

# WINGTIPS

February 2015



SNOWY OWL photo by Dane Adams

Editors: James Jablonski, Cathy Priebe, Harry Spencer

## **Program**

**Dan Best**

**Senior Naturalist, Geauga Park District**

### **Rest in Peat: Extinct Ice Age**

#### **Animals of Ohio**

**February 3 2015, 7 p.m.**

**Carlisle Visitor Center, Lagrange**



**Dan Best**, a lifelong resident of Northeast Ohio, grew up in Avon Lake where his family, teachers and scouting activities nurtured his early interests in nature.

His program, he explains, will emphasize that virtually all Ice Age animal remains discovered in the Midwest have been found in the peat deposits of former swamps and bogs. "Excavations for agricultural or construction purposes have blundered upon the bones of extinct animals, including mastodons, ground sloths, elk-moose and other Pleistocene megafauna."

Dan participated in Black River Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts during his college years. He is a graduate of The Ohio State University's School of Natural Resources. A naturalist for

36 years, he has been employed by the Geauga Park District for the past 28 years.

Dan's presentation was originally scheduled for January 2014 but fell victim to the sub-zero temperatures of the well-remembered "polar vortex."

## **Field Trip**

Saturday, February 21, 2015

**Castalia Pond, Pickerel Creek, etc.**

Meet at Castalia Pond with Paul Sherwood

## **Great Backyard Bird Count**

Friday-Monday, February 13-16, 2015

### ***Save the Dates!***

#### **Jack Smith Outstanding Speaker Series**

**March 21, 2015, 2 p.m.**

Carlisle Visitor Center

Joy M. Kiser, librarian and author

**"America's Other Audubon"**

**April 11, 2015, 2 p.m.**

Carlisle Visitor Center

Dave Horn, Professor Emeritus of Entomology at

The Ohio State University

**"A Forty Year Survey of Birds in Northwestern Hocking County, Ohio"**

# Christmas Bird Count Results

## Elyria/Lorain

Twenty-five hardy individuals spent most of December 20 combing the six areas of the Elyria/Lorain count region on foot and by car recording their bird sightings. The day was overcast with a temperature in the low 30s but the absence of any wind made it a relatively pleasant day for the time of year. At the conclusion of the day, people gathered at the Jack Smith house to compile the data and share a potluck dinner. The count totaled 76 species and 13,931 individual birds. Veterans of the Elyria count said the number of species was higher than any they could recall.

The species and number of each are: Ross's goose 1, cackling goose 1, Canada goose 1377, tundra swan 2, gadwall 1, American wigeon 2, American black duck 1, mallard 431, blue-winged teal 1, green-winged teal 7, northern shoveler 15, canvasback 1, redhead 7, lesser scaup 100, surf scoter 1, white-winged scoter 1, long-tailed duck 1, bufflehead 13, common goldeneye 372, hooded merganser 51, red-breasted merganser 65, common merganser 30, ruddy duck 84, common loon 4, horned grebe 5, great blue heron 6, sandhill crane 2, American coot 1, killdeer 1, Bonaparte's gull 1, ring-billed gull 3944, herring gull 23, great black-backed gull 14, bald eagle 5, northern harrier 1, cooper's hawk 4, sharp-shinned hawk 1, red-shouldered hawk 8, red-tailed hawk 28, rough-legged hawk 1, barred owl 2, snowy owl 3, short-eared owl 3, rock pigeon 44, mourning dove 117, belted kingfisher 1, red-headed woodpecker 1, red-bellied woodpecker 61, downy woodpecker 69, hairy woodpecker 17, pileated woodpecker 5, northern flicker 12, blue jay 180, American crow 73, northern mockingbird 1, eastern bluebird 26, hermit thrush 1, American robin 5, black-capped chickadee 84, tufted titmouse 78, white-breasted nuthatch 68, brown creeper 1, Carolina wren 5, golden-crowned kinglet 3, yellow-rumped warbler 2, dark-eyed junco 184, American tree sparrow 36, song sparrow 42, white-throated sparrow 1, house sparrow 471, house finch 73, American goldfinch 58, common redpoll 4, northern cardinal 132, European starling 5433, red-winged blackbird 22.

The Wellington area bird count was performed on January 3, a miserably cold, rainy day. Twenty-three very hardy souls turned out to count 6,392 birds while covering 324 miles. There were no rare sightings but a strange one – a barred owl on a wire.

## The Value of Citizen Science

By **Jim Jablonski**

The term “citizen science” has only been in use since 1995 but the concept was put into practice for more than a century beginning with the first Christmas Bird Count in 1900.

In a peer-reviewed research article titled “*The Invisible Prevalence of Citizen Science in Global Research: Migratory Birds and Climate Change*” in the open access journal PLOS ONE, Caren B. Cooper, Jennifer Shirk and Benjamin Zuckerberg asked the basic question, “Is citizen science effective at science?” In other words, are projects such as the annual CBC, Great Backyard Bird Counts, Nest Watch and others really of value?

The three researchers “examined a review paper by ornithologists in which they formulated central claims about the impact of climate change on avian migration.” Citizen science was never explicitly mentioned in the review of other research papers but Cooper, Shirk and Zuckerberg found that “papers based on citizen science constituted between 24% and 77% of the references backing each claim, with no evidence of mistrust of “citizen science data.”



In other words, ornithologists rely heavily upon bird counts collected at Christmas and other times by amateur birders, and use this data to support research on topics as important as climate change, although direct mention of this use is often not provided.

The three authors emphasize that ornithologists rely more heavily than they acknowledge on data collected by birders and suggest that researchers use the keywords “citizen science” in their papers when appropriate.

A review of Cooper, Shirk and Zuckerberg’s study recently appeared in Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s “*All About Birds*” blog. The author, Hugh Powell interviewed Caren Cooper who said, “. . .we tend to have notions about expertise, and that only professionals have it . . . But people who have been doing a hobby for years have tons of expertise, and they can make a very real contribution.”

**References:** “*The Invisible Prevalence of Citizen Science in Global Research: Migratory Birds and Climate Change,*” in **PLOS ONE**, Cooper, Caren B., Shirk, Jennifer, Zuckerberg, Benjamin; “*Climate Change Science Aided by Huge but ‘Invisible’ Efforts of Amateurs,*” Powell, Hugh in Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s blog.allaboutbirds.org.

## A Birder’s Diary: Waders and the Benefits of Watching and Waiting

By Carol Leininger

Ever since I watched the DVD, *Watching Waders* by Judy Fieth and Michael Male, I have been more observant of our common wading birds. When I see a great blue heron or great egret standing out in the water so silent, solitary and still, I pause to watch a while in hopes of actually seeing a great catch.



I will never forget watching an American bittern stalking its prey at Sandy Ridge. At first I didn’t even see the bird, but a bit of motion amongst the rushes alerted me. Very, very slowly he took a tiny step forward in a crouched position. Then he waited. He took another step forward and waited some more. This happened over and over again. I thought he would never get to what he was after, but at last he did indeed dart forward, catch the prey and disappear.

I have enjoyed watching snowy egrets hunt. They don’t stand quite so still. Instead they wiggle their golden slippers about in the water to attract fish. I have read somewhere that green herons are true fisherman – they entice fish to the shore where they are standing by dropping insects or worms on the surface of the water. I have watched these herons a lot since learning this, but have never been close enough to actually see if there was bait involved.



Green herons and night herons tend to hunt close to the shoreline or from a branch hanging over the water since they do not have the legs for deeper water.

I do not see reddish egrets very often, but after viewing the DVD I would like to spend more time watching their feeding behavior. They seem to dance about instead of standing still and even flap their wings to attract attention. And then there are the cattle egrets who will do just about anything to get an insect meal – pecking the bugs off the grilles of cars, walking around the feet of cows, and even following a tractor as it plows a field.

Sometimes just staying in one place and watching bird behavior is much more fun than sighting the bird, checking it off on your list and going on to the next.

GREEN HERON photo  
by John Koscinski

# SNOWY OWL

*Nyctea scandiaca*

By **Jim Jablonski**

Opportunity does knock twice. Last year's irruption of snowy owls south of the border took our area by storm last winter. Area birders had any number of chances to see the ghostly visitors from the boreal regions with the owls being sighted along the lakefront and further south, even in the subtropics. One made news after being rescued from a deserted Lorain building. And even the mass media became involved with many stories and great photos. Few events have helped popularize birding more than their arrival. But somehow despite all the hoopla, I was never able to make it out to see one; something always seemed to get in the way until they eventually returned north.

Well, they're back! And this time, once my annual dose of the flu (despite vaccinations) subsided I rushed out to see the one that took up residence at Spitzer Marina. Photos in the local paper spurred me to brave the winds at the lakeshore. The first day it happened that a local television reporter interviewed me, since I was the only birder there at the time. Gratefully, the minute-long interview was shortened to three seconds. But despite my moment of fame I failed to see the owl. Nor did I on the next day. But with the next irruption possibly twenty years away, I'm determined to keep at it.

After all, by any standards, the snowy is an impressive species. At twenty-four inches one of our largest owls, the snowy doesn't seem that much smaller than an eagle. The nearly pure white color of the adults with the ominous yellow eyes peering out of the white face is striking indeed.

The owl's summer habitat is in the distant far north along the coast of Canada and Alaska. It moves south in the winter but only to roughly along the Canadian border and rarely as far as Ohio.

Given the short days in the arctic and frigid nights much of the year, the snowy, unlike other owls, is a day feeder. Its prey consists of small mammals such as lemmings, hares and other rodents along with fish, birds and carrion.

As birders and even non-birders know by now, the irruptions may be tied to population explosions of the Canadian lemming population although the precise connection is uncertain. One thing is fairly certain. It likely will be a while before another irruption occurs.

**References:** "Snowy Owl" in *"Field Guide To Birds,"* Donald & Lillian Stokes; "Snowy Owl" in *"The Birders Handbook,"* Paul R. Ehrlich, David S. Dobkin, and Darryl Wheye.

## Photographing a SNOWY OWL

By **Dane Adams**

On December 18th, 2014, following a tip from a friend, I found a Snowy Owl perched atop a tall utility pole on the north side of the very busy State Route 224 near Homerville, Ohio.

After obtaining permission from the occupant of a nearby residence, I geared up and worked my way slowly away from the owl to decrease the possibility of disturbing the bird. That move also produced an angle that made the owl appear lower, as if it on a low post, not on its high perch.

My Canon camera with an 800 mm lens maximized the apparent size of the bird and enabled me to photograph from this distant location.

I took several photos, and thanked the landowner. A couple of days later I returned with an 8x10 print as a gift, which the landowner seemed to appreciate.

# CAROLINA WREN

*Thryothorus ludovicianus*

By **Cathy Priebe**

“Tea kettle, tea kettle, tea kettle!” What the heck was that? My first encounter with the Carolina wren’s loud and boisterous song totally befuddled and also startled me. After we became properly acquainted, I looked forward to their musical trills and often up close and personal behavior.



The Carolina wren is a year round Ohio resident although it originally was a southerner that slowly migrated north as the climate and habitats changed. Even though these wrens are very hardy during the winter months, it has been determined that snow depth affects their survival more than harsh temperatures. The extreme snow during the blizzards of 1977 and 1978 inflicted a heavy toll on them, wiping out almost 90 percent of their Ohio population. It took 20 years for them to recover, but they are back as strong as ever according to recent surveys.

Described as having a chubby, rounded body with a large head, the Carolina is our biggest eastern wren. Its upper body is a warm rusty brown, with buff belly and white throat. Sporting a very definite white-eye stripe and long, curved bill, it is very easy to tell them apart from other wrens.

When it comes to nesting locations, these creative birds are not very particular. Hanging baskets, old boots, broken down cars, crevices, overhangs and dense vegetation, all are prime real estate for these clever critters. Both birds build a cup-like nest of sticks and plant material, lining the inside with moss or soft fibers. The female will lay 4 to 5 white eggs with brown splotches and incubate for about 2 weeks. Both sexes feed the nestlings.

Their favorite foods are soft-bodied insects and spiders but they will eat berries, fruit, seeds, peanuts, suet and mealworms.

## Some fun facts about Carolina wrens:

- Males have about 32 different songs in their repertoire and will repeat one song from as many as 5 to 250 times before changing.
- Females will sing with the males when they are defending territories.
- They prefer unkempt yards and dilapidated buildings.
- They like to hang out with tufted titmice, gray catbirds and eastern towhees.
- Can hang upside down like a nuthatch and climb like a creeper.
- Sings year round and in triplets. “Weed eater, weed eater, weed eater, wheet!” It also makes sounds like “a finger being run down a comb” according to Pete Dunne.
- Can fly vertically from the bottom of a tree to the top in a single bound.

If you are fortunate enough to host Carolina wrens this winter, keep your suet feeders full. These little guys can use help to get through the winter, especially if we have a lot of snow.



CAROLINA WREN photo by John Koscinski

**References:** “Birds of Ohio,” Jim McCormac; “The Sibley Guide to Bird Life & Behavior,” David Allen Sibley; “Birds of the Cleveland Region” Larry Rosche; “Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion,” Pete Dunne.