



GREATER AKRON

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Witt's End

Beauty Is In The Eye — And Body Feathers

The other day, during what passes for normal conversation around my office, a colleague noted that she detests the onset of winter. Her reason being that all the birds migrate and she's left with only the dun-colored (or maybe she said dung-colored) Cleveland countryside.

Right on cue — Kathunk! — a starling smacked into my 5th floor office window. As luck would have it, the critter was only stunned and managed to hang on to the window ledge until it regained what passes for normal equilibrium in a starling.

For a few moments we had a great opportunity to study the bird and the beauty of its winter plumage. Actually it's the bird's normal, or non-breeding, plumage. What we call normal is really alternate plumage. However, in the case of starlings it's a bit more complicated. No wonder birding is so confusing and better left to more superior members of the human species.

Far from being just a black bird, the European starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is one of those species that actually looks better not in its breeding plumage. The iridescence of its feathers rivals a peacock or ring-necked pheasant. The colors seem to shimmer as the bird probably shivers, hacking away at a piece of frozen whatever under the feeding station.

I was not sure the bird on my windowsill would ever enjoy another meal of frozen worms. Each of the feathers on its back and side was tipped with a white to light tan color. The glossy wing feathers, as well as those of the tail were outlined in the same light colors, typical of a non-breeding adult. By late spring, these tan colors will wear away, leaving the bird with a more uniform black to oily greenish color, what we see as breeding plumage.

Its apparently oversized bill, designed for getting at grubs, fruits and other sources of energy, was shading to solid black now. It would get the distinctive yellow color later in the year as its feather colors faded.

Signs of life returned, slowly. First with a fluttering eye, then the turn of its head. Soon the starling was standing on its precarious perch, and like me, watched the passing morning traffic on East 9th Street far below. We shared the same thought: Where to go for lunch.

— Clyde Witt, editor

Programs? Those Hits Just Keep on Comin'

The chapter holds meetings once a month on the 4th Tuesday, except for July, August and December. 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 p.m. and the meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public.

Only the month of May remains unconfirmed. We're still working on a special springtime migration program for that night. Meanwhile, here's a brief outline of the programs. You won't want to miss any. We'll give more details closer to presentation time.

October 28: Dr. Lauchlan Fraser from the University of Akron Biology department will give us an update on UA research activity at Bath Nature Preserve. A lot more than just garlic mustard has been growing out there. Here's your opportunity to ask questions of experts from the site.

November 25: Our president, Mark Purdy will recount the turmoil and excitement he and Claire had on their recent Birding in Chile Adventure. He says there was more excitement than turmoil.

December: No program. The date of the Chili Dinner and Christmas Bird Count have been set for December 14. The chili dinner will be at Mingo Shelter in Sand Run Park, again. We'll have details on signing up for the count closer to the date.

January 27: Chapter member Shannon Ehlers, Un. of Akron biology grad student, will speak on her adventures in Ghana.

February 24: An extra special program, Coyotes in Ohiooooooooooooo.

March 23: Our friends from the Medina Raptor Center return with a cadre of critters.

April 27: Naturalist Stanley Stine tells us about a new park in northeast Summit County.

May 25: Stay tuned.

June 22: No program. We'll have information on the annual picnic. Ohiooooooooooooo.

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Annual Christmas Count

Once again, the help-wanted sign is hanging out as we seek birders, intrepid and otherwise, to participate in the annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, December 14.

This year marks the 104th anniversary of the Christmas Bird Count when 27 conservationists in 25 localities, led by ornithologist Frank Chapman, changed the course of history.

On Christmas Day 1900, the group initiated an alternative to the traditional holiday 'side hunt,' in which teams competed to see who could shoot the most birds. Instead of hunting, the group counted the birds they saw, thus founding one of the most significant citizen-based conservation efforts and a century-old institution.

Today, more than 55,000 volunteers from all 50 states, every Canadian province, parts of Central and South America, Bermuda, the West Indies, and Pacific islands will count and record every individual bird and bird species seen during one 24-hour calendar day. About 1,800 individual counts will be held during a two-and-a-half week period. Each group has a designated circle 15 miles in diameter - about 177 square miles - where they try to cover as much ground as possible within a day.

Our chapter's circle is centered in Cuyahoga Falls, near the place where our chapter, originally known as the Cuyahoga Falls Bird Club, got its start.

The designated CBC compiler for each count will enter their data on-line via BirdSource <www.birdsource.org> or Bird Studies Canada's homepage <www.bsc-eoc.org>, where the count results will be viewable in near real-time. Bird Studies

Canada is recognized as a leading and respected not-for-profit conservation organization dedicated to advancing the understanding, appreciation and conservation of wild birds and their habitats. Designated compilers without Internet access may mail forms to Audubon and Bird Studies Canada.

Apart from its attraction as a social, sporting, and competitive event, CBC reveals scientific information on the winter distributions of various bird species as well as the over-all health of the environment. CBC is the longest running ornithological database and continues to grow in importance as a monitor of the status of resident and migratory birds across the western hemisphere. The data, 100% volunteer generated, has become a crucial part of the U. S. Government's natural history monitoring database.

Count data from 1900 to the present is available at BirdSource <www.birdsource.org>, a collaborative website of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. All counts are open to birders of all skill levels.

We'll be taking names at the November meeting so be there, or have someone sign you up with our compilers. The majority of the counters are needed for field work, beating the bushes as it were. If you live within the 15-mile count area, and can't get out, we do allow feeder counters. These folks will count the number of species and highest number of birders of each species, visiting the feeder on count day.

Annual Wild Bird Seed Sale

We went out on a limb this year to get you the earliest possible information on the chapter's annual wild bird seed sale — and we were right. The prices we gave you last month have held up. Weather and market conditions control the actual prices, however, our friends at Copley Feed and Supply have given us the go ahead to use the prices we stated. Please use the attached order blank and order early. Bring your completed order form to the October meeting. Deadline for orders is October 31. We must give our final numbers to the folks at Copley Feed on that date. We are making arrangements to offer some last-minute items in case you forget something, however, we need the most accurate count possible by October 31. Pick up day will be November 8.

Again, we are limiting the offerings to the most popular sellers from the past: Niger seed (thistle) will be sold for \$9 for 10 pounds; black oil sunflower will be \$14.50 for 50 pounds; The popular Oliger mix will be \$6.50 for the 20-pound bag and \$13.50 for the 50-pound size; Bird Banquet (looks good enough to eat!) will cost \$14.50 for the 35-pound bag.

This is the chapter's only fund raiser and the money

goes to support educational programs throughout the community. Any seed not picked up on November 8 will be donated, in your name, to the Seiberling Naturealm.

A special thanks goes out to Joyce and Wolfgang Pelz for the use of their company mailbox, countless hours of order tabulation, special mailings and the endless details that make an event such as this a success.

Protecting America's North Coast

The Ohio House Committee on Energy and Environment was the scene of a raucous hearing on September 17 on legislation designed to roll back state authority to protect the coastal zone of Lake Erie. A standing-room-only crowd consisting mainly of lakefront property owners applauded legislation introduced by Rep. Tim Grendell (Chesterland) to give wider latitude to such owners to develop areas along the water's edge.

The legislation in question, House Bill 218, would redefine what portions of the lakefront are subject to regulation by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. ODNR currently maintains that its jurisdiction begins at the historic high water level of the Lake – in other words, up to the point on the shore that Lake Erie reached when it was at its highest level.

H.B. 218, however, would specify that ODNR's jurisdiction ends at the historic low water level of the Lake, that is, the point that Lake Erie reached when it was at its lowest level.

The area between the high and low levels of the Lake is normally under water, except when the Lake is at its lowest level. The area in question can be up to 50 feet wide. The effect of the legislation would be to deprive ODNR of the ability to regulate private structures and activities in this near-shore wet zone. Other provisions of the legislation roll back other state authority to regulate the coastal zone as a whole.

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported that about 120 homeowners attended the hearing, some sporting t-shirts declaring "ODNR Get Off My Land." Representatives of Ohio environmental groups, including Audubon Ohio and the Ohio Environmental Council, also attended the hearing.

Grendell's legislation has not yet been reported out of the Energy and Environment Committee, and has not been passed by either house of the General Assembly. Furthermore, competing legislation was recently introduced by Rep. Tom Niehaus (New Richmond). His bill, H.B. 276, attempts to take a more balanced approach to coastal regulation.

Niehaus and Grendell are both members of the Energy and Environment Committee. The Committee will hold its first hearing on Niehaus's bill on September 24. Comparable legislation has not yet been introduced in the Ohio Senate.

Audubon Ohio will evaluate Rep. Niehaus's bill and develop a position as to whether it deserves support.

Annual Wild Bird Seed Sale

(This is the chapter's only fund raiser and the money goes to support educational programs throughout the community.)

Name: _____

Street: _____

City, St, Zip: _____

PHONE: _____

Niger (thistle)	10 pounds	\$9.00	x	_____	=	_____
Oil sunflower	50 pounds	\$14.50	x	_____	=	_____
Oliger wild bird mix	50 pounds	\$13.50	x	_____	=	_____
	20 pounds	\$6.50	x	_____	=	_____
Bird banquet	35 pounds	\$14.50	x	_____	=	_____

Multiply the number of bags by the price for each to get your total.

Total: _____

Mail your order form and check, payable to **Greater Akron Audubon Society**
JoyWolf Enterprises, P.O. Box 26278, Akron, Ohio 44319

(By cutting up this newsletter form, and using your own stamp and envelope you'll save the chapter nearly \$400)