearby trees for consumption in leaner times.

Tufted titmice are exceptionally family oriented. Monogamous for life, they form pairs lasting until one of the two disappears. Territorially bound, each pair defends its space year-round. They build a nest in an abandoned tree cavity or bird box, perhaps lining the cup with animal hair. The female incubates her 5 to 8 eggs and both parents share in caring for the hatchlings. Titmice forage in small family groups, perhaps joined by a nuthatch or downy woodpecker. Offspring might even remain with the family to help with the next brood.

Ranked in the least endangered category, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, titmice seem to have adjusted well to climate change. In some locations their populations have been growing. This happy development has a lot to do with the adaptability of this intelligent little bird. May you hear its merry songs throughout this Holiday Season!

References: allaboutbirds, Cornell University; Gill, Frank, et. al., “Protein Relationships Among Titmice”, “Titmice,” Encyclopedia Britannica; North American Titmouse Mythology.

They're Disappearing

Most of us have seen the news. According to the journal *Science*, the bird population of the U.S. and Canada is said to have declined by roughly 25 percent since 1970. Think of it! When Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was just starting to have an impact, we had three billion more birds than today. Despite the inspiring comebacks of individual species from bald eagles to bluebirds, our avian friends and sentinels are in worse shape today than in those seemingly less-enlightened times.

The major culprit, in addition to the threats Carson warned about, is climate change. The National Audubon summary report *Survival by Degrees* states that 389 bird species of the 604 species native to North America are threatened by “*unlivable climate conditions across most of their current ranges by 2080.*”

According to Ken Rosenberg, of Cornell Lab and American Bird Conservancy, this has implications for all life.

“These bird losses are a strong signal that our human-altered landscapes are losing their ability to support birdlife. And that is an indicator of a coming collapse of the overall environment.”

Unfortunately, in recent years we have pulled out of the Paris Agreement on climate change and weakened the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Both are actions that deny the importance of the natural environment, wildlife, and the species declines that are occurring.

Still, there is some hope. The reports of declining species also point out that human conservation efforts have led to large increases in waterfowl, raptors, and some game birds such as wild turkeys. In other words, we have learned how to help formerly decreasing individual species come back, but now wider-ranging change is necessary.

One regional action with promise is the recently announced Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan 3 (GLRI) of the EPA. It contains priorities to clean up toxic pollution, reduce polluted runoff and restore bird and fish habitats. In the past GLRI has funded nearly 5,000 projects that have improved water quality. But obviously much more is needed, particularly in reducing carbon emission levels. Please visit Audubon.org regularly to find steps that can be taken. **JJ**

References: National Audubon Society flyer, “Survival by Degrees”; Axelson, Gustave, “Vanishing,” in *Living Bird*, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Autumn 2019; Audubon Great Lakes, “Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Action Plan Update,” email of November 5, 2019.

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

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**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.”**

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

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**Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8
Send your check to: National Audubon Society,
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Attention: Chance Mueleck**



The Urban Birder at Sandy Ridge Reservation



David Lindo discusses bird identification with two of the bird walk participants.
(Photo by Jim Jablonski)

The Urban Birder came to the suburbs Friday, November 8, 2019! David Lindo of Great Britain, known worldwide for his birding books, visited Sandy Ridge as part of *Urban Birding with David Lindo Week* organized by Western Cuyahoga Audubon and co-sponsored, along with others, by Black River Audubon Society.

Lindo has advocated world-wide for Urban Birding in his books, stating that birders can see and enjoy a much wider range of bird species in the cities than they expect, if they only know where to look. Despite worldwide experience from Tunisia to Lorain County, he readily admits he can't identify everything immediately. While examining distant Sandy Ridge shorebirds he readily sought advice from the local birders and by cellphone with birding friends such as Cleveland's own Jen Brumfield, whom he knows well and credits with his appearance in our area.

In his opening comments to the gathered birders in front of the Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center, Lindo said he was eager to meet the people and see the birds of Sandy Ridge, including its trumpeter swans. On the other hand, he was saddened to know his week in northern Ohio was coming to an end. So were the many fans he added to his life list along the way!



TUFTED TITMOUSE photo by Barbara Baudot

BLACK RIVER AUDUBON SOCIETY

“Birding Since 1958”

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