



GREATER AKRON

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Witt's End

The Irony of Birding

Birding is rife with ironies. The weekend of the Great Backyard Bird Count, arguably the most electronic variation of the game for listers like me, found Susan and I holed up in a beautiful, secluded log cabin near Millersburg. It proudly advertises no television, no computers, no telephones.

It was President's Weekend. Big snow with no place to go. The cabin had a huge feeder outside its large picture window. We sat by the fire, consumed copious amounts of coffee and tea, and enjoyed the colorful flow of birds, close enough to touch. This might be the only way to do winter birding.

Our greatest challenge was a female purple finch. She cooperated and hung around long enough for us to compare and contrast her image with that in several field guides.

Prize for most colorful costume went to the northern cardinals. It was a scene from a Robert Bateman painting. We counted more than a dozen at a time, eating and waiting to eat.

Strangest behavior belonged to the eastern bluebirds. Susan spotted them, disappearing into a hole in the ground about 50 yards below the cabin, down a ravine! We concentrated our scopes on the spot and up popped bird after bird! After a while we figured out there was an ice ledge in the stream bank with a hole beneath. The birds were using the spot for shelter.

When we got home I had to log onto birdsources.org, site of the Great Backyard Bird Count, to see how the count was going — and to enter our sightings. In the end, 48,293 checklists were entered this year, accounting for 508 species and more than four million birds. Ohio logged 106 species with the Akron area coming in 5th in

the state — 46 species and 65 reports. In 1998 when this thing started, Akron had only two reports and 37 species.

In Ohio, the northern cardinal was the most-seen bird, 1,943 in all. I was surprised at the 150 purple finches. Everything else seemed about as I'd suspect, maybe fewer in number. While Carolina wrens appeared in large numbers (967 statewide) I averaged them out and since 1998 the number remains about the same — 1.5 birds per report — on average. More people reporting, thus more birds.

So what does it all mean? The data collected by Audubon and Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology is added to the Christmas Count and other surveys to give scientists a picture of winter bird populations on a huge scale. It's only through these large-scale surveys, over many years, that accurate assessments and predictions can be made.

Your next best opportunity to participate in citizen science will be our June nesting survey of Summit County, orchestrated by Dwight and Ann Chaser. It's the longest running study of its kind in this area and your help is needed. Never too early to think Spring ...

Sorting out the money

Since National Audubon changed its dues structure and the dues split with the local chapters, there has been a lot of confusion as to who pays what and who gets what. We know that our chapter income has been reduced, considerably. We are in the process of re-writing the application coupon on the back of this newsletter and have made enquiries to Audubon Ohio as to the best way to proceed. We'll have a full report in the May/June newsletter and, hopefully, at the next chapter meeting.

Meetings — We Got 'Em!

The chapter holds meetings once a month on the 4th Tuesday, except for July, August and December, when there are no meetings. The GAAS monthly meetings are held at the Shady Hollow Pavilion in the Sand Run MetroPark in the Merriman Valley. The entrance is off Sand Run Parkway, just east of the ford. Check the MetroParks Web site for a map of Sand Run Park. The pavilion is 1.3 miles west of N. Portage Path Drive and .9 mile east of Sand Run Road (or N41° 08.029' W81°

33.586' if you need the precise location).

The doors open at 7:00 and the meeting starts at 7:30. Meetings are free and open to the public. The new meeting place comes with the same guarantee as the old place: If you don't like our free programs we'll return your entrance fee, twofold!

March 25 — We're hearing a lot of bad news about Venezuela these days. However, at this meeting Beth and Steve Cagan will tell us about their trip to Venezuela in conjunction with a conservation project involving the Cleveland Zoo. Their presentation includes some information on birds of the region and quite a bit on the conservation efforts underway there.

April 22, (Earth Day!) We'll feature chapter member Larry Rosche, well known for his birding skills, books and videos. Only this time, Larry is bringing us something new, a program based on his recently published book on dragonflies and damselflies. This is a program not to be missed if you want to learn more about those dainty insects that seem to have only two speeds — blinding and stop.

May 27, We're going to do what we do best — bird! Something a little different. At this time of the year it's tough to be inside, particularly after the winter we had. So we're going to split up into several groups and bird the nearby trails in Sand Run Park Metro Park. After an hour or so, we'll return to the shelter to discuss sightings and have some well-earned refreshments.

June 24, Annual picnic — Based on last year's rousing success, the Executive Committee has opted to hold the annual Picnic at Wolf Creek Winery again this year. The meeting will be held June 24 at Wolf Creek Winery on Cleveland-Massillon Road, about two miles north of Wadsworth Road (state route 261), starting at 6:30 PM. Since the object of the exercise is for you to try (and buy!) the various wines of Wolf Creek, no beverages are permitted. You should bring your own picnic meal to enjoy, although Wolf Creek does offer a limited carry-out menu. It's called carry-out, but actually it's carry-in. You telephone a selected list of restaurants and they'll deliver to the winery. We'll not have a formal program, just the sharing of bird stories — real and imagined.

If you have any program suggestions for next year, please pass the ideas on to any member of the executive committee. As of now we have a clean slate and we're open to all suggestions.

Field Trips

Organized birding field trips this year are limited to three, all at the Bath Nature Preserve (BNP). We've opted to do it this way because the chapter is strengthening its bonds with BNP and the battery of researchers who will be studying this special spot. It gives us an opportunity to participate in citizen science at its best.

The executive committee hopes to expand the role of the chapter to the point where we might generate bird checklists, provide educational material about the preserve and even do some trail maintaining. The roles of all participants at this ecological gem have yet to be defined. It's an opportunity many Audubon chapters seek to channel their energies, but few find. Adopting the BNP can be the focus for our environmental efforts and it's right in our own backyard. The list of birds for this area is long and growing. It's one of the few places left in this area where we consistently see bobolinks and Eastern meadowlarks. And there must be some special sparrows lurking in that long grass ...

Your first opportunity to visit the BNP will be Saturday, May 3, then Saturday, May 10. We'll return on Saturday, May 17. All walks start at 8 AM. Dress appropriate for the weather, and no whining!

Mark has spearheaded our participation at BNP and will lead the walks. People of all birding skills are welcome. The chapter has many excellent birders willing to help you, too, learn the joys of birding. And remember, since you see as many birds (especially warblers) with your ears as you do with your eyes. Out of respect for others, we ask that unnecessary chit-chat be held to a minimum. We've planned the visits for the near-peak (whenever that is!) of migration to assess the birds passing through this mixed woodland habitat.

The entrance to BNP is on the south side of Ira Road, about one mile west of Cleveland-Massillon Road.

Chapter Has Pull at Local Nature Preserve

Mark has arranged with Randy Mitchell of University of Akron to conduct a garlic mustard eradicating event at Bath Nature Preserve on Saturday, April 12 at 1pm. This is the first such event held anywhere in the county, possibly the entire state! You don't want to miss this! If April 12 is rained out, we will telephone people to reschedule. Meet at parking lot off of Ira Road. We need help. This will be a great warm-up for spring gardening chores. No experience expected or needed. Volunteers can call the GAAS telephone number (330-315-5213) and leave a message. Please speak slowly and leave your name and telephone number.

Elections in June

June is election time for chapter offices. The election will be held at the June meeting, June 24 at Wolf Creek Winery. If you would like to run for one of the four elective offices, please see Clyde Witt, nomination committee chairman, at any chapter meeting. If you would like to put the name of someone into nomination, please make sure they agree to running for the office, then contact the nomination committee. All offices are open. Candidates will be announced at the May meeting.

Exec Visits Chapter

At the February meeting, newly appointed Executive Director of Audubon Ohio, Jerry Tinianow, stopped by to introduce himself and give us an update on what's happening, Audubon-wise, at the state level. Tinianow has been active and served as a volunteer leader of several Ohio environmental organizations for many years. Most recently he was directory and secretary of the Ohio Environmental Council. He noted that since he has family ties in the Akron area, we'll probably be seeing a lot of him at our chapter meetings.

Lake Erie Wing Watch

Can't make it to south Texas or some other exotic place for a spring birding festival? Well have we got a deal for you. The 10th annual Lake Erie Wing Watch will be held April 5-6 at Firelands College, Huron. It's a weekend of birding fun sponsored by the Erie, Lorain and Ottawa counties' visitors and convention bureaus. Firelands college is located less than a half mile south of State route 2 at the Rye Beach Road exit. Saturday afternoon is filled with interactive workshops encompassing all levels of birding knowledge. Topics range from basic bird watch and bird photography, to identification of birds, dragonflies and other critters. In the evening, James M. Berry, president of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History will discuss Dr. Peterson's life and legacy.

Sunday is the time to but newly learned birding skills to use. Field trips will be made throughout the three-county area. A nominal fee is charged. For more information, phone 800-255-3743.

New Park In Summit County

Twinsburg Township and Summit County have combined to create a new park in Northeast Summit County, much of which consists of land that was not previously open to the public. The *Akron Beacon Journal* reported February 17 that the Township and County have formed a 1,435-acre park that will preserve important habitat and create new opportunities for observing birds and other wildlife.

Park officials hope to open the first trail in the new park this summer. The 2.2-mile long trail will be accessible from a 42-car parking lot off of East Aurora Road (State Route 82). Eventually, seven miles of trails may be built within the park.

The new park contains significant habitat. A recent survey identified 74 separate wetlands comprising a total of 483 acres. Deer, wild turkey, owl and beaver abound in the park. Park officials believe that bald eagles, river otter and sandhill cranes may eventually frequent the park. The park also contains two cliffs of

sandstone conglomerate.

For more information, contact Summit County Metro Parks at 330-867-5511.

ODOT Cleans Up Its Act

In an effort to fight pollution at one of its sources, the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is working to decrease the amount of pollution that ends up in Ohio's lakes, streams and wetlands, according to a press release issued by the agency on February 14. "ODOT is going to help the environment by improving water quality," said ODOT Director Gordon Proctor. "While a lot of people know ODOT builds and maintains Ohio's roads, fewer realize that working to protect the environment is one of the department's responsibilities."

When water from rain or melting snow runs off highways, it can collect elements of vehicle exhaust, brake and tire materials, oil and grease, litter and other materials that are flushed through the storm drain system. According to the U. S. EPA, these pollutants and others found in the runoff can adversely affect drinking water, recreational activities, wildlife habitat, and the normal life-cycle of organisms and animals which are living in or dependent on water resources.

To address this concern, the U.S. EPA developed regulations for storm water runoff on Ohio's state-maintained roads. To ensure compliance with these regulations, ODOT is working with the Ohio EPA to develop a storm water management plan that outlines the technologies ODOT will implement to reduce pollutants.

"As more severe water quality problems, such as pollution from factories, have been brought under control, other sources like pollutants in runoff from the highways have become the new focus of the state and federal governments," said ODOT Environmental Liaison Tom Linkous. "The new regulations will target efforts statewide to deal with pollutants that run off of the highways."

As part of the OEPA requirements, ODOT is incorporating public comments into the development of the department's storm water management plan. Comments can be submitted at www.dot.state.oh.us/stormwater. These comments will be considered as the final plan is completed.

In Memoriam

At the February chapter meeting, Mark announced two contributions to the chapter in memory of Dianna Young. The contributions came from June Marsh, and Don & Ann Belacic, to whom we extend our condolences and thanks.