

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

January 2016



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EASTERN BLUEBIRD photo by John Koscinski

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Program

Bird Banding for Science and Conservation

Tim Jasinski & Gary Fowler

Lake Erie Nature and Science Center

January 5, 2016

Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Bird banding is usually a multi-person task and our program will feature two very experienced bird banders who will speak on their vocation.

Tim Jasinski, of the Lake Erie Nature and Science Center (LENSC) became involved in birding at age five and wildlife rehabilitation at aged seven! He began raising caged birds at 13 and eventually became a volunteer at LENSOC prior to full-time employment as a Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist in 2006. Below, you can see him preparing to release a red-necked grebe from the Center – after banding it, of course!

Gary Fowler began work at Lake Erie Nature and Science Center in the 1990's as a rehabilitation specialist and quickly realized that rehabilitation was the perfect time for banding birds. He approached Dr. Ron Canterbury of the Cleveland Metroparks and received a banding sub-permit under Dr. Canterbury to band rehabbed birds at LENSOC. Fowler's wife Jill also trained under Dr. Canterbury, and they continue banding rehabbed birds. Working together, the couple also received training on songbirds and began doing public programs for Cleveland Metroparks as volunteers.



Tim Jasinski and red-necked grebe

In 2001, Gary received his master-bander permit with two sub-permit holders, one of whom is his wife.

The Fowlers volunteer for a wide variety of organizations including the Metroparks in Lorain County and Erie County as well as the Medina County Park District. Through 2013, Gary and Jill have banded over 23,000 birds of 139 species.

Many BRAS members have expressed an interest in learning more about banding, and this meeting is certainly a great opportunity to do so.

Field Trips

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, January 2, 2016

Diane Devereaux will lead, 440-458-2440

Lorain Harbor and Avon Lake

Saturday, January 16, 2016, 9:00 a.m.

Meet at the Jackalope parking lot

Sally Fox will lead

Sandy Ridge, "Outer-Limits" Walk

November 21 Field Trip

By **Tammy Martin**



On a rather balmy November morning, nine lucky birders joined Tim Fairweather for an "outer limits" hike at Sandy Ridge Reservation. After a quiet walk through the woods, we scanned the marsh, noted a few species of waterfowl, then headed off-trail around an area only accessible on a naturalist-led walk. As hoped, this area proved to be very birdy for our group.

To begin, we spooked a large flock of turkeys that were feeding along the tree/marsh edge. Next, we stopped near the eagle nest, where Tim explained the new nest-cam[era] unit, powered by

solar panels. Once online, we'll be able to watch the nesting activity of our very own Sandy Ridge eagle pair! Thanks to Elyria's 3M plant for donating the necessary funds to purchase and install this unit.



Tim then took us off trail to see a recent beaver dam, blocking one of the outlet channels between the marsh and the housing development to the east. Although no beavers were detected, much fresh activity (cut trees) was noticed in numerous locations around the marsh. Mammal-wise, we did watch several muskrats, swimming near and far.

Bird-wise, we tallied 36 species, including a peregrine falcon that remained perched in one of the dead tree snags in the marsh.

Other species included Canada goose, American black duck, mallard, northern shoveler, green-winged teal, hooded merganser, wild turkey, pied-billed grebe, bald eagle, red-tailed hawk, ring-billed gull, mourning dove, belted kingfisher, red-bellied, downy, hairy, and pileated woodpeckers, blue jay, American crow, black-capped chickadee, tufted titmouse, red-breasted and white-breasted nuthatches, brown creeper, golden-crowned kinglet, eastern bluebird, cedar waxwing, American tree, fox, and song sparrows, dark-eyed junco, northern cardinal, house finch, American goldfinch, and house sparrow.



Photos by Debbie Parker

Hog Island Birding Camp Scholarships Available

Since 1988 BRAS has offered educators, naturalists and community leaders the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills at Hog Island to educate our community about conservation of birds, other wildlife and their habitats.

This year we offer two scholarships to adults. Each scholarship includes tuition, room and board, and travel expenses. We hope that the recipients will follow the examples of those who have returned from Hog Island as ambassadors of conservation and education in our community.

Campers spend one week on the island off the coast of Maine learning from naturalists and educators such as Kenn Kaufman, Scott Weidensaul, Pete Dunne and Stephen Kress.

Hog Island campers love its natural surroundings and rustic 19th-century buildings. Delicious meals are served in a communal dining room.

The following camps have been particularly valuable to past campers: Joy of Birding (June 5-9), Field Ornithology (June 12-17), Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week (July 17-22). For details see the website projectpuffin.org. Individuals interested in applying for the scholarship should contact Dick Lee at leedck@windstream.net or (440-322-7449).

The European White Stork: It Does More than Deliver Babies

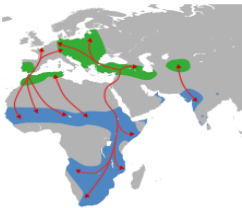
By **Jim Jablonski**



Some birds are so iconic, especially the large or exceptionally intelligent, they earn for themselves a lasting place in a society's folk culture. Examples are owls, ravens, crows, penguins, and eagles. And, of course, there is the European white stork. Even though we do not see them in the U.S., they continue in our cultural memory through the old baby-delivering story that has been passed down through the generations. Stories are attached to the species, it seems, in every country they pass through, from nesting sites in Central and Western Europe to winter-feeding grounds in Central and Southern Africa..



EUROPEAN WHITE STORK photo by Jim Jablonski



A friend of mine, and former co-worker Lucy Wanderi, grew up in Kenya before immigrating to the U.S. She well remembers the storks, or 'nyamindigi' in her native Kikuyu, perched in trees or feeding near her home. If a stork was the first animal a woman saw when she went out in the morning she was sure to have a good day, the story went. And the chances were good since women were usually the first family members to rise.

The birds could be pests, she said, especially during times of drought and famine when they would dig in cultivated fields, uprooting plants in their search for worms and grubs. People would have to run through the fields swinging ropes to scare them off. Still, Kenyans would not eat them, since there is a taboo against eating any wild animals in that cattle-raising part of Africa, Lucy explained.

Meanwhile, in Central Europe, people seem to go to an extreme in catering to their favorite migrant bird. In Poland, where I have traveled often, storks, or 'bociany' have taken to nesting on houses in the countryside and are welcomed as bringers of good luck, just as they are in Kenya. Homeowners see themselves as favored by their presence, although a good look at the condition of the roof in the photo on page 2 makes one doubt that opinion.

In addition, they somehow build nests on utility poles, so, to avoid the obvious problems, platforms are often built on poles placed nearby to accommodate them, as you can see in the second photo on page 2. The acceptance granted by the human residents of the area has led to the adaptation of the storks to human presence. More than 50,000 pairs nest in Poland, the largest number in any country. The photos were taken in the town of Bialowieza, near the last surviving remnant of European primeval forest, so one might think only rural people are so accepting. But even on the outskirts of larger towns you

can see flocks of storks feeding in open fields like Canada geese in Ohio. Finally, my Polish friend, Kasia Suszkiewicz, said they have been used to symbolize both Poland and 'life' in films.



Other legends have been attached to the bird. Muslims revered them at one time because they seemed to make an annual migration to Mecca while ancient Romans saw them as models of parental devotion since they could so clearly be seen tending to their young. Ancient Greeks believed they cared for their aged parents. Western Europeans seem to have developed the baby-delivering myth. Storks caused an understanding of bird migration when Germans found them with African arrows embedded in them. Few birds have had such an interesting relationship with human culture.

Polish peasant children watching storks arrive,
Josef Chelmonski, 19th century Polish painter, Wikipedia

A Birder's Diary: Bird Banding 101

By Carol Leininger



Seeing a banded bird can be quite exciting. If the bird is still alive, copy down all the band data to report; if the bird is dead, remove the bands and send them in. Be sure to include: [1] type of bird; [2] all band colors, numbers, and letters; [3] date found; [4] location found; [5] condition of bird; [6] your address.

The toll-free number of the Bird Banding Lab in Washington D.C. is 1-800-327-BAND (2263). The exciting part comes when you receive information regarding the history of the bird you have found. Bird banding provides abundant data on birds - migration routes, wintering and breeding grounds, stop-over feeding sites and general health of a bird population. It's a way to monitor productivity and survivorship of a species.

To band birds one must have a permit and follow specific rules. Methods of capturing live birds vary with the species. Songbirds are generally captured using a mist net (which looks like a volleyball net with finer mesh) stretched between two poles or trees. Some may use a loud speaker to lure birds in. For ground birds, nets may be large funnel-shaped traps on the ground. Ducks and geese are easily caught in a tunnel-like set of nets with decoys at the entrance. Cages with a lure of a live pigeon or rabbit and a trigger-net that falls over a lured bird works well for raptors. Whatever method of capture is used, it is always best to retrieve the bird, get all the data needed, band the bird, and release it as quickly as possible.

A bird bander really needs one or more helpers to obtain and record all the data as well as band the bird. Condition of feathers may provide information on age, sex, and molt. Some wing feather measurements are needed for identification. "Skulling" helps with aging also. This requires blowing or wetting feathers on top of a bird's head to examine the skull – in a young bird the bone layer covering the brain is still very thin and will show up pink; in an adult bird the skull is thicker and appears white in color. During the breeding season gender indicators (brood patch, cloacal protuberances, and bulges in abdominal area) should be noted. Body weight is a good indicator of fat build up, health, and recent migration activity. Official metal bands that are placed on the leg of a bird vary in size depending on species, and the band data must be recorded. That's a lot to do and requires preparation.

There are many bird banding projects in Ohio, and most banders welcome volunteers to help and/or observe. Banding is done in spring, summer and fall. This is a wonderful citizen science project. If you think you might be interested, check for more information with the Ohio Bird Banding Association or Black Swamp Bird

Observatory. To whet your appetite you might read “Hawk Banding for the English Major’s Soul” by Jenise Porter (Birding, March 2012).

To a bird lover, banding is a new and different way to view the sky.



Photo by H Spencer

LONG-EARED OWL

Asio otus

By **Cathy Priebe**



I have had the pleasure of seeing this particular owl once in my birding career, when one was wintering at Caley Reservation many years ago in Lorain County. Occasionally found in Ohio during the winter, these owls can be communal, sharing a space with as many as 20 individuals. They also generally favor locations along Lake Erie during spring migration (April and May).

The species is one of the most secretive and difficult owls to spot because of their ability to disappear during the day by blending into the tree (usually young conifers, pin oaks or grape vine tangles), and it has been speculated that there are more winter residents and migrants present in Ohio than are ever detected. Checking for their scat at the base of trees is probably one of the easiest ways to track their nightly roosting areas.

Long-eared owls are slender and are appropriately named as their tufted ears are close-set and long. Their face discs are a rusty orange, yellow eyes and brown mottled plumage. They are often mistaken for the great-

horned, short-eared and screech owl because the four species share some similar characteristics. Strictly a nocturnal bird, long-eared owls hunt over open fields for mice, voles and, sometimes, small birds and rabbits.

According to *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac, “the long-eared owl is a very rare and sporadic breeder across the northern half of Ohio.” They nest in abandoned crow or hawk nests, usually raising at least 2 to 6 offspring. Unfortunately, these birds are often subject to other predatory creatures, such as hawks and larger owls, which fosters secretive behaviors.

If you are fortunate enough to detect a wintering long-eared owl, it is recommended that you take great care when approaching its location, as with all birds, so as not to spook them into relocating and possibly making them a victim to other predators. Follow the proper birding protocol as always and enjoy these rare birds when they visit.

References: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Ohio Cardinal* Vol. 37 No. 3 Spring 2014.

Eastern Bluebird

Sialia sialis

By **Jim Jablonski**

A few years ago I realized that with my declining vision, poor hearing and lifelong battle with impatience, that the best way to become involved with birding was to tend bluebird trails. So I began working with Penny and Fritz Brandau’s very productive group of Black River Audubon bluebirders in 2013. As a result I am more familiar with this great little bird than any other and welcome the chance to write about it.

An attractive, little thrush with a brilliant blue head, back and wings, somehow non-birders confuse the eastern bluebird with the much larger and raucous blue jay. The reason probably lies in its near-disappearance in the twentieth century. The cause of that disaster was in the British invasion of House (or English) sparrows whose violent proclivities enable them to out-compete and kill bluebirds. However, since birding groups, such as BRAS, began establishing bluebird box trails their numbers have rebounded with significant increases – proof that individuals can make a difference.

Bluebirds are rather efficient breeders, when they are given a fair chance through the elimination of house sparrows. Producing two, and sometimes three, clutches of four to six blue eggs, they are capable of easily producing 10-12 young in a season. The fledglings from the first nest also stay with the parents through the summer, helping with the feeding of their younger siblings.

Their diet of crickets, grasshoppers, beetles and worms is easy enough to find in their breeding grounds and usually insures the fledging of all the young from a well-tended bluebird box. So it is really no surprise that with the provision of nest boxes and the elimination of sparrow competitors that the bluebird is making a significant comeback.

The eastern is one of three related species in North America, the others are the western bluebird along the west coast and the mountain bluebird in the Rockies. The eastern bluebird migrates north to just above the Great Lakes and, as winter approaches, heads south to just below the Ohio River. Some are known to stay in our area, however, if they are guaranteed a good diet of mealworms and berries by birders who have designed their backyards to accommodate them. All in all, with a little help from their friends, it seems that these beautiful blue birds with the musical song are here to stay.

Reference: *Lives of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman.

Local Black River Audubon Membership Application \$15/year (Includes subscription to WINGTIPS but not AUDUBON magazine.) \$15/year.

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

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Attention: Chance Mueleck

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