



GREATER AKRON

# AUDUBON *Matters*

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## Witt's End

By Clyde Witt, editor

### **Birding for Profit With a Happy Ending**

In January, Susan and I had a rare birding opportunity. Through the extraordinary efforts of our son-in-law, Kurt Gohde, an art instructor at Transylvania University, along with the director of the university's library, Susan Brown, we were given a private viewing (actually touched) one of the few full collections of John James Audubon's *Birds of America*, Double Elephant portfolio. And, as if that was not enough, we also examined *original* Audubon sketches now part of the university's rare book collection. Most of Audubon's sketches and drawings were destroyed after engraving the printing plates.

In a special, highly secure room, surrounded by first editions of Charles Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, the first five editions of Isaac Walton's 1633 treatise, *The Compleat Angler*, and hundreds of other priceless works, stood a cabinet specially designed to hold the Audubon treasures. Most estimates are that fewer than a half dozen of the original subscription of 175 copies of the original, intact portfolio exist. This collection was given to the university about 75 years ago by Clara Peck, a Lexington, Kentucky philanthropist whose complete nature library included Audubon's *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*, and many rare natural history books and prints. It also included a series of five volumes Audubon produced titled *Ornithological Biography*, which served as the text for bird images since the collection was published without a table of contents or any accompanying descriptions.

Audubon had to be one of the early adopters of trying to make a living from birding. His dream was to sell the portfolio by subscription, each installment containing the images of one large bird, one middle size bird and three small birds. On completion, the 435 plates were to be available in four bound volumes.

The images were created, first by engraver W.H. Lizars who produced plates 1-10, then by engravers R. Havell, senior and junior. Publication extended from 1826 to 1838. I don't want to assign too much religious significance to this, however, it was with near reverence that we slowly

worked our way through the huge prints. One person worked on either side of the huge pages and a third gently guided the pages into the specially designed carrier. The pages, about 29.5x39.5 inches, held life-size copies of birds familiar and unknown. We puzzled over name changes of familiar species — ferruginous thrush, warbling flycatcher and yellow-winged sparrow. Some birds we knew. Some were the stuff of dreams.

And those colors! The prints we viewed were done in 1832-33 in a method called aquatint and engraving with hand coloring. Pages were of handmade Whatman paper, watermarked J. Whatman with the date of manufacture. The colors were brilliant. Much better than anything I've seen in any field guide. Particularly in the portraits of birds such as crows that we don't always associate with color, Audubon captured an iridescence we see only under the best field conditions.

We marveled at birds he encountered, probably on a regular basis, when he painted in Key West. Now they're rarely seen in Florida. And there were stunning portrayals of species gone forever.

Over the years the portfolio has been copied numerous times. The Royal Octavo edition, also known as the *Great Little Work*, was completed between 1840 and 1844. It, too, was sold by subscription in parts of five images. Each part was to be published on the first and 15<sup>th</sup> of the month. These were done via stone lithography and hand colored. The guess is that about 1,200 complete portfolios were made.

The Octavo differs from the Double Elephant in that it has 500 birds rather than 435. Audubon added a few birds to the smaller-sized Octavo that had not been ready for the Double Elephant. The monumental job of reducing the images to fit the new format (6.5x10.75 inches) of the Octavo fell to Audubon's son, John Woodhouse Audubon. He used a device called the *camera lucida* to exactly copy his father's work.

J.W.'s efforts paid off. The Octavo sold like — well, like Audubon prints do today. They sold the full 1,200 subscriptions and turned the family's financial fortunes from ruin to respectable. J.J. died in 1848, hopefully with some inkling of what birding might become.

Yes, for us it was a rare, enlightening, enthralling, nearly wordless experience we'll talk about forever. To be in the presence of this artist and ardent birder is one we'll always savor. The moral of the story is: Keep Birding! Someday it will pay off.

## **Programs 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. 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). Doors open at 7:00 p.m. and the meeting starts at 7:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public.

Those who braved January's chill and icy snow were treated to a great program from Shannon Ehlers, University of Akron biology grad student, and her adventures in Ghana as a Pease Corps volunteer. Her program, *There's a Frog in My Toilet*, highlighted the strange culture of a land where a taxi driver from Chicago can become a tribal chieftain. You had to be there, honest.

**February 24:** we'll come in from the cold to learn about those furry creatures we occasionally glance slipping through the trees at dusk, or sometimes when they brave the open meadow. Ohio's coyotes are special. We'll learn all about them — the good, the bad and the furry.

**March 23:** Our friends, Laura and Bill Jordon from the Medina Raptor Center return with a cadre of critters. As we get into the warmer months, the season for finding injured and abandoned animals moves into full swing. Learn how to deal with injured animals and a lot more from this dynamic duo.

**April 27:** Naturalist Stanley Stine tells us about a new park in northeast Summit County. It looks like it will be a great place for birding when there is access. Hear the latest from the man in charge.

**May 25:** Dr. Lauchlan Fraser from the University of Akron Biology department, who was unable to speak at

the October meeting, has graciously agreed to reschedule for May's meeting. At that time 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.

**June 22:** No formal program. We'll have information on the annual picnic. Also, June is the meeting for chapter elections. Your vote counts.

## **Lake Erie Wing Watch Weekend**

The 10th annual Lake Erie Wing Watch returns to Erie County for the fourth time. This weekend of birding fun is a joint effort sponsored by the Erie, Lorain and Ottawa counties, visitors and convention bureaus, and naturalists in the three county region.

The Lake Erie Wing Watch Weekend will be held at Firelands College in Huron, on April 5-6. Firelands College is located less than a half mile south of State Route 2 at the Rye Beach Road exit. Numerous activities are planned for the whole family.

Saturday afternoon will be filled with interactive workshops encompassing all levels of knowledge and age. Some topics include: bird watching, photography, identification and other winged

animals like butterflies and dragonflies.

A Saturday evening dessert will be followed at 6:30 PM by a presentation from, James M. Berry, president, Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History. Berry's presentation will be "The Life and Legacy of Roger Tory Peterson." Berry is a life-long naturalist who grew up in Southern Ohio, and was able to turn his passion into a career.

The weekend will wrap up Sunday morning with hikes at various trails in the Lake Erie Wing Watch area. There is a nominal charge for the weekend events. For more information, and to register for

Lake Erie Wing Watch please contact the Erie County Visitors Bureau at 1-800-255-3743.

## **Got Birds?**

If you have access to a computer and the World Wide Web, there are plenty of links to birding information, local and national. You can start at our chapter's Web site,

### **Spring Elections**

It's that time again when we seek candidates for the chapter's four elective offices. Everything's up for grabs at this point. We are particularly seeking a candidate for treasurer. This job has been done by Susan Dooley for many years, and while Susan would love to continue, she says it will be tough to do from the new home she, Allan and daughter Sarah have purchased in the Outer Banks. She did promise to think of us back here, especially during the first snowstorm of the year. Susan has given years of service to the chapter, as a former multi-term president and the force behind getting this newsletter out on time, as well as treasurer through the difficult changing financial workings that are Audubon today. The Dooleys will be missed. The other elective offices, president, vice president and recording secretary are also open for nominations.

If you would like to seek one of the above chapter positions, see Clyde Witt, the unofficial nomination committee chairperson, or any of the current officers. And if you don't have the campaign funds to run for an elective office, there are plenty of volunteer jobs to be filled. See Mark for details. All the jobs, elective or not, pay the same.

[www.cs.uakron.edu/~pelz/gaas.html](http://www.cs.uakron.edu/~pelz/gaas.html). Our site is maintained by Wolfgang Pelz who has recently populated the site with links to many other birding organizations in the area. You're only a click or two away from a life bird or a birding trip of a lifetime. You can also find this Newsletter, in case you used your paper version to line your bird's cage, and other useful information.

### **Wetlands Protection Bill**

National Audubon hailed proposed legislation that would restore federal protection for millions of acres of wetlands that provide crucial habitat for birds and other wildlife.

The Clean Water Authority Restoration Act seeks to remedy a 2001 Supreme Court decision that removed federal protection for so-called "isolated" wetlands across the United States. That decision said federal officials could not rely on the Migratory Bird Treaty Act - or the presence

of migrating birds - as the sole factor when acting to protect wetlands that are separated from navigable waterways or other wetlands.

"The phrase 'isolated wetlands' masks the fact that these wetlands are directly connected to birds and people," said Bob Perciasepe, Audubon's senior vice president for policy. "Isolated wetlands provide critical nesting and habitat for birds while providing water purification and flood control benefits for people."

More than half of the duck population produced each year in North America comes from breeding in isolated wetlands known as "prairie potholes," for example. Prairie potholes provide vital habitat for hundreds of thousands of migratory shorebirds and endangered species including piping plovers and bald eagles. These wetlands are in danger of disappearing as more land is used for agriculture and development.



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### **Christmas Count Results**

Thanks to the efforts of Christmas Count compilers Marie Morgan, Bert Szabo and Bill Osborne, we have the results from last December's event. This year we managed to find 84 species within our count area, a 15-mile-circle centered in downtown Cuyahoga Falls. There were 95 folks out in the field in a total of 50 parties. Another 44 participants braved the warmth of their living rooms to provide feeder counts.

A total of 25,737 individual species were counted in the more than 206 total hours devoted to this annual event. Although the individual numbers are down a bit, the all-important species count of 84 was the best since 1991 when we also had 84.

Here are some of the highlights of the event. Again this year we had sightings of bald eagles and wild turkeys. Add to that a turkey vulture and a couple of northern harriers and things begin to get interesting. Mix in a northern shrike and an American Pipit and you have a great birding day in our area at any time of the year.

Also seen during count week were American wigeon, canvasback, redhead and greater scaup ducks. A Ross' goose was also noted in the area during the week.

Most-seen species was the ubiquitous European starling; 7,732. Coming in number two was the Canada goose with 2,769, followed by the house sparrow at 2,049. Here are some critters that made singular appearances: rusty blackbird, purple finch, turkey vulture, ruby-crowned kinglet, American pipet, chipping sparrow, fox sparrow and bald eagle.

Other birds of special interest, because of the time of year or reduced numbers, also made the list. Our area does not have a lot of water, and what there is usually has a hard coating at this time of the year, so water fowl are rarely reported in great numbers. There were a pair of common loons sighted as well as eight pied-billed grebes. Twenty-one mute swans made the list along with four bufflehead and a half dozen northern shovelers.

On land, six winter wrens were spotted along with nearly two dozen golden-crowned kinglets. A pair of hermit thrushes, a pair of gray catbirds and a pair of merlins offered an extra treat for some folks who braved the 30-degree-temperatures.

A limited number of counters made special efforts to find owls and they were rewarded. Seven Eastern screech-owls, five great-horned owls and three barred owls were located.

In the woodpecker family, downies dominated with 315, red-bellieds 189, hairies 67, Northern flickers 37, pileated 16 and yellow-bellied sapsuckers two.

The half-dozen red-breasted nuthatches, 25 brown creepers and 64 Carolina wrens were a welcome sight. Four common redpolls were a good winter bird sighting.

Along with the raptors mentioned above, other species were about as expected. Red-tails ruled with 81 individuals. Next most commonly seen was the Cooper's hawk with 37, sharp-shinned hawks 10, red-shouldered 9 and American Kestrels 8.

As for shorebirds, well, an intrepid five killdeers were seen either early or late in their migration.

Among the pleasant surprises had to be the half dozen Northern mocking birds found, along with 13 Eastern towhees. And that's the beauty of the Christmas Count, you can never be certain about what you will, or will not, see.

An estimated 50 people enjoyed the chili supper following the count. A big thanks to our chapter officers and other volunteers who made the great eats possible. Along with the warm food and fellowship, we had a cameo appearance from Jerry Tinianow, executive director of Audubon Ohio, who stopped by to give us an update on what's happening, Audubon-wise, at the state level. Also, Casey Tucker from Audubon Ohio was there to give us some insight into the *Audubon At Home* program.