



GREATER AKRON

# AUDUBON *Matters*

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## Witt's End

### *Thinking Outside the Bird*

Recently Susan, my nest mate, signed on as a volunteer with Curator of Ornithology Andy Jones at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. She, and a group of like-minded others, are working on preparation of the museum's collection of bird specimens. They call it skinning. Allegedly, it has nothing to do with swimming, scantily clad, in remote lakes and ponds. It's about taking birds that have died from a wide range of natural causes, such as window strikes and bad luck, and preparing them for study.

It's a lot like taxidermy only more scholarly and less artsy. Thursday evenings she arrives back at the nest, thoroughly pumped up about having plucked out eyes, scooped out brains and broken a few legs to get at the meat, just to mention a few of the less-gruesome tasks required. It's also a learning process. They get to study the intricate structure of an owl's feathers, the lobes of a coot's feet and the gonads of a Cooper's Hawk.

And here's where the real education part comes in. Recently, Andy gave one of the skinning class members a male Cooper's Hawk to prepare. Based on its size, rounded tail feathers and general appearance, it had to be a male Cooper's, said the guy earning the big bird bucks.

When the skinner (I guess that's what they're called) got down to the nitty-gritty-the gonads, the class and curator discovered that the bird was, in fact, a female Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Just like the field guides tell us, the two birds can overlap in size and the rounded outer tail feathers are not always the best field mark. In the case of the bird in question, closer inspection showed the edges of those tail feathers had been worn considerably, giving them a rounded appearance.

The moral of the story (assuming there is one) is that you can't always judge a bird by its coverts.

## Spring Programs

**February 27** Anyone who has met chapter member Jen Brumfield 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 (with Cleveland's Metroparks) and nationally recognized wildlife artist, Jen will reveal what birds have taught her-some lessons we can all learn. She's recently back from a long birding adventure in South America so prepare

yourself for a whirlwind trip. And she promises to bring along some of her recent art. If you've never met Jen, you're in for a real treat. Bring the kids. They need to hear Jen's story.

It's a long time until spring, however, let me tell you what we have after the snow melts. **March 27** We have a special program. Akron author Ann McClain Roher has been hand-feeding and observing Black-capped Chickadees at F. A. Seiberling Nature Realm for 10 years. During four of those years, Ann hand-fed, on an almost daily basis, the same alpha male, Mr. Picky, as she dubbed him, forming the longest casual observation recorded of an individual chickadee. Based on this, her book *Mr. Picky and Me: Lessons from a Master Chickadee* (Aptos, California: New Brighton Books), presents a most intimate view of this familiar species. Reviewed favorably by Audubon and birding experts, the book is written for a general audience, with an inside-the-flock perspective.

Special for Greater Akron Audubon, Ann will discuss topics such as behavioral details to enhance chickadee observation, advice for hand-feeding chickadees with minimal stress to the birds or the environment, and findings from her years of observation.

An exhibit about the book and the Nature Realm chickadees is at F. A. Seiberling Nature Realm Visitors Center through March 31.

**April 24** chapter President Mark Purdy, along with Claire Purdy, will share the experience of their recent trip to Namibia. Wedged between the Kalahari Desert and the chilly South Atlantic Ocean, off Africa's west coast, Namibia has it all: deserts, seascapes, bushwalking and boundlessness. Mark and Claire promise to reveal all.

**May 22** Dwight Chasar, chapter member, researcher, trip leader and one of the more knowledgeable birders on this part of the planet, will introduce us to Cleveland's wealth of ornithologists, "History of Northeast Ohio Ornithologists." These are fascinating people who have made a contribution to ornithology and on whose experience we have all built.

Our annual picnic will be held **June 26** at the Bath Nature Preserve. Greg Smith from the University of Akron will talk with us about American Kestrels.

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 Shel-

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](http://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.

## **Big and Small of Ohio Birds**

Everything from Sandhill Cranes to Ruby-throated Hummingbirds will be talked about at this year's Lake Erie Wing Watch, April 14-15, a unique event dedicated to promoting birding in Erie, Lorain and Ottawa counties in Ohio.

The Lake Erie Wing Watch areas are home to more than 300 bird species, including Bald Eagles, colorful migratory warblers, and Great Blue Herons. Add an abundance of other wildlife, from the famous walleye to the lesser-known mel-nistic garter snake. Plus the region has many varieties of plant life, without which the entire ecological system of Lake Erie would change.

Located between Oak Harbor to the west and Lorain to the east, this waterfront region on the southern shore of Lake Erie includes marshlands, deep forests, natural springs, limestone quarries, rocky shorelines and the only undeveloped natural estuary on the Great Lakes.

The location of the event is rotated between the representative counties: Erie, Lorain and Ottawa. Plan to join area naturalists and fellow bird watchers for a weekend of natural wonders. Exhibits, seminars, reception and forum focus on bird watching hints and habitats will be held at Oak Harbor High School, 11661 W. SR 163, Oak Harbor.

Things get started with a Breakfast with the Birds at Magee Marsh. This will include a walk and a breakfast served by the Friends of Magee Marsh. Then head over to Oak Harbor High School where the rest of the days events take place.

Concurrent sessions on a variety of topics will be going on all morning and afternoon. Participants can choose from beginning birding, birding by ear, identifying warblers, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Other topics include Osprey, Sandhill Cranes, birding hot spots, wind power, live raptors, native plants and a panel discussion with expert birders, digital photography and more. Also all day Saturday there will be exhibitors and vendors set up, a silent auction and lunch will be available.

Saturday evening there will be a "Taste of Ottawa County" reception that will precede the keynote speaker. Tempt your taste buds with samples from area restaurants. The keynote speaker is Paul J. Baicich, who has worked for American Birding Association in a variety of capacities, led birding tours to Alaska, authored several publications and most recently has been with the National Wildlife Refuge Association.

Sunday there will be a variety of field trips, including Magee Marsh, Sheldon Marsh, Sandy Ridge, Erie MetroParks

eagle watch and an open house at Back To The Wild wildlife rehabilitation center in Castalia.

## **Mild Winter and Birds**

[This article was submitted to Audubon Ohio News by Audubon Ohio Education Specialist Casey Tucker]

For the most part, this winter has been relatively mild for much of the eastern United States. In Ohio alone, the average temperature for December of 2006 was 38.7 deg. F, which was 7.8 deg. F warmer than the 20th Century average. December of 2006 was also the 4th warmest on record for the state over the last 112 years.

Mild winters can potentially be problematic for a variety of different bird species. For example, birds that cache and hoard food to help them survive the winter may experience a number of different problems as a result of mild, warmer fall and winter conditions. Cold fall and winter temperatures typically act as a natural cold storage for food hoards, however warmer conditions during these seasons may cause cached food to spoil, which can make it more difficult for birds to survive through the winter when food is hard to find. In Ohio the Red-headed Woodpecker, an Audubon WatchList species, commonly caches food for winter months. Many of the food items cached by these birds are typically types of nuts (e.g. acorns, beechnuts), but they will also cache berries and even insects, like grasshoppers. Will warmer, mild winters potentially impact Red-headed Woodpeckers in Ohio negatively, or will they benefit?

## **Ohio Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Survey Records 480 Birds**

Observers counted 480 birds during the recent Mid-Winter Bald Eagle Survey, the second highest number ever recorded during the event. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife conducts the annual study. The total included 359 mature and 121 immature birds.

In 2006, 206 eaglets fledged from a record 150 nests in Ohio. Last winter's all-time record survey counted 554 bald eagles, which included 329 mature and 225 immature birds. Immature bald eagles are those without completely white heads. They are generally less than 5 years old.

"Ohio's bald eagle population continues to expand throughout the state," said Mark Shieldcastle, a biologist with the Division of Wildlife. "Last fall's mild temperatures made eagle viewing excellent this year. Open water has held Ohio birds, while an abundance of habitat has made it difficult to locate them."

Bald eagles were observed in 53 of Ohio's 88 counties during this year's survey, conducted January 2-15. Sandusky, Ottawa, Erie, Trumbull and Wyandot counties, along the western Lake Erie shore, continued to report the largest number of eagles. Sandusky County had the greatest number of sightings with 69 birds. Summit County had five birds this year.

Although rarely seen in Ohio, three golden eagles (one adult and two immature) were spotted this year. The number of sightings could increase as the golden eagle population



grows in the eastern Arctic, and as a successful reintroduction effort in Georgia and Tennessee expands.

### Save the Date

The 4th annual Avian Ecology and Conservation Conference will be held on Friday, August 24 at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. Topics this year will include energy development and bird conservation, avian influenza and emerging disease issues, and an update on the Breeding Bird Atlas project. Apart from

these important topics, the conference also provides a valuable opportunity to network with volunteers and professionals who work year-round to support the conservation of birds and other wildlife.

Conference organizers are seeking papers and speakers for the conference. Abstracts of papers and suggestions for speakers can be sent to Nathan.Stricker@dnr.state.oh.us or Dave.Scott@dnr.state.oh.us . Details on how to register for the conference will be available later this year.

## Christmas Bird Count 2006 Results

Here are the results of this year's annual Audubon Christmas Count. The initials "cw" indicate the bird was seen in the count territory during the count week. We tallied 78 species, not bad considering the warm weather. Thanks to all the participants.

Canada Goose . . . . .	4373	Ring-billed Gull . . . . .	1937	American Robin . . . . .	282
Mute Swan . . . . .	19	Herring Gull . . . . .	51	Gray Catbird . . . . .	4
Wood Duck . . . . .	1	Rock Pigeon . . . . .	878	European Starling . . . . .	4814
Gadwall . . . . .	3	Mourning Dove . . . . .	830	Cedar Waxwing . . . . .	103
American Wigeon . . . . .	3	Eastern Screech-Owl . . . . .	13	Eastern Towhee . . . . .	3
American Black Duck . . . . .	28	Great Horned Owl . . . . .	7	American Tree Sparrow . . . . .	621
Mallard . . . . .	1620	Barred Owl . . . . .	3	Field Sparrow . . . . .	8
Northern Pintail . . . . .	1	Belted Kingfisher . . . . .	13	Fox Sparrow . . . . .	2
Ring-necked Duck . . . . .	167	Red-bellied Woodpecker . . . . .	154	Song Sparrow . . . . .	197
Lesser Scaup . . . . .	8	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker . . . . .	4	Swamp Sparrow . . . . .	18
Bufflehead . . . . .	1	Downy Woodpecker . . . . .	394	White-throated Sparrow . . . . .	212
Hooded Merganser . . . . .	69	Hairy Woodpecker . . . . .	82	White-crowned Sparrow . . . . .	8
Common Merganser . . . . .	1	Northern Flicker . . . . .	27	Dark-eyed Junco . . . . .	840
Ruddy Duck . . . . .	12	Pileated Woodpecker . . . . .	24	Northern Cardinal . . . . .	895
Wild Turkey . . . . .	30	Blue Jay . . . . .	592	Red-winged Blackbird . . . . .	74
Common Loon . . . . .	1	American Crow . . . . .	2157	Rusty Blackbird . . . . .	1
Pied-billed Grebe . . . . .	7	Black-capped Chickadee . . . . .	976	Common Grackle . . . . .	31
Great Blue Heron (Blue form) . . . . .	35	Tufted Titmouse . . . . .	329	Brown-headed Cowbird . . . . .	10
Bald Eagle (Immature) . . . . .	1	Red-breasted Nuthatch . . . . .	1	Baltimore Oriole . . . . .	1
Sharp-shinned Hawk . . . . .	10	White-breasted Nuthatch . . . . .	343	Purple Finch . . . . .	4
Cooper's Hawk . . . . .	33	Brown Creeper . . . . .	22	House Finch . . . . .	424
Red-shouldered Hawk . . . . .	11	Carolina Wren . . . . .	182	American Goldfinch . . . . .	1139
Red-tailed Hawk . . . . .	98	House Wren . . . . .	1	House Sparrow . . . . .	1868
American Kestrel . . . . .	4	Marsh Wren . . . . .	1		
Merlin . . . . .	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet . . . . .	102	TOTAL INDIVIDUALS . . . . .	27,421
Virginia Rail (cw) . . . . .		Ruby-crowned Kinglet . . . . .	1		
American Coot . . . . .	102	Eastern Bluebird . . . . .	95	TOTAL SPECIES . . . . .	78
Killdeer . . . . .	1	Hermit Thrush . . . . .	3		

**Field Counters:** Jay Abercrombie, Ian Adams, Deedra Allen, Claudia Anders, Natalie Arnold, Rory Arnold, Jeff Bowler, Peter Bowler, Michael Bowlerl (33), Jenny Brumfield, Dave Brumfield (39), Garnet Bryne (26), Ken Bulen, Ann Burris, Doug Caesar, Nick Calabro, John Cameron, Bob Capanna (30), Ann Chasar, Dwight Chasar (41), Dave Conrad, Kathy Conrad, Jeff Cordi, Vicky Croisant, Greg Cudworth, Mary Deal, Phyllis Devlin, Cheryl Dinkelbach, Fred Dinkelbach, Mike Edgington (30), David Ford, Henry Fortiage, Fred Fricker (35), Bob Furst, Ryan Furst, Joe Golgosky, Bill Gruber, Ann Gulbransen, Martin Gulbransen, Amanda Hanlon, Cheryl Harner, Nancy Howell, Mary Lou Hura Diane Johnson Hedy Jones, Susan Jones, Barbara Kaplan, Chuck Kegley, Winnetta Kennedy, Sheila Kerns, Dave Kersten, Steve Kolbe, David Kuipers, Duane Kurapka, Celeste Lau, Roger Lau, Karl Liska, Fred Losi, Jim McCarty, Beth McDonald, Maureen McGinty, Beth McQuire, Kathy Mock, Fred Montaque, Marie Morgan (47), Paul Motts, Marc Nolls, Bill Osborne (40), Jane Oswald, Cahy Parker, Dick Parker, Michael Pasek, Joyce Pelz, Wolfgang Pelz (23), Doug Piekarcz (29), Edwin Pierce, Jim Reyda (46), Dave Richards, Bob Roach, Bryn Roberts, Maryanne Romito, Tom Romito, Larry Rosche (52), Hugh Rose, Judy Rose, Pat Rydquist, George Sangrik, Linda Sangrik, Steven Sheppard, Harvey Simon, Ilene Simon, David Stover, Bert Szabo (32), Jim Tomco, Jeanne Utter, Doug Van Auken, Steven Van Auken (25), James W. Vogus, Doug Vogus (37), Wendy Weirich, Jeff Wert, Janet Wertz, Brad Wilkinson, Clyde Witt (30), Bill Zelesnik, Eileen Zimlich

**Feeder Counters:** Brenda Dawson, Helen Dessent, Cecil Dobbins, Joanne Dobbins, David Erickson, Jaime Gerard, Janeanne Gregg-Huber, Craig Griffin, Annemarie Hansen, Sandra Hansen, Sue Henniger, Gina Hirst, Betty Hudkins, Kay Hutchinson, Hedy Jones, Barbara Klewe, Georgia Knowles, Janet Kucko, Pam Leddon, Carolynn Liebmann, Shane Lowrey, Bob Lowry, Joe Mako, Donna Maximovich, James McIntyre, Bill Meyers, Bill Miloscia, Becky Monegan, George Papp, Betty Peabody, Jeanette Plazak, David Reinhart, Maggie Robinson, Peg Robinson, Doris Rooney, Louise Royce, James Ruby, Pat Rydquist, Grace Rymer, Elaine Sommers, Karl Stutz, Sue Tolley, David Watkins, Pat Webb, Larry Williams