

WINGTIPS



FEMALE MALLARD by Mike Tylicki, Cascade Park, August 3, 2019

OCTOBER 2019

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October 2019 Program
Tuesday, October 1, 2019, 7:00 pm
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

**Gary Gerrone, Geneva and Headlands State Park
Manager**
“BOOT TALES AND OTHER APPENDAGES”



A few days after an obvious clerical error bestowed upon me the title of ‘Naturalist,’ two life-changing events needed to occur: 1) I had to buy a pair of hiking boots; 2) I had to figure out what a Naturalist was. Little did I realize the grand adventure that those first boots would take me on. This presentation tells of the lessons learned, the places visited, and the absolutely amazing people that would mold a suburban boy into the truest form of a Naturalist . . . and somewhere among the stories there just might be a bird call or two.”

Gary S. Gerrone is a naturalist, writer, musician, bird caller, father of twins and a relator of things. He served as the award-winning naturalist for most of his 30+ year career with the Lorain County Metro Parks. Gary’s writing resume includes nearly 400 published pieces including his long-running nature column and the authoring of the book - **Lorain County Metro Parks: The First Fifty Years**. Gary is a highly regarded birder, and well-known for his bird calls, as well as his historical musical presentations. He recently added the title of park manager to his career as he currently manages both Geneva and Headlands State Parks.

October Field Trip

Saturday, October 19, 2019, 9:00 a.m.

Sandy Ridge Metro Park

6195 Otten Rd., North Ridgeville

Meet at Wetland Center

(Naturalist Tim Fairweather to lead)

Firelands Audubon's Invitation to Honor Dean Sheldon

Dean Sheldon, founder of Firelands Audubon Society, will be remembered with a bird walk in his honor at the park his family made possible – **Sheldon Marsh State Nature Preserve**. Firelands Audubon invites us to take part on **Saturday, September 28 from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m.** This is everyone's chance to share memories of a great conservationist. Please send your RSVP to the organizers at firelandsaububon@gmail.com by September 23.

August Field Trip Schoepfle Gardens By Marty Ackermann

Five people participated in the bird walk at Schoepfle Gardens on August 17. It was a bright, sunny day, but not too warm for mid-August. Initially we walked the paved area, enjoying the landscaping and flowers while noting a number of the most frequently seen bird species. But we spent most of the walk in the undeveloped areas along the river and in the forest in the southwest part of the park whose habits yielded a mostly different set of species. Thankfully mosquitoes and other bugs did not bother us.

Our total for the morning was 28 species: blue jay, American robin, house sparrow, white-breasted nuthatch, downy woodpecker, American goldfinch, house wren, mourning dove, tufted titmouse, common grackle, chipping sparrow, eastern bluebird, eastern phoebe, indigo bunting, northern cardinal, blue-gray gnatcatcher, Baltimore oriole, ruby-throated hummingbird, song sparrow, red-bellied woodpecker, Carolina wren, eastern wood pewee, northern flicker, orchard oriole, hairy woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, red-eyed vireo, and black-capped chickadee.

CANADA GOOSE

Branta canadensis

By Gina Swindell

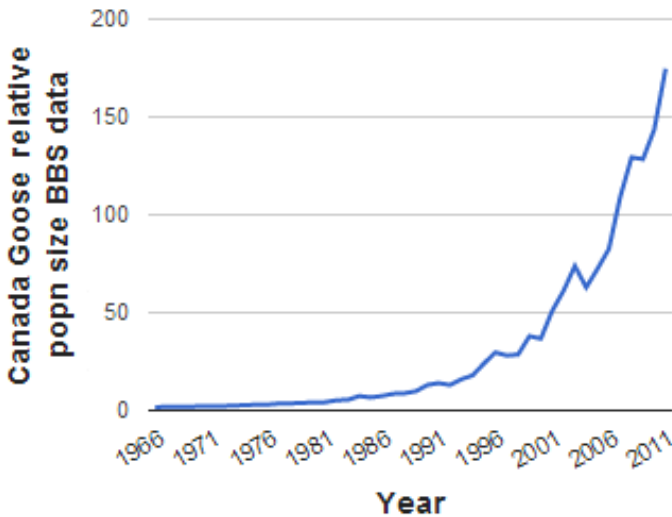
I love to chase after a rare bird, but I still find myself admiring even the most common. I rarely find myself saying, “*it’s just a*”. It seems that when I think I understand a species, I see them doing something that surprises me. Last week I noticed a pair of Canada geese hanging out atop a dirt mound in our neighbor’s backyard. I was surprised because we live in a development, and this mound is only about twenty feet from the main street. I suppose, to non-migrant Canada geese, this looks like as good a spot as any to set up shop, especially since there is a stream at the back of the property, and the land owner puts deer corn out daily. I began to wonder, are Canada geese so plentiful that these birds have to take whatever digs they can get? Or, are they just super adaptable and not so selective?

As common as Canada geese are today, it’s hard to imagine that their numbers hit a low in the 1920s and ‘30s, due in large part to unregulated hunting and the draining of wetlands. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 helped to increase their numbers by establishing hunting seasons. Conservationists also did their part by reintroducing Canada goose colonies. According to Scott Weidensaul in his book *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds*:

“one subspecies, the giant Canada, which nested in the central United States, was presumed extinct until 1962, when it was rediscovered in Minnesota. Many states established populations of wing-clipped geese of several races in an effort to restore the species on wildlife refuges and in parks—first within its original nesting range, but during the 1960s and ‘70s the practice became common across the United States.”

Gone are the days when the recognizable honking of Canada geese as they flew over in their unmistakable V-formation was always an indication of the changing season. Canada goose breeding populations in the Northeast have steadily increased 16% annually according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Waterfowl Status Population records. This story has a familiar cause and effect scenario. Urban/suburban areas are great for them because they have access to manicured lawns and many of their common predators are not as prevalent in these areas, including hunters. Also, people will often feed them.

Explosive Growth of Canada Goose Populations, 1966–2011



North American Breeding Bird Survey

So, what, you may ask, could be so bad about large resident populations of Canadas? According to Weidensaul, “*fifty geese will produce three and a half tons of manure each year.*” There are more concerns than can be mentioned here, but complaints were so numerous that jurisdictions looked to resolve the issues that these flocks were creating. While Canada geese, their nests, eggs, and goslings are protected by both Ohio and Federal law, there are non-lethal tactics that may be used to curb resident geese “infestation” during non-hunting seasons. Such tactics include harassing them with trained dogs (hazing), landscape modification, such as leaving tall grass around ponds, removal/relocation, and more. Migratory Canada goose populations are kept in check by migration mortality, late winter storms, predation, and hunting.

The next time you see a Canada goose, take a minute to appreciate their beauty and remember that they are plentiful in our area because of our efforts to correct a wrong. They were once over-hunted and their habitat stripped away. Then we created a haven for them in which they have thrived. We must learn to live with nature and to keep in mind that our actions often have unintended consequences.

References: wildlife.ohiodnr.gov/species-and-habitats/nuisance-wildlife;
allaboutbirds.org/Canada-geese-resident-vs-migratory.

Mallard

Anas platyrhynchos
By **Barbara Baudot**

Sexual dimorphism could almost be defined by example as the case of the dapper drake and the dull hen!

As the old adage goes: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. In the realm of nature who is this beholder? And what explanations can be offered for the distinctive and varying plumage of mallard drake and hen?

Mallards, in contrast to diving ducks, are dabblers inhabiting a variety of shallow wetlands. Tipping forward while gliding on ponds, they feed on plants and small animals.

Descriptions of mallard plumage inevitably describe the regal beauty of drakes compared to the drab appearance of hens. But this human appreciation has nothing to do with how drakes see their mates *or vice versa*.

There are fundamental differences between the eyes of birds and humans. Bird eyes have four color cones while human eyes have three. In addition to perceiving the same colors as humans, birds are able to see colors emitted by ultraviolet rays. This light plays differently on feathers in ways that may reveal to drakes brighter and more colorful hens than humans perceive.

Dimorphism, sexual and natural, refers to distinctions, plumage and others, between males and females of the same species. Since the 19th century many scientists have been building on Charles Darwin's initial discoveries regarding dimorphism. They have offered more factors and details specific to plumage dimorphism of mallards and other water birds. A key factor is the social mating system including polyandry or monogamy of varying degrees. Other factors include nest type and location, migratory behavior, parental responsibility, and seasonal dimorphism.

From October through the spring mating season, to the human eye, the drake sports green iridescent head feathers bordered by a white collar. His breast is a purple-tinged brown and his wings and belly are a handsome light and brown gray. Throughout the year mallard hens are cloaked in mottled patterns of brown, black and tan plumage. Both sexes have a white-bordered, blue "speculum" patch on their wings.

Each autumn drakes and hens will pair up for the forthcoming breeding season. It is the richly plumed drakes that appeal to hens as

they choose their mates, likely because their plumage reflects good health and fertility. Pairs migrate in the fall and mate in the spring. After mating, drakes normally abandon their hens. Unaided hens build their nests, incubate their 10 to 13 cream-colored eggs, and protect and nurture their broods.

Mallards engage in varying degrees of extra-pair paternity. Commonly, a hen seeks to enrich the genetic properties of her brood through extra-pair paternity, and drakes having left their mates carouse with other drakes and seek to copulate with single hens.

The hens' mottled plumage is a natural camouflage hiding them as they rummage around wetlands or other suitable locations to build their low-lying nests among shrubs and grasses on watery shores or in pond nesting boxes.

Seasonal dimorphism is characteristic of mallard drakes. After the breeding season, drakes molt their worn breeding plumage; exchanging them for a cloak of mottled brown/black feathers closely resembling those of the hen. This dress is known as eclipse plumage. During this extensive molt, drakes are unable to fly for 20 or more days but their non-breeding feathers serve to conceal them from predators. Drakes molt less dramatically a second time in the fall when they reassume their handsome breeding feathers. Hens molt once a year, almost unnoticeably.

Millions of mallards range throughout temperate and sub-tropical regions of the Americas, Eurasia, and North Africa. The IUCN classifies them as least endangered. Nature serves them well. Thanks largely to the proud and selective hen!

References: Dunn and others, **Mating Systems, Sperm Competition, and the Evolution of Sexual Dimorphism in Birds**, University of Toronto; "Mallard, Sexual Dimorphism" in Wikipedia; "Mallard" in All About Birds, Cornell Laboratories; ScottishWildlifeTrust.org.uk/blog/ducks.org/conservation/waterfowl-research-science/understanding-waterfowl-the-amazing-molt.

KILLDEER

Charadrius vociferous

By Cathy Priebe

Even though there are many birds that we like to associate with the beginning of spring, the loud call of the killdeer is one of my top five that gives me hope that our cold weather is finally departing.

This familiar plover is a breeder in almost all of North America, with the exception of southern Mexico, Alaska, and arctic Canada. Often found near lakeshores, golf courses, open grassy fields, mudflats,

and even urban areas, this bird is quite adept at adapting to various habitats. For example, my mother's neighbor placed a chair in the middle of her driveway to protect a killdeer nest. Really, they nested in the driveway.

Their "killdeeeerrr" call is without doubt the best example of a mnemonic device provided to humans by any bird. But if it is not enough to help you identify them, their dapper attire certainly will. The killdeer is brown on top with a white breast and two black bands on its neck, a white eyebrow, long yellow legs, and a rusty rump. They generally nest on open ground in a scraped depression and both parents share the nesting duties. It is not unusual for the pair to raise two broods in one season.

The killdeer's nest location sometimes leaves one to wonder how they have withstood the pressures of predation through the millennia. Their nests are often in the open and not always well camouflaged. If humans or other species come near, the killdeer will often lure a predator away by employing the "broken wing" act. When I first observed this behavior, I was fooled by this poor "injured" bird and followed it until it "miraculously" flew away.

The well-practiced trick must be enough; the killdeer is considered a "species of least concern" by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Their wide range throughout most of North America and species population of one to two million keep it from being considered vulnerable.

Killdeer primarily eat insects, earthworms, marine invertebrates, snails, and spiders. Their movements are jerky as they feed, often described as stop, walk, stop, and then eat. They are quite loud and often very vocal, especially when "saying" their name. Nicknamed the "noisy plover" by Pete Dunne, they make their presence known when they are approached.

Most killdeer migrate south from September through early November, but there have been individuals recorded throughout the year in Ohio.

Here are some more interesting facts about killdeer:

- They are generally found near fresh water, but sometimes salt water.
- Flocks, during migration, typically number between 6 to 30 birds usually found congregating on mudflats in the fall.
- The cute, fuzzy young are precocial, able to search for food almost immediately after hatching with only protection provided by parents.

- Although they will mingle with other shorebirds (plovers), on dry land they are found with horned larks and American kestrels.

References: *Birds of the Cleveland Region* by Larry Rosche; *Pete Dunne's Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Killdeer* in *Wingtips*.

The Arctic Is on Fire Too

"The earth is withered, sear; the world languishes, it is sear; the most exalted people of the earth languish. For the earth was defiled under its inhabitants . . ."

While world leaders are rightfully concerned about the wildfires consuming the Amazon jungle in 2019, fires are also raging in Indonesia, Siberia, and in our country's largest state – Alaska.

Kristine Liao, in an August 23 article in Audubon.org, stated that "Alaska is aflame and enduring one of its biggest fire seasons in decades." Up to the time of publication 2.5 million acres had burned, continuing, and worsening, a long-term trend.

While periodic wildfires are part of nature and often beneficial, the long-lasting trend today seems to be toward major changes in boreal ecosystems. Spruces are giving way to grasslands and, in some places, deciduous trees.

Meanwhile as the heavy fire season rages on, so much carbon is released into the atmosphere, northern temperatures rise even faster, leading to more widespread, uncontrolled fires in the future. This year's conflagrations have already released 150 million tons of carbon. That comes after Arctic temperatures have risen twice as fast as the rest of the world's over the last 70 years.

Alaskans, like many other Americans, have not been the most climate-conscious people, but that is rapidly changing. With temperatures reaching an all-time-high of 90 degrees Fahrenheit in Anchorage, and eyes burning throughout the past summer from wildfire smoke, they rarely question that the earth is warming rapidly. *"Around here people don't argue about climate change,"* said Stephanie Smith of National Audubon in Anchorage. *"They just understand that it's a reality."*

References: "Isaiah 24:4-6 of the Old Testament, quoted in Torgerson, Mark A., **Greening Spaces for Worship and Ministry**; Pierre-Lewis, Kendra, "The Amazon, Siberia, Indonesia: A World on Fire," nytimes.com, August 29, 2019; Liao, Kristine, "Alaska's Big Fire Seasons Are a 'New Normal' and Reshaping the Landscape, Audubon.org/news/climate, August 23, 2019.

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A Face Only a Few Birders Can Love?

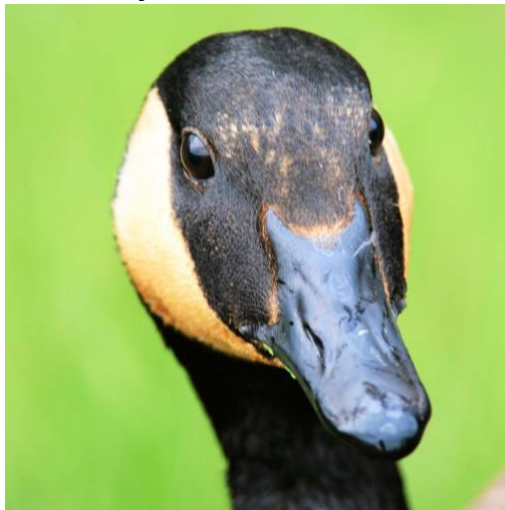


Photo courtesy of Michael Smith

Those of us of a certain age might remember the excitement we would feel as grade-schoolers at the sight of the classic-V formation of Canada geese migrating far overhead. I certainly do. I also remember thinking wistfully that I would never in my lifetime have the chance to see one up close!

Fast forward six decades and most of us feel overwhelmed by the presence of these large, bothersome birds that seem to be everywhere and dominate our favorite birding locations. I feel the same way at times when attempting to gingerly avoid their droppings or nervously edge around their nests during breeding season. But as a relatively new birder in old age, I still cannot forget the feelings I had gazing upward with awe as a preteen in the 1950's.

Common birds like the Canada goose and mallard, discussed in two of this issue's feature stories, seem to get in the way of adding to our bird lists. However, we should remember these words by Donald Stokes about observing mallards after reading, with purpose, an article by Konrad Lorenz about their behavior.

The experience of being thrilled by the behavior of a common bird was so new and unexpected that we had trouble explaining it to those present, especially when they believed, as we had before, that only rare species could be this exciting.

Reference: Stokes, Donald, Bird Behavior, Volume I, 1979, p.4

JJ



KILLDEER photo by Bruce Bishop

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