

WINGTIPS



AMERICAN TREE SPARROW photo by Jeanne Buttle Williams

JANUARY 2019

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January 2019 Program
Tuesday, January 8, 7 pm
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Tim Jasinski
Lights Out Cleveland



Tim Jasinski recovers an injured bird. (from his Facebook page)

Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist Tim Jasinski, of Lake Erie Nature & Science Center, has been dedicated to conservation since childhood. In his position, Tim utilizes his skills and abundance of wildlife knowledge, to treat injured wildlife, care for our resident animals, and effectively educate people of all ages about Ohio's environment.

Tim has been recognized with an award for Outstanding Service from the Ohio Wildlife Rehabilitators Association where he has also taught sessions. He is recognized as a leading Ohio birder having led multiple groups in various locations, including at the Biggest Week in American Birding.

Also dedicated to saving migratory birds, Tim will explain the **Lights Out Cleveland** program which rehabs birds injured by flying into the buildings of the Cleveland downtown area. Lights Out Cleveland also encourages businesses and building owners to shut off their lights at night. A number of major Cleveland businesses have enrolled in the program.

Upcoming Field Trips

Wellington Christmas Bird Count

Meet at Wellington McDonald's, December 29, 8:00 am

Paul Sherwood to lead

Contact him at 419-202-6080 or pdsstrix@aol.com

Saturday, January 19, 2019

Lorain Harbor to Avon Lake

Meet in parking lot behind Jackalopes Restaurant

(Sally Fox to lead)

November 2018 Field Trip Report

By Sally Fox

On a cold November Saturday, six of us gathered at Cleveland's Edgewater Park. A brisk breeze made the temperature seem much colder. Views of Lake Erie from the pier were surprisingly devoid of waterfowl, a few ring-billed gulls flew by and some ducks swam too far off to identify. But, as we drove away, a merlin gave us close looks from the top of a small tree. We then walked through Wendy Park. Again, things remained quiet as we only picked up American goldfinch, dark-eyed junco, rock pigeon, and northern cardinal. On the river by the former Coast Guard Station, we added mallard, bald eagle, horned grebe, pied-billed grebe, double-crested cormorant, herring gull, and great black-backed gull.

Next, we birded the Scranton Flats area. In the bushes across from the river, we tallied blue jay, house sparrow, eastern phoebe, northern mockingbird, and cedar waxwing. On the river, we added Canada geese and Bonaparte's gull. We traveled from there to Merwin's Wharf where we added black-crowned night heron and great blue heron. Although the birding was sparse, we had some nice surprises.

To finish off the day we lunched together at Merwin's Wharf. It was so nice to gather around the table and get a chance to visit with each other. We decided that we should end more of our walks this way. So, our total for the day was twenty-two species and some delightful new friends.

Applications for Hog Island Scholarships

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

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

Campers spend one week on Hog Island, learning from accomplished naturalists, birders, and educators.

Past scholarship winners have loved the camp's natural surrounding and rustic buildings. Delicious meals are always served in the communal dining room.

A reservation has been made for one lucky BRAS scholarship winner for the *Sharing Nature: An Educator's Week* camp which will run from July 15 to 20th. A different camp might be possible if openings exist.

For more details and description of the Hog Island 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.

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW

Spizella arborea

By **Cathy Priebe**

I have to be honest and up front. I have never been good at identifying sparrows, so I have not spent a lot of time studying them. I prefer the vibrant colors of warblers, especially in the spring. At least I am able to correctly ID many of them, mostly because of their distinctive plumage.

Sparrows can be tricky to identify, and it does not help that they are usually brown and likely to hide in bushes or grasses. But when winter arrives in Ohio, so does the American tree sparrow. And this little bird has a personality and look that cannot be mistaken for any other little brown bird, once you become acquainted with it.

One snowy and cold winter day, I saw that I had a bunch of sparrows eating below a thistle feeder. At first glance, I thought I saw house sparrows. Upon closer scrutiny, these birds were different. They resembled adult chipping sparrows, but chippies had long departed. Of course, after I looked them up, I discovered a new backyard species, the American tree sparrow.

The “Winter Chippy” is a common and widespread spring breeder across arctic and subarctic regions, nesting at the edge of the arctic tundra. Like other winter irruptive species, these little sparrows head south in the fall and show up at feeders or weedy areas with grasses, goldenrod, ironweed, and various other plants. Generally, they stay in small flocks and will remain in one area until it is time to leave or they need to find more food.



(Audubon.org map showing the far northern breeding area of the American tree sparrow)

Sporting a rusty brown cap, a bi-colored small pointy bill, and a light grey chest with a charcoal smudge in the middle, these sparrows are not very hard to identify once you get to know them. (So, there is still hope for me!)

Fast forwarding to this winter of 2019, I have already been fortunate to host these visitors again! Not only are they eating thistle, but I have seen them on the suet feeders and regular seed stations. And, of course, they are all over the ground doing their frantic feeding dance, shuffling back and forth so fast that I often lose sight of them!!

These sparrows have a very pleasing trill and they become more vocal when it is time to head home around March or April. So, pay closer attention to your little brown birds this winter, especially on the ground below your feeders. You may find that you have a “different sparrow” this winter, and I guarantee you will enjoy their visit!!

References: Pete Dunne’s *Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *National Geographic Complete Birds of North America*.

EUROPEAN BARN OWL

Tyto alba

By **Barbara Baudot**

Barn owls are responsive, intelligent beings with serious conservation problems requiring recognition and concern. On all continents of the globe, except Antarctica, their distinctive beauty, air of mystery, and sublime sensory awareness are known to people, especially those living near open fields where small rodents claim home.

For centuries myths and legends reveal humanity's fascination with these birds. Adored or abhorred, they are associated with wisdom and compassion as well as death, despair, and necromancy. Maybe it is their silent flight, stealth in hunting; nocturnal lives and eerie hissing that prompt these images.

Reality is otherwise. Spine chilling hisses express males' efforts to attract lifelong mates, to chase other males, or a male's invitation to its mate to visit a nesting cavity in some hollow tree. Or maybe a female is calling for food. The feather configurations on their broad wings make for silent flying, so much so that they have inspired designs for quieting the wings of windmills.

Barn owls nest when prey is abundant. Incubation begins with the first egg; others appear one by one every 2 or 3 days until the brood is complete. A nest then fills with owlets of varying sizes, the last born are covered in white down while older ones are emerging as adults in soft downy grey and golden brown feathers covered with black and white spots. Their bellies and the heart shapes of their faces are generally white; female bellies are spotted. Owlets fledge at eight weeks but remain dependent until they are able to hunt.

European barn owls and American barn owls, *tyto furcata*, look very similar. However, the latter are considerably heavier and have shorter wings and longer legs. The latter can eat larger prey.

For all barn owls, premature fledging and subsequent abandonment are real dangers. In such cases, human intervention is necessary.

Such was the situation of one dehydrated, starving fledgling standing in the middle of a busy road linking two villages in rural France. Here is her story.

I teetered out of my nest before fledging and landed immobile in the middle of a road. Cars whizzed by, veering off to avoid hitting me.



When one stopped, a lady appeared and tried to rescue me; terrified, I flew out of reach. Soon I was back on the road expecting food from a parent. Two days passed, no food, nor water. Close to death, flies cavorted on my face and beak. Informed of my continued presence, the lady returned to find me. This time I was too weak to offer resistance as she picked me up and put me into a poultry carton. I was soon safe in her kitchen pantry.

She sought a wild bird refuge but found none within 150 miles. She brought me to the veterinarian, who determined I was uninjured, but seriously dehydrated and much too frail to travel.

Searching the internet for guidance, the lady found a video entitled “how to save starving and dehydrated barn owls” put up by the Barn Owl Trust in the UK where no laws prohibit ordinary citizens from caring for wounded or distressed birds. In France, this is illegal but tolerated if there are no reasonable alternatives.

I remained in the lady's care for three weeks. She moved me into a large cage partly lined with sheets to protect my wings' feathers. Morning and evening she donned leather gloves, lifted me from the cage, rolled me up in a towel to hold my wings and legs straight, and then fed me. In the beginning I needed hydration. She put a few drops of water in my pharynx with a syringe, carefully avoiding my breathing passage. She lifted my long beak and put small balls of chicken or quail flesh, chicken liver, and soft feathers in my mouth—as much as I would swallow. The second week I took the balls from her hand. I refused to eat food placed in the cage.

Daytime, I slept standing on one leg, the other drawn close to my body. Nighttime I assumed an alert hunting posture.

With time, I grew strong and feisty, more resistant to handling. I spread my wings and swayed back and forth on a perch when approached. Then one night the lady saw me arching my powerful wings and hissing harshly. She understood this call to the wild and contacted a well reputed refuge 150 miles away from her village and met the director halfway.

Upon examining me, the director assured the lady I would catch live prey that evening. He showed her my specialized hearing equipment. He explained that each of my inner ear openings are shaped differently and are lopsided. He added that the sides of my heart-shaped face served as outer ears, the short feathers on the sides of my face and head forming grooves channeling sound waves into my ear openings. Skin flaps on the openings of these inner ears protect them and capture sound coming from all angles. Thus, not only can I locate sources of sounds, but also calculate their direction and the speed of prey in motion. That night, there would be mice in the aviary and these ears, instinctively alert, would direct my attack.

The director brought me to the 'Centre de Sauvegarde pour Oiseaux Sauvage...' Wild Bird Sanctuary in Sens, Burgundy and placed me in an aviary with another barn owl. That night there were mice scurrying on the bottom of this cage and I proved to be an effective hunter. The director stayed in touched with the lady and reported that he found me in terrific shape and would soon be released. He sent the lady my last picture in captivity.

Now I am gliding by night over the fields and meadows of Burgundy offering to farmers below the economic benefits of the most effective natural rodent control available. *Please read "Comments on Rehabilitation" on the last page. Editor*

References: mdc.mo.gov/conmag/2000/07/ghost-owls; **"Barn Owls"** in Wikipedia; **"Barn Owls"** in Audubon Birds of America; Barn Owl Trust.org. UK.

Project Puffin Success and Threats

Project Puffin, a world-wide leader in bird restoration, recorded another success in 2018 as common murres returned to Matinicus Rock after a 130-year absence! Matinicus is 110-miles south of the nearest murre colony at Machias Seal Island on the Canadian border.

Murres, with the encouragement of the Project Puffin restoration techniques, made recent attempts to begin breeding on Matinicus Rock, but it took until this year for six chicks to successfully hatch.



Common murre from Audubon.org, Guide to North American Birds

“The Rock” played a role in the bird conservation movement. Murres, and other Atlantic seabirds, were hunted to extinction off the U.S. coast in the 1800’s for their meat, feathers, and eggs. By 1883, murres were gone from Matinicus. But in 1900, William Dutcher, Audubon Society’s founding president, hired lighthouse keeper William Grant to serve as a warden to protect the remaining seabird species. Steps such as these were the building blocks toward the establishment of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, the inspiration for declaring the centennial year of 2018 to be “The Year of the Bird.” Unfortunately, the Treaty is threatened by the current U.S. administration that is seeking to weaken it significantly through new interpretation of its meaning.

Project Puffin also experienced difficulties in the breeding of its signature bird, the Atlantic puffin. An “ocean heat wave” caused an up and down pattern in water temperatures off the coast of Maine. In mid-July sea surface temperature rose, forcing the forage fish of puffins to drop to deeper, cooler waters.

Adult puffins, although capable of diving lower, tended to be exhausted by the repeated attempts and the chicks, fed less, suffered. When the surface water cooled, the parents had to choose between migrating or staying to continue feeding their young which had little time to recover. Either way, both generations were likely to suffer. **JJ**

Reference: 2018 Egg Rock Update, Newsletter of Audubon’s Society’s Seabird Restoration Program.

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

Attention: Chance Mueleck

Comments on Rehabilitation



Before . . .

Wingtips writer Barbara Baudot relates the experience of rehabilitating a European barn owl beginning on **page 5** of this issue. As you can see, the transformation of the little owl from the exhausted, fly-covered, and nearly dead bird above to the nearly recovered owl below is amazing.

However, Barbara's situation was a very special case and in a different country. ***It must be stressed that bird and other animal rehabbing should not be attempted in the U.S.*** In fact, it is illegal for the everyday citizen. By law, animals can only be rehabilitated by those specially trained and licensed to do so. It is also unnecessary since there are a number of excellent rehab facilities nearby, including *Lake Erie Nature & Science Center* in Bay Village (***managed by our January 2019 speaker Tim Jasinski***), and *Medina Raptor Center* in Medina County among others.

. . . and After.



Both photos by Barbara Baudot



EUROPEAN BARN OWL photo by Dominique Crickboom

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