

WINGTIPS



FEMALE HOODED MERGANSER photo by Jeanne Buttle Williams

Or Current Residents
ADDRESS LABEL
HERE

SEPTEMBER 2019

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September 2019 Program
Tuesday, September 3, 7 pm
Carlisle Reservation Visitor Center

Jen Brumfield, Cleveland Metroparks Naturalist
“URBAN BIRDING”



Jen Brumfield, known to many as simply JB, returns to speak to Black River Audubon Society about the success one can have birding in what seems the most unlikely of environments – modern urban areas.

Jen’s birding interests are legendary in northern Ohio and beyond. She “combines a passion for extreme birding, field studies, outdoor education, and detailed scientific illustration into a truly ‘wild’ career,” according to the Cleveland Metroparks website and to everyone who knows her.

She has proven repeatedly that urban birders can see as many bird species as those in the wild with her record-breaking Cuyahoga County “Big Years.” In addition, she has written and illustrated seven field guides to the flora and fauna of the Cleveland Metroparks while also planning and leading pelagic birding boat trips on Lake Erie. Her last presentation to BRAS was on her birding trip to Israel’s bird migration flyway.

Truly, no birding experience is foreign to Jen Brumfield. She will definitely add to the knowledge of Black River area birders with her program.

September Field Trip

All trips are on Saturdays
Non-Members Are Always Welcome!

September 21, 2019, 8:30 a.m.

Howard Marsh

611 South Howard Rd., Curtice, OH

Meet in the parking lot.

(Paul Sherwood to lead)

A Fond Farewell to Dean Sheldon, Lifetime Friend of Birds

The memory of the rich and varied ways that Dean Sheldon enriched all of our lives and our environment will live on. Every interaction with him was inspiring and his record of conservation in this area may be unequalled.

Those words from long-time friend Harriet Alger definitely ring true. Dean was a founder of Firelands Audubon Society and helped organize Erie County Metroparks and Sheldon Marsh.

He was also a great friend of Black River Audubon Society and encouraged our efforts in our wonderful bluebird program. BRAS founder Jack Smith, before his death, expressed a wish that we would begin to promote kestrels in the area. When Dean heard this, he recruited representatives from the Delaware Kestrel organization to help us organize a successful program.

Dean Sheldon's influence throughout northern Ohio Audubon circles, and beyond, will be sorely missed. *JJ*

The New BRAS Officers and Board

Three new board members were added at the May general membership meeting at Carlisle Reservation. Rob and Gina Swindell of Lorain both joined while Andy Lance, who has served for several years as conservation chair, was also added. Kate Pilacky agreed to serve another term on our board.

At the end of May, the newly constituted board selected new officers. Sally Fox replaced Jim Jablonski as president, Paul Sherwood was chosen as second vice-president, and Rob and Gina Swindell were selected treasurer and secretary.

Editor's Note

This year Wingtips will at times feature under-appreciated birds, those that birders describe as “Oh, that’s just a . . .” due to their large numbers in our area. It has always seemed to me that we should revel in the fact that a few of the most beautiful birds, such as mallards, are so common. Why not study their behavior, rather than quickly passing on to the next bird on our checklist?

We will discuss much-maligned species such as cormorants (see Barbara Baudot’s story) that many birders love to hate despite evidence that they might not be as destructive as some claim.

In addition, the females of some species will be featured, at least as much as the males, especially on the covers of the newsletter. Who can claim the female northern cardinal or hooded merganser, shown on this issue’s front cover do not possess a subtle beauty?

We hope you enjoy this different perspective. *JJ*

HOODED MERGANSER

Lophodytes cucullatus

By Cathy Priebe

The hooded merganser is a common migratory bird here in Northeast Ohio, stopping by in the spring, fall and winter. They are uncommon nesters in Ohio, but lately, a few of these dapper birds have been reported nesting here during the summer. The most recent local report was this year at Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville, Ohio.

According to Tim Fairweather, senior naturalist at Sandy Ridge, a pair successfully fledged their young but only one survived nature’s circle of life. It was last seen hanging out with the trumpeter swans who are first time ever nesters at the park. Another exciting record for Sandy Ridge!

The hooded is listed as climate change endangered in Audubon.org. It seems even more rare than it is since it is easily overlooked in the swamps and wooded areas it prefers. This small duck is a tree cavity nester. Within 24 hours of hatching the female calls to the young from below and the hatchlings jump to the ground like young wood ducks. They are able to feed themselves with only tending from the mother.

The smallest of all of the mergansers, the hooded likes to frequent wetlands, ponds, rivers and lakes. It dives for its food, mostly small fish, amphibians, fly larvae, and crayfish. The male is a stunning individual with a black head and distinctive white crest that is

impossible to miss when it is flared out. His body also has bold white stripes outlined in black and rusty sides.

The female is primarily brown with a fluffy reddish-brown crest. The female we viewed at Howard Marsh this past spring was adorable. Her crest glowed like a halo in the sunlight. Females are often overlooked since they are not as colorful as their partners, but they are just as beautiful. (Check out her demure expression and shaggy hair-do in the photo below and on the front cover.)



Female Hooded Merganser
(photo courtesy of Dave Priebe)

Easily flushed and wary of humans, the hooded is also not very sociable with their own kind or other ducks and often is seen in pairs and very small groups. The exception is when they are at their roosting sites. Comfortable on land, unlike other mergansers, they can be found perching on stumps or feeding near the shore.

Here are some more interesting facts about the hooded merganser:

- *Nesting in forested wetlands, they will also occupy wood duck nest boxes.
- *They will also breed with the wood duck.
- *Their bill has been described as resembling a “long, thin popsicle stick.”
- *According to Pete Dunne, “the male opens and closes his crest like a Chinese fan.”
- *The three merganser species are our only ducks that mainly specialize in eating fish and other aquatic animal species. They will only occasionally take some plant material.

Make sure you put the hooded merganser on your list this season if you have not seen one. They are definitely a bird worth observing.

References: *Birds of Ohio* by Jim McCormac; *Pete Dunne’s Essential Field Guide Companion* by Pete Dunne; *Hooded Merganser* in Audubon.org.

GREAT and DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS

Phalacrocorax carbo and Phalacrocorax auritus

by **Barbara Baudot**

Evolution has crafted the only creature on Earth that can migrate the length of a continent, dive and hunt deep underwater, perch comfortably on a branch or a wire, walk on land, climb up cliff faces, feed on thousands of different species, and live besides both fresh and salt water in a vast global range of temperatures and altitudes, often in close proximity to man. (Richard I. King)

I first encountered cormorants when snorkeling around the rocky shores of Good Harbor Beach in Gloucester, MA. A small flock of great cormorants were standing on a rock on the edge of the water drying their black water-soaked wings. This was a magical moment. Removing my mask, I beheld the wonder of the Japanese emperor's sacred fishing bird.

One can find cormorants almost everywhere fish are found. They inhabit rocky crags overlooking oceans, and trees bordering inland lakes, ponds, and rivers. They belong to the genus, *Phalacrocorax*, of which there are 36 species and many subspecies. The largest bodied and most numerous are the great cormorants, which range from the east coast of the US across the shores of Europe and the Asian Pacific.

The double-crested cormorant, smaller than the great cormorant, inhabits the shores and inland waters of North America, including Lake Erie. These two species are distinguished by their breeding feathers and gullets. Double-crested cormorants have white feathered crests for eyelids and orange gullets, while white feathers ring the faces of great cormorants having white gullets and orange patches lining their beaks. Cormorants are monomorphic and monogamous and typically breed from the age of 2. Both parents care for their broods.

*Long a symbol of gluttony, greed, bad luck and evil, the cormorant has led a troubled existence in human history, ..., myth and literature. They have been demonized by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, and reviled, despised, and exterminated by sport and commercial fishermen from Israel to Indianapolis, Toronto to *Tierra del Fuego*.* (Richard I. King)

Among shorebirds, cormorants are the most maligned; victims of negative mythology and misinformation. At different times, cormorants in Europe and the US have been threatened with extinction. More recently, in the 1990's, thousands were shot. Presently their egg shells are oiled, and nurseries of adolescents exterminated. Cormorants are supposedly protected by the Migratory Bird Act of 1918 and other regulations. They are under the watch of the IUCN. But systematic culling is permitted, and violators are symbolically punished. Ohio permitted culling as of 2018, to save fish farms, lake fish and flora.

Few people understand the cormorants' positive ecological role. Contrary to the widespread assumption that cormorants consume excessive quantities of valuable fish and pose a danger to fish farms, their Great Lakes diet consists largely of non-commercial species such as alewives and round gobies. Cormorants have limited appetites; analyses reveal an average daily consumption of 0.5 pounds of fish. Commercial overfishing of some popular species and predatory game fish are greater threats. Moreover, cormorants are unlikely threats to bird diversity. Increasing populations of different species of herons are occurring where cormorants reside.

Contrary to popular imagination, cormorants are friendly birds, intelligent, easily domesticated and trained to catch fish. For centuries they have had economic value in parts of Europe and Asia. The tradition of fishing with cormorants goes back to the 13th century and is still practiced in Japan and China where it is now a tourist attraction. In Peru cormorant guano is a potent natural fertilizer. Globally, guano is becoming a valued alternative to artificial fertilizers.

References: Richard I. King, *The Devil's Cormorant: A Natural History*, University of NH Press, 2013; sanduskyregister.com/story/201806100004; Double-Crested Cormorant, allaboutbird.org; ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/cormorants/faq.htm IUCN, Survey 2013; Cormorants. Population survey.

BRAS Highlighted During NAS Convention Keynote Address

Black River Audubon Society continues to be honored by National Audubon Society for its environmental work. Following our tree planting day at Elyria's Black River Audubon Park on West Bridge Street, the NAS website ran a lengthy article, still photos, and videos of the work.

National particularly appreciated the diversity of people involved as well as trees and shrubs that were planted through the funding of the Burke Plants for Birds grant awarded to BRAS. The labor was provided

by Sunshine Rotary members, Elyria High School students, local residents, as well as BRAS members. The project transformed the former dumping ground into a beautiful, rapidly developing nature park, designed to attract birds and pollinators.



Elyria High School students planting a red cedar at BRAS Park in Elyria.
(National Audubon Society photo by Allison Farrand in Audubon.org, May 25, 2018)

Fast forward to Friday, July 26, 2019. This writer was sitting in the largest Audubon convention crowd of this century. President and CEO David Yarnold was giving his keynote address to the 600-plus members from around the country. In presenting success stories since the 2017 convention, he spoke of the new Burke Plants for Birds program.

The stray thought crossed this BRAS representative’s mind “wouldn’t it be something if . . . ?” And it was something! The photo above flashed onto all three large screens in the convention hall as he said “you can do as Black River Audubon Society in Ohio did . . .”

Yarnold explained our project in a few sentences before moving on to the achievements of other chapters. Just to be mentioned, however, at the national conference of an organization that has a history going back to the turn of the 20th century with an unbroken tradition of fighting for the environment was certainly a distinct honor for our small chapter. *JJ*

A Book Suggestion

***A Season on the Wind: Inside the World of Spring Migration* By Kenn Kaufman**

If you are looking for an exciting book about local migration and conservation, written by an author who is internationally known, you have to read *A Season on the Wind* by Kenn Kaufman.

One of the most prolific and interesting writers in any field, Kaufmann, of Oak Harbor and Biggest Week in American Birding fame, writes about the rhythms of spring migration in northern Ohio. He describes in beautiful detail the earliest stirrings of migration in late winter through the climax of the famous warbler migration in May.

The book gives the reader a sense of the rhythm of nature that birders along the lakeshore are familiar with and places it into the larger context of North American environment and climate.

Along the way, he finds time to credit Oberlin College and Lorain County as the sources of modern birding as we know it today. In 1895, Oberlin was the first college in the U.S. to offer coursework in ornithology. The professor, Lynds Jones, also pioneered the birding concept of Big Days with his walk from Oberlin to Lorain and back in 1898. His article on the experience later provided the inspiration for Christmas Bird Counts.

Kaufman's book provides inspiration to local and national birders, both the experienced and beginners. **JJ**

April Survey of LCCC Meadow Preserve

Seven LCCC students, led by BRAS conservation committee member Harriet Alger, took part in the annual survey of the meadow north of the LCCC campus this past April.

The students, Willow Benn, Macie Hammond, Alex Lopez, Shannon Knapp, Chris Penny, Rachel Shank, and Zachariah Szpont recorded twenty species during the cold, dark, and rainy conditions of this past spring.

Among the species were Canada goose, wild turkey, turkey vulture, red-tailed hawk, killdeer, herring gull, mourning dove, downy woodpecker, northern flicker, blue jay, eastern bluebird, American robin, chipping sparrow, song sparrow, red-winged blackbird, American goldfinch, house sparrow, and both male and female eastern meadowlark, a target species of the meadow project. **JJ**

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(but including Wingtips) is \$15/Year**

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**“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.”**

National Audubon Membership Application

**(Includes membership in Black River Audubon
and subscriptions to WINGTIPS and AUDUBON
magazine: \$20/year)**

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**Chapter Code S52, 7XCH8
Send your check to: National Audubon Society,
225 Varick Street, 7th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Attention: Chance Mueleck**





“The Magnificent Seven”

Sandy Ridge Reservation’s first-ever brood of seven trumpeter swans take a break from learning about the world, July 22, 2019.

(photo courtesy of Tim Fairweather)

Sandy Ridge to Have a Busy Autumn

Migrating birds have been stopping, spring and fall, at Sandy Ridge Reservation in North Ridgeville since it opened twenty years ago. Both the birds and the anniversary will be celebrated in the coming months at the best-known birding location in Lorain County.

Naturalist Tim Fairweather, who has been at Sandy Ridge since it opened, will again be leading the morning bird walks as he has done for years. They are held every Wednesday, 8-10:30 am, from September 4 through October 30. As always, coffee and bird check listing will be available in the Perry F. Johnson Wetland Center immediately after the hikes. All experience levels are welcome.

In addition, the 20th birthday of the reservation will be celebrated with a nine-day Anniversary Open House. Beginning Saturday, October 12 and going through Sunday, October 20, the Johnson Wetland Center will host displays, hands-on activities, and much more. The hours are 11 am to 4 pm daily. Sandy Ridge is located at 6195 Otten Road, North Ridgeville.



GREAT CORMORANT photo by Barbara Baudot

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