



GREATER AKRON

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Witt's End

So, Where's the Beef?

Certainly one of the things I enjoy about climatology is that weather keeps us humble. As I was walking to my office one recent November morning, winds coming across Lake Erie were gusting into the 60-miles-per-hour range. While dodging wayward building supplies and scraps of indeterminate material, I thought about the book I was reading. The author was explaining why cattle were (are) bad for the West. Her basic argument went something like this: American bison evolved with the land, eating crops that also evolved there — and they had adapted to the weather. Cattle, on the other hoof, were (are) interlopers. Cows are selective eaters, requiring human intervention to supplement their diets and to find sources of water. Most of all, cattle have basically no weather-sense.

For example: When weather turns bad — actually, normal since we assign it adjectives like good and bad — cattle turn their butts to the storm and walk whichever way the wind is blowing, essentially *following* the inclement weather. Then, either the weather goes on about its business, or the animals die. Bison, however, turn *into* the weather. They walk into the teeth of a storm. By so doing, going toward where the weather comes from, they move quickly out of the threatening conditions — and live to tell the tale.

What's in this for us? Cows are the poster children for how going with the flow is not always the best course. Living in harmony with nature does not mean going with the flow. In fact, with nature, what sometimes seems contrary is in fact harmonious. In any case, trying to conquer and have domain over the Earth is bad policy — political or otherwise. Using the sun and wind to provide for us makes more sense than relentlessly digging for coal and oil, elements that will eventually be gone. And think of how much more fun it is to carry moonbeams home in a jar...

So it's time to get out your quill and parchment and send a letter to our senators and congressmen. Tell them to keep their grubby paws off the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The place is there for the animals, not us.

Programs Set for 2004

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. The pavilion is 1.3 miles west of N. Portage Path Drive and .9 mile east of Sand Run Road (N41° 08.029' W81° 33.586' if you need the precise location). Doors open at 7:00 p.m. and the meeting starts promptly at 7:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public.

As frequently happens with birding trips, when something goes awry, it can also turn into good news later down the road. Because of some missed communications, Dr. Lauchlan Fraser from the University of Akron Biology department, was unable to speak at the October meeting. He has graciously agreed to fill the open spot we had in our line-up for May's meeting. In May he 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.

Meanwhile, at the October meeting, swooping in to the rescue, sort of like a purple martin diving on a mosquito, came Larry Hunter of the Portage Lakes Purple Martin Society. Not only did he have a head full of knowledge and information about purple martins, he also had a car full of martin houses and paraphernalia required to keep these important creatures happy and reproducing. A big thanks goes out to Larry for his fascinating -- if somewhat impromptu — presentation.

On **November 25**, Mark Purdy provided a great recounting of the excitement he and Claire had on their birding adventures in Chile. From the north of the country, one of the dryer spots in the world, to Patagonia in the south, where you can experience the world's more turbulent weather, Mark and Claire saw birds and cultures most of us only dream about. And he wore a cool alpaca sweater. Back to the future. On **January 27**, chapter member Shannon Ehlers, University of Akron biology grad student, will speak on her adventures in Ghana.

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

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

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

May 25: Dr. Lauchlan Fraser and Bath Nature Preserve.

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

Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Should Be

Assuming you have a few bucks left after the holidays, here are a couple of organizations that could use your financial as well as physical help. One is the previously mentioned Portage Lakes Purple Martin Society. What began a couple of years ago as a one-man-crusade, has turned into a viable conservation organization that produces outstanding results. Larry and his group can use all the help they can get. Larry is a regular at our meetings and would be only too happy to talk with you.

Another group I recently became aware of is Friends of Wetlands (FOWL — ya gotta love the name!). It's another one-man crusade that has grown and is making an impact. You can check out the full story of John Katko and this group at its Web site, www.fowl.org. I recently heard John speak at the Kirtland Bird Club. This sixth-grade teacher is better able to tie the whole ecology picture together than many other speakers I've heard. He has a way of taking the complexities of a situation and making it totally incomprehensible — yet interesting. His sense of humor, particularly his under-the-breath comments about politicians, is infectious. Speaking of infectious, did you know that salamanders, which live in warm wet places, never get infections like we humans? John says there is current research underway to find new antibiotics based on salamander secretions since the bugs are evolving faster than researchers can find cures through traditional methods.

You can join FOWL for \$5 a year. Its newsletter is filled with great stuff and worth the five bucks. Right, we'll try to get John as a speaker next year. If you're not Web-savvy, write to John Katko, FOWL, P.O. Box 2016, Elyria, Ohio 44036.

The Joy of Winter

One of the real pleasures of winter is thinking about spring. Hey, you can't think about spring during the summer. Toward that end, here's an early spring event to get on your calendar. It's called, "Birds, Bugs and Board Feet."

Family forest owners stand on the front lines of conservation in Ohio. Financial success is the only way for them to continue the conservation measures taking place on 92

percent of the Ohio forests they maintain. Failure of these family farms will mean continued fragmentation and destruction of critical wildlife habitat.

Want to learn more? April 24, Scott Galloway (www.burntridgetreefarm.com) is having his second field day at his family farm. He's encouraging birders to visit and learn more about the important conservation of habitat initiatives he and other tree farmers are undertaking. Birding there is outstanding and this would make a great warbler field trip day. The keynote speaker for this unique event is Dr. David Horn, professor of entomology at The Ohio State University. He has concentrated on the ecology of predator-prey and parasitoid-host interactions and application of this to biological control. Recent projects have included biological control of purple loosestrife with chrysomelid beetles. His current efforts are focused on assessing environmental impacts of forest management on the diversity of selected insect groups.

This Carroll county farm is about an hour from Akron, 13 miles east of New Philadelphia. Register at the Web site or call Scott at 330-666-9377. Since free lunch is included, he needs to know how many folks are coming.

E-News

Here's some important environmental information we've gleaned from a variety of Web sites.

The Ohio House Committee on Energy and Environment has resumed work on Substitute House Bill 218. The Committee will take further testimony from proponents, opponents and other interested parties. A vote on the legislation may occur in committee before the end of December.

The *Akron Beacon Journal* has joined the *Toledo Blade* in editorializing against the revised legislation. The Beacon Journal published the following editorial on November 24, under the headline, *A Matter of Trust*. Here is part of what the Beacon had to say: When something is as big and popular as Lake Erie, it is no surprise that folks might disagree on who owns what piece of it. Specifically, private property owners along the lake's 262-mile shoreline suggest the current definition of the lake's boundary

robs them of the right to enjoy their property. Some of their complaints have merit, but not enough to warrant turning the notion of public trust on its head.

The proverbial line in the sand is known as the ordinary high water mark. Ac-

ording to the U.S. Constitution and Ohio's grant of statehood, any land lake ward of the high water mark is titled to the state and held in trust for the public.

State Rep. Tim Grendell, a Chesterland Republican, wants to change that definition. Responding to complaints from

Note of Thanks

Ella Virginia Chase died November 12, age 83. She was an avid birder and participated in the annual Christmas Count many times. Her family suggested memorial gifts to Greater Akron Audubon, for which we are grateful.

owners of lakefront property, Grendell's House Bill 218 would set the lake's boundary at the ordinary low water mark, in effect ceding state land to private ownership.

What's the big deal? If viewed vertically — Lake Erie does have many miles of majestic cliffs — it's only about 6 feet. However, depending on the slope of the coast, those 6 feet could translate into hundreds of acres. The total loss of public coastline has been estimated at more than 2,000 acres.

Both the Ohio Supreme Court and the U.S. Supreme Court have considered this issue, with cases dating back to 1878. Each challenge has been met with the same, firm declaration: The state has title to all land under Lake Erie as trustee for the people of Ohio. Simply put, the state cannot abandon its public trust, which starts at the high water mark.

Problems that Lake Erie property owners have with the ODNR's coastal management or permitting process can be fixed. The solution is not to give away forever a precious public resource.

Despite opposition to H.B. 218 from his own natural resources director, Ohio Gov. Bob Taft has been disturbingly silent. As president of the Council of Great Lakes Governors, he has asked Congress for help in fighting the invasion of the Great Lakes by alien species. This internal invasion would be just as destructive of this natural resource. Taft needs to put his foot down — on the high water mark."

Those wishing to take quick action to halt this dangerous legislation can do so by visiting <<http://actionnetwork.org>.

Learning from Birds

Contributed by Mark Purdy, president

Dr. Bernd Heinrich recently gave a fascinating presentation on the "Behavioral Ecology of Ravens." It was part of the University of Akron's Williams Lecture Series. Dr. Heinrich, now retired from the University of Vermont biology department, is a world famous biologist, renowned author, and record-holding ultra-marathon runner. As a young boy in Poland and Germany, his family survived WWII by living for five years in a deep forest, living totally off nature. Perhaps this early experience influenced him to make a career of studying nature.

In North America, the common raven (*Corvus corax*) lives in the western US, much of Canada, and the Appalachian Mountains from New England to the Smokies. They are almost never seen in Ohio. They eat primarily carrion, which leads to some interesting behavior. Dr. Heinrich observed that after one or two ravens discover a carcass, large feeding groups (up to 40 or more birds) join the feast within a day or so. But why would the ravens jeopardize their own livelihood by sharing a precious food source, particularly during the dead of winter when food is hard to find? It was theorized that perhaps the feeding group

consisted of relatives of the ravens who found the food, or that perhaps ravens took turns willingly sharing their good fortune with their fellow ravens.

Research disproved both of these theories of altruistic behavior. Further work revealed the truth: Ravens that discover food try to be selfish and keep it a secret. However, a wandering raven will sometimes spot them and attempt to horn in on the feast. When these freeloaders, typically juveniles, arrive in small numbers, they are almost always driven away. However, freeloaders are clever. They go for reinforcements. This may consist of circling and calling to others in the area, or, more often, recruiting others at the evening communal roosting area to return in force in the morning. When faced with overwhelming numbers of freeloaders, the original ravens are forced to give in and share the bounty.

Not all are content to share. Some individuals attempt to steal away with chunks of food to hide in a secret cache for later, private dining. Others are on to this ploy. They will tail the thief in hopes of observing the hiding place so that they can steal the cache from the first thief!

Another interesting behavior involves ravens' relationships with other animals. Ravens cannot kill their own food and are unable to tear open the hides of many animal carcasses. They let predators such as coyotes and wolves do the work for them. Increasing numbers of coyotes in the eastern US has led to a corresponding increase in the raven population. Work in Yellowstone National Park has shown that ravens follow wolves and share in the wolf kills. This is done only after skillfully testing the tolerance levels of the wolves, to insure that they don't become hors d'oeuvres for the wolf. In fact, they are so attached to wolves, that Yellowstone ravens will ignore a perfectly good carcass if there are no wolves present.

Ravens are intelligent and playful. They've been observed hanging upside down for no apparent reason. They've also been seen rolling and tumbling down hills or sledding down a snowy incline on their bellies for no apparent reason. Pairs mate for life and are quite affectionate with each other. They have been called the primates of the bird world in recognition of how they take turns carefully preening each other. Lastly, ravens can be exceptionally vocal. They have an extensive repertoire of calls and improvisations, further complicated by individualism and regional dialects — all of which is poorly understood by humans.

So, the next time you're in raven country, pay attention. See if you can observe any of their interesting behavioral patterns. Or, watch the American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*), common locally and a close relative of the raven, to see if it has similar behaviors. Finally, one closing thought: Do the various behaviors of the raven (selfishness, scheming, cooperation, thievery, affection, playfulness) remind you of another common species of our area?

