

Black River Audubon Society

WINGTIPS

May 2011



Royal Tern
Dane Adams



Editors: Jack Smith and Harry Spencer
Photographer: John Koscinski
Webmistress: Arlene Lengyel

Program

Tuesday, May 3, 2011, 7:00 p.m.

Carlisle Visitor Center

In the Footsteps of Roger Tory Peterson – Birding Newfoundland

Casey Tucker, Conservation Biologist

Casey Tucker is the founder and director of the American Avian Conservation Association, a bird conservation organization working to engage people in bird conservation through science education. He is a Research Associate with the Ohio State University's Museum of Biological Diversity, where he works in a bioacoustics laboratory. He is also a Conservation Educator for the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. From 2003 to 2008 he worked for the National Audubon Society in Ohio as an education specialist, where he gained experience addressing bird conservation issues around homes and communities, and leading eco-tours to Alaska. He has experience as a volunteer in a molecular ecology and systematics laboratory at the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History.

Field Trip

May 7, 2011 (Saturday)

Magee Marsh at 9:00 a.m.

Spring migration is just around the corner and Black River Audubon Society is offering a birding field trip to Magee Marsh in Ottawa County, the premier locale for migrating warblers. You may see colorful warblers, up close and personal, and other species at this fabulous migratory hotspot. Everyone welcome!

Board Meeting

Tuesday, May 31, 6:30 p.m.

304 West Avenue, Elyria

Everyone welcome!

Royal Tern

(Thalasseus maximus/Sterna maxima)

By **Jack Smith**,

On the first page of this month's issue is a great action photo of a royal tern flying over the Columbus City Hoover Dam during the first week of March. It was shot by Dane Adams. This is not an ordinary sight in Ohio as records of this bird list it as very rare and accidental in inland areas such as Ohio. It was first spotted on March 3 by someone other than Dane. That person mistakenly identified the bird as a Caspian tern, a species often seen along Lake Erie and some inland Ohio Lakes.



The royal and Caspian terns are among the largest American terns with Caspian slightly the larger, so identification by size alone is very problematic. Other features are different, however. The Caspian's beak is much broader, with more red, a small amount of black near the end with a yellow tip. The royal tern's beak is more slender and orange all the way to the tip. Another difference only seen in flight is that the Caspian's underside primary wing areas are blacker as compared with mostly white under wings of the royal. Also, differences exist in the non-breeding plumage of the head area. It is best to consult a bird guide book such as Peterson's to be able to distinguish this difference among others. In flight, the royal's forked tail can be seen.

Both birds have gray backs.

Why was the royal so far inland from the coast? As I recall, quite a storm with high winds came out of the Gulf, headed north by northeast, and probably carried the bird inland.

The royal is seen along the coastal areas from Maryland around the coast of Florida to well below the Mexican border. They are also seen along the Pacific coastal areas of Mexico and California.

As winter approaches some birds along northern coastal areas migrate to winter habitats along the coasts of Peru, Ecuador and Argentina, although a few may remain in northern areas during the winter. Actually, this bird is quite a global species found, also, in Europe and Africa.

The Royal's diet is mostly fish but it also feeds on some crustaceans, especially crabs. It forages mostly by hovering over water, plunging to catch fish. When I was in Florida a few years ago I saw this feeding behavior.

At about four years of age the bird begins to nest within a colony of nesting birds. Courtship is a spectacular sight in which two or more birds spiral high above the ground. Males present food to females, and male-female pairs bow and strut in circles. A nest site is on open ground along the coast and offshore islands. Probably both male and female construct the nest by hollowing out a spot with little or no lining of debris. Usually the female lays one whitish-to-brown egg blotched with reddish brown. Both sexes incubate the eggs for 28 – 35 days (usually 30 – 31 days). During this incubation period both male and female may defecate on the rim of the nest. After a couple of weeks the rim edge hardens, possibly reinforcing the nest against flooding. Within one day after hatching a chick leaves the nest and congregates with many other chicks. This group of chicks is called a crèche. Remarkably the parents can easily find their chick among many, possibly thousands of others. The commonly accepted explanation is that the adults recognize individual chick-calls. The age at first flight is four to five weeks, and a juvenile remains with the parents up to eight months or more. Sometimes the juveniles and adults migrate together.

In the 1800's and early 1900's the population of this bird was in serious decline, mainly because tern eggs were harvested for food. Not until laws were passed to protect both bird and nest did substantial recovery take place. Today royal tern populations are still vulnerable because of commercial and residential developments along coastal areas. The terns are also adversely affected in areas where small fish are in decline. For example, in California the declining numbers of terns coincides with the decline of the Pacific sardine.

References: *Life of North American Birds* by Kenn Kaufman; *Peterson Field Guide to Birds of North America* by Roger Tory Peterson; *whatbird.com*, Mitch Waite Group; Royal Tern in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*.

A Birder's Diary

By Carol Leininger

So you do not call yourself a birder, go on birding hikes, keep a life list of birds, or attend Audubon meetings – you just feed the birds around your home. Fine! Great! Have I got a project for you? It's called *bird behavior*.



Have you ever noticed that cardinals and blue jays sometimes feed with their crests up and at other times with their crest down?

Watch the birds eating at your feeder. Sparrows sit for long times gulping seeds continuously. Tufted titmice and black-capped chickadees just fly in, pick up one seed, and fly to a branch where they diligently crack open

the seed, eat the contents, and then fly back to the feeder for another seed.

Have you seen brown-headed cowbirds and common grackles feeding together below your feeder? They often point their bills toward the sky. This behavior indicates aggressiveness – the other bird is too close while feeding. Finches stick their head forward and gape for the same reason. The common redpoll lifts its chin to startle other birds with its black chin-patch.

A flock of sparrows flying up at once while other birds quickly disappear is a sign of danger. Possibly the birds have spotted a large overhead bird that may be a hawk. If they can't get away quickly, they may freeze in place until the danger disappears. A nearby brush pile or a conifer provide hiding places. And it would help if the cat wore a bell.

In addition to watching bird behavior around your feeder, you might want to notice that different birds prefer different types of feeder and different foods. You might want to get involved in a citizen's survey at your feeder. There are backyard watches and winter-feeder watches in which you see and report to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology via email.

There are so many ways to enjoy birding without leaving your house.

Some results from an example of an annual national Citizen Science Project:

Most Frequently Reported Birds		Most Numerous Birds	
Rank Species	Checklists	Rank Species	Individuals
1 Northern Cardinal	45,510	1 European Starling	1,377,118
2 Mourning Dove	40,119	2 American Robin	1,043,950
3 Dark-eyed Junco	39,380	3 Common Grackle	942,777
4 Downy Woodpecker	34,597	4 Canada Goose	727,834
5 American Goldfinch	31,900	5 Red-winged Blackbird	553,669
6 Blue Jay	31,671	6 Snow Goose	537,525
7 American Crow	31,300	7 American Crow	313,340
8 Black-capped Chickadee	30,405	8 American Goldfinch	302,340
9 House Finch	30,310	9 Dark-eyed Junco	275,590
10 Tufted Titmouse	29,219	10 Mallard	253,808

For more information: <http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/top 10>

Additional Bluebird Nesting-boxes Installed

By **Jack Smith**

Again this year Black River Audubon enlarged several bluebird nesting-box trails and established two new trails. To accommodate this growth, volunteers constructed fifty-one boxes and installed many of them at various sites in the area. On March 12, thirteen volunteers assembled the boxes in a two-hour period of intense work in my home-basement workshop. Participants were: Marty Ackermann, Jack Smith, Jean Sorton, Fritz Brandau, Penny Brandau, Joe Strong, Gary Hawke, Steve Chavez, Tom Reed, Bob MacGillis, Mike Smith, and Dick Lee.

On March 26 eight workers installed twenty-five boxes along 1.5 miles of the Hale Road Loop Trail at Carlisle Reservation. The eight volunteers were Marty Ackermann, Bob Austin, Jack Smith, Tom Reed, Sonny Sorton, Ken Austin, Harry Spencer, and Bob MacGillis.

On April 3, at Golden Acres Lorain County Nursing Home, Amherst, Bob Austin, Ken Austin, Fritz Brandau, Penny Brandau, Bob MacGillis, Mike Smith, Jack Smith, and Jean Sorton mounted twenty more boxes.

With these additional boxes and new trails, Black River Audubon volunteers will be monitoring about 400 nesting boxes.

Brief History of Bluebirds in Lorain County

By Jack Smith

During my birding activity from about 1940 to 1970, I and others had difficulty observing bluebirds in Lorain County. The species had been nearly extirpated, and in the 1970s the birds were hard to find. The probable cause of this population decline was loss of breeding habitat, particularly cavity nesting sites. Aggressive house sparrows and European starlings probably occupied the limited numbers of cavities in forest snags. Farmers eliminated most fences along with their black locust posts that formed cavities upon decaying with age.

In the late 1970s Black River Audubon began building nesting boxes and creating blue bird trails in Lorain County. Since then the bluebird population has noticeably increased. Many volunteers have constructed and installed boxes and monitored bluebird trails.

Monitoring involves regular observation of the boxes, destroying nests of the non-native species, particularly house sparrows, and generally watching the health and progress of nests, eggs, and chicks of native species such as bluebirds, tree swallows, house wrens, and black-capped chickadees.

Inexperienced monitors can be quickly trained by experienced ones.

compared the vocalizations of other birds including robins and rose breasted grosbeaks, juncos and chipping sparrows, and goldfinches and indigo buntings.

After Professor Rainsong's talk Grant Thompson announced his promotion to Chief Naturalist of the Lorain County Metro Parks. Congratulations Grant!

Bring a friend to a meeting: Share a Black River program with others. Some people are just waiting to be asked.

Breeding Bird Atlas

Summer Birding Bonanza

Saturday, July 2, 2011

7:30 am: get maps and split into groups

1:00 pm: turn in checklists, bring your own lunch, refrigerator and cooking facilities are available

7:30 pm: get maps for owling, bring audio equipment if you have it

Hidden Hollow near Lodi, 30 minutes south of Wellington

8672 Richman Road, Lodi, OH

Along the Black River and Killbuck Creek headwaters

All levels of birders are encouraged to participate in this citizen science project. Tent camping is available on Friday and Saturday nights. We will identify bird species and watch for nesting behaviors. Ohio's nesting birds are particularly dependant on Ohio's habitats for reproduction. Are these bird populations declining or stable? Once the survey is complete a book will be produced consisting of breeding species accounts. These accounts include maps that depict the statewide distribution of observations and the breeding status records. Maps will be accompanied by text that describes a species' current and historical status and distribution. This is the last year for the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas II.

Help us get our birds on the map!

Are you interested in learning more?

Contact Terri at Naturenut@wowway.com or call 440-759-8220 (cell)



Snowy Egret
John Koscinski