



GREATER AKRON

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Witt's End

It's Called Birding, Honest

Birding for me is a pause; a break in the action of daily life. It's the white space between the notes that define the music. It functions well in that capacity, particularly when I've been around folks who think wearing a tie can actually improve what you do or what you say.

I had just finished a speaking gig in West Palm Beach and was heading for Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge and a few hours of birding. One of the conference attendees ambushed me in the lobby of the overly plush Breakers Hotel. I never saw him coming. His green cap with matching logo shirt and shorts proved to be great camouflage. He stood behind the potted plants used to make the inside of the place artificially look like the outside. Why do they do that, then go to great efforts to keep out the bugs and other creatures?

"Great talk this morning. Wanna join us for some golf?"

"Ah, thanks. Nope."

"We've got room for one more. We're playing on the Ocean (something) course this afternoon."

"No, thanks. I'm going birding."

"Aaaa, like bird watching? Why would you want to go out in this heat [96 degrees] and watch birds?"

The greatest of all philosophical questions—why.

And it's so easily answered with the greatest of all philosophical answers—why not.

I've learned that just saying "why not" is usually enough. It gives the asker enough space to nod his head and slip away, feeling like he won the discussion, which is what it's all about for these corporate-leader types—winning.

This guy didn't cave. He hadn't grappled to the top of his corporate heap by not knowing all the answers. "So, what do you expect to see out there?"

Let's educate, I thought. "Well, Loxahatchee is about the

only place you can still find the endangered Snail Kite," I said in my most pleasant, instructional tone of voice.

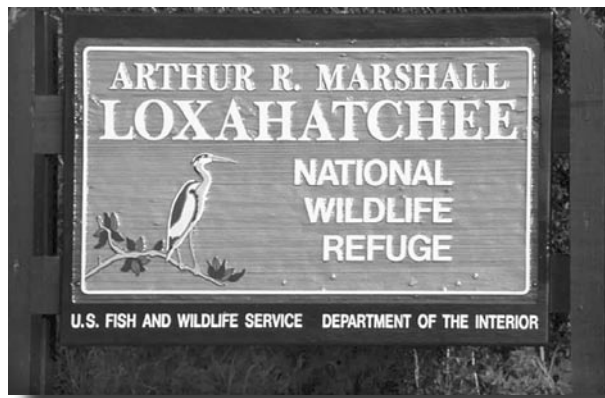
Oops, that did it. His eyes narrowed. He furtively glanced around, kind of bird-like. Still, he couldn't let it go. "A bird called a snail?"

"Nope. The bird is a kite. It eats snails. Apple snails, actually."

He had to get in the last word. That's what bosses do best. "Ya know, none of those words make a bit of sense if you're really talking about birds."

I just grinned, raised my shoulders and bid him a tolerable day on the course—in 96 degree heat.

- Clyde Witt, editor



Programs

For our **November 28** program we'll be welcoming back one of our more popular speakers, Jim McCormac, president of the Ohio Ornithological Society. Jim has done several presentations for our chapter, each one a learning experience. This time Jim will be telling us where to put all that birding and naturalist knowledge to use. He'll be talking about the hottest birding spots in the state. You'll be amazed how far you don't have to travel to see hundreds of species of birds.

December 17 This is the date of the annual Christmas Bird Count and Chili Dinner. We don't have a regular meeting in December so join the count and come to the dinner just for fun and food.

January 23, 2007 With the recent construction of an electric generating wind turbine on Cleveland's lakefront we felt it would be timely to have Mark Shieldcastle, bird researcher from the Black Swamp Bird Observatory, speak to us on this controversial subject. Are turbines a threat to

migrating birds? Hear what Mark has to say.

February 27 If you've ever met chapter member Jen Brumfield you can't help but be carried away by her enthusiasm and love of birds and dragonflies—along with just about everything else in nature. Now a naturalist and premiere wildlife artist, Jen will reveal what birds have taught her—some lessons we can all learn. And she promises to bring along some of her recent art.

It's a long time until spring, but let me tell you what we have after the snow melts. Dwight Chaser, chapter member and one of the more knowledgeable birders on this part of the planet, will introduce us to Cleveland's wealth of ornithologists. These are fascinating people on whose experience we have all built. Also in the spring, chapter President Mark Purdy, along with our official court jester, Claire Purdy, will share the experience of their recent trip to Namibia. Wedged between the Kalahari and the chilly South Atlantic, off Africa's west coast, Namibia has deserts, seascapes, bushwalking and boundlessness. Mark and Claire promise to tell all.

The chapter holds its meetings the fourth Tuesday of the month, except for December when we do the Christmas Count. June is our annual picnic. Meetings are held at the Mingo Shelter in Sand Run MetroPark in the Merriman Valley. The entrance is off Sand Run Parkway, east of the ford. Check MetroParks Maps at www.summitmetroparks.org for a map of Sand Run Park. Doors open at 6:30 and the meeting starts at 7:00. We usually start with a short business session before the main program. Meetings are open to the public and you are welcome to bring a friend. Plan to stay after the meeting to enjoy refreshments served by our stellar hospitality committee.

Christmas Count December 17

This year we're planning to get the holiday season off to a rousing start by finding some birds never or rarely seen within the 15-mile-diameter of our count circle. Where are these birds? Ha! That's the fun of participating in this annual event. One never knows.

This year marks the 107th year of the Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC). It is unquestionably one of the more successful, and longer-running citizen science monitoring programs ever. Ohio has been involved with the CBC since its inception in 1900.

The first Christmas Bird Count had 27 volunteer participants who counted birds in 25 distinct count circles across 13 states and two Canadian provinces. They collectively counted 18,500 individual birds and 90 total species. Today there are nearly 50,000 volunteer CBC observers throughout the world.

Professor Lynds Jones of Oberlin was one of the original 27 counters of 1900, thereby securing Ohio's place in history as one of the first states to conduct a Christmas Bird Count. During that first Ohio count, Jones counted 14 species which included a red-shouldered hawk, 40 American tree sparrows,

and 14 purple finches and only one northern cardinal.

Today there are more than 60 Audubon Christmas Bird Counts throughout Ohio that attract close to 1,500 volunteer counters who count nearly 20,000 northern cardinals annually, and the number of both volunteers and cardinals goes up each year.

If you've never participated, you can join by coming to the chapter meeting in November to sign up. Regardless of experience, all birders are welcome. If you are unable to get out into the field, or have only limited time and would like to participate as a feeder counter, you can do that as well. The restrictions on feeder counting are that you must live within the 7.5-mile radius of the circle, centered in downtown Cuyahoga Falls. And you count only the highest number of a species seen at any given time—not every sparrow and junco—just the highest total appearing at the feeder at any time.

Getting out and whacking the bushes, regardless of weather conditions can be invigorating and rewarding. We need people to help in various areas throughout the count circle.

Your reward at the end of the day is a great chili dinner provided by the chapter. It's held at the Seiberling Nature Realm on Smith Road. Come to the November 28th chapter meeting to sign up. If you can't make it to the meeting, call Marie Morgan at (330) 867-9850.

Winter Field Trip

We're going to take a gamble and do a winter field trip to the Bath Nature Preserve January 20th at 10 AM. We'll meet in the parking lot and hope to find a Northern Shrike. One of this species has been at the preserve the past two years so we're gambling that it will show up this year as well. We're going to do the trip with members of the Western Cuyahoga Audubon chapter, so if you don't add a new bird to your life list you might be able to at least add a few new birders.

Need I say anything about dressing for the weather?

News From the Grassroots

According to Marnie Urso, grassroots coordinator for Audubon Ohio, the U.S. Congress as authorized the Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Restoration Act at double its previously authorized level. That's \$80 million over the next five years to utilize manageable solutions to address some of the critical issues facing the Great Lakes. This is an important first step in our efforts to restore the Great Lakes and pass the Great Lakes Collaboration Implementation Act.

When this bill was passed by the Senate and sent to the House, the House leadership offered to pass the bill at its previously authorized level of \$8 million / year. Because of the tireless efforts of so many Audubon members, Great Lakes Guardian volunteers and our partner coalition members the House and Senate have reached a compromise that doubles the original authorization from \$8M to \$16M / year.

The disturbing news in all of this is that industry groups, including the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, are working

to de-rail legislation to ratify the Great Lakes Basin Water Resources Compact that State Sen. Robert Spada (North Royalton) and State Rep. Matthew Dolan (Novelty) have introduced. This Compact is an agreement among all of the Great Lakes states to stop unlimited water diversions and withdrawals from the Great Lakes.

Settings Records is Tough Work

Casey Tucker of Audubon Ohio says birders in Ohio should always be on the look-out for extra-limital and out-of-season occurrences of birds, and if found, documentation of such birds is a vital undertaking. The Ohio Bird Records Committee is tasked with review of all such "rare" bird sightings that have been recorded and submitted. There are currently 116 species of birds that require documentation among the 417 species known to have occurred within the state in historic times. The amazing cave swallow invasion of November 2005 resulted in the latest addition to Ohio's avifauna. Acceptance or non-acceptance of submitted documentation is often a matter of knowing "how" to properly describe the subject bird as much as the "what, when, and where" of the sighting. The benefits of careful and thorough observations that are accurately written provide a base of knowledge to assess bird migration and population dynamics throughout North America.

Check Out the New Look of Audubon Ohio's Web Site

Audubon Ohio has rolled out a new, revised Web site at www.audubonohio.org. While the new site retains the "look" of the old version, it adds some new features:

- The chapter map now displays the name of the chapter when the user's pointer is placed on top of the chapter's territory. In addition, for those chapters that have their own web site, clicking on the chapter's territory will bring up the chapter's web site in a separate window.
- A new statewide outings calendar lists chapter outings from all over the state for a three-month period. If you are looking for an outing to join on a particular date, the calendar will show you all outings that participating chapters are offering on that date. (13 of our 18 chapters have authorized us to put their events in the calendar).
- The site includes a downloadable membership brochure to facilitate becoming a member of Audubon.
- Still under construction, the site will contain a link that will allow the visitor to make a credit card donation to Audubon Ohio.
- We have added detailed information on our staff and state board, including copies of the minutes of recent board meetings and descriptions of our board committees.

The site includes other popular features from the old version, including a link allowing people to sign up for our E-News.

Ohio Winter Bird Atlas 2007

The Black Swamp Bird Observatory is coordinating the 2007 Ohio Winter Bird Atlas and it needs your help. The Atlas is conducted during the month of January anywhere in Ohio and it is looking for people to count birds on a weekly basis if possible (1-4 hours a morning at your favorite birding spot or pick a quadrangle block near you from the Ohio Gazetteer DeLorme.) Anything you can do would be great. This is a great opportunity to venture out with friends and contribute to the Ohio winter bird knowledge. More information is available on the website www.bsobird.org or call the Observatory (419-898-4070) and it will send you an information packet or answer your questions.

Gift Ideas

It's never too soon to think about gifts for the approaching holiday season. In the Great-Minds-Think-Alike department several people, including a nice note to me from chapter member Marian Zehnder, have mentioned Julie Zickefoose's new book, *Letters From Eden*. Apparently Julie had been interviewed on NPR about the book, which prompted people to call me. Hard to pick a better ambassador for the birding than Julie Zickefoose.

In her latest book, Julie describes how she knew at the age of seven that she wanted to paint birds for a living. We all know the result of that drive and desire.

The art in this book has evolved from scenes of her southern Ohio home. The essays, as enlightening and color-rich as her paintings, are based on daily walks and observations. Hardly a critter escapes her pen or paint brush.

For me, some of the more rewarding moments in the book are her reactions to the interactions among people and animals. She, of course, brings her husband, Bill Thompson III, editor of *Bird Watcher's Digest*, and two young children into various scenes and describes their challenges and experiences with nature.

The essays follow the seasons, beginning with the apparent death of winter and moving through the year.

Another book brought to my attention, maybe because I complain too much about them, is *Squirrels: The Animal Answer Guide*. This book, written by Richard W. Thorington Jr., is filled with more facts about squirrels than my local *sciuridae* is with sunflower seeds. Obviously Thorington likes squirrels. And maybe we all better change our attitude about these fuzzy feeder robbers since there are more than 270 species of them and they've been around 36 million years. The book tends to be more of a zoological text than a report on how to beat them at the bird feeder game. And that's okay. It doesn't hurt to know the enemy. There is some good discussion on the interaction of humans and squirrels that can help you figure ways to defeat them at the feeding station. It's a fun read.

Did you know that approximate 40% of all animals running around today are in the squirrel family?