



GREATER AKRON

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Witt's End

Standing on the Movie's Edge – by *Clyde Witt, editor*

Four of us were birding Killdeer Plains. It was a cold, clear February day. It had been a good day. Not our best, ever. Bald Eagles. Snow Buntings. Northern Shrike. Long-eared Owls. Rough-legged Hawks. In February you take what you get. And if you get sunshine you rejoice.

By late afternoon we were checking the last possible spots of open water for reported White-fronted Geese. Hundreds of geese, Canadas and who-knows-what else, were crowded into three small spots of open water. We picked out two species of swans and a few Mallards.

Suddenly the show began. Soaring across the pond, straight at us, came a bird that looked more like a ghost. Two short tufts on its round head. It was about three o'clock. Too early for Short-eared Owls—we thought. At the edge of pond, perched atop fragile Fragmites, or dried Purple Loosestrife, was another Short-eared owl. No! It was three owls! Foraging on the ground, like sparrows, were more owls.

We were surrounded by owls—and Northern Harriers. Owls on one side of the road, harriers on the other. Soon the two species began to mix in flight. They normally share the same habitat. Usually, however, one species is heading for bed as the other is heading for Killdeer Plains' dinner table, loaded with its mice and voles. The birds paid little or no attention to us. They dodged and darted and swooped around us, working the nearby fields and pond edges. We watched a spectacular aerial display as a harrier began harassing an owl in an attempt to get the owl to drop its hard-earned dinner mouse. The owl eventually dropped the mouse. It appeared that neither bird was able to spot it in the light snow covering the field. Score one for Mickey.

It was one of those birding moments when you turn, looking for the National Geographic photographers. Surely they must be filming since only in the movies do you get to experience such incredible scenes. We stood there 90 minutes or so, not realizing the time had passed until our hands went stiff, our toes had lost any sense or feeling. The price of admission. The movie will replay many times in our heads and conversations.

Meetings

The chapter holds meetings on the fourth Tuesday of the month, except for December when we do the Christmas Count. June is our annual picnic so the meeting place is not always the same. There are no meetings in July and August. 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 and east of the Shady Hollow Pavilion. Check MetroParks Maps at www.summitmetroparks.org for a map of Sand Run Park. The 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 so bring a friend. Refreshments are served by our stellar hospitality committee.

March 25: Dr. Todd Blackledge, University of Akron Department of Biology, "Research on Spiders." Todd has spoken to our chapter previously and he's always brings captivating information to the meeting. If you suffer from arachnophobia, you might want to sit near the back of the room.

April 22: We welcome back Mark Shieldcastle, Ohio Division of Wildlife. Just in time he'll be discussing "Spring Bird Migration." If you heard Mark's talk last year on wind-powered electric generators you know how interesting and informative he can be.

May 27: Matt Shawkey, Univ. of Akron, will enlighten us on the topic of "Sexual selection in birds as a function of feather color." Wear your bright-colored clothes for this one.

June 24: Once again we have a special event in store. This year the Annual Picnic will be hosted by Portage Lakes Purple Martin Association. We'll have specific times and maps in the next newsletter and on our chapter Web site, www.akronaudubon.org. We'll meet at the state park where the martin boxes are located. Participants will be able to look into some boxes and see the chicks and possibly unhatched eggs. There will also be feeding of scrambled egg bits to the adult birds. Afterwards, we'll go to the nearby Kiwanis building for our picnic.

Local Birding is Best

A great thing about living in this region is that you don't have to travel far to find great birding spots. Important birding spots. A little-known, and little-used park within the MetroParks Serving Summit County is Liberty Park in Twinsburg. It now carries the critical designation of being an Important Bird Area (IBA). The goal of the IBA program is to conserve the identified IBAs and protect bird populations.

IBAs provide essential habitat for one or more species of birds and include sites that birds use during their nesting season, during the winter and while they are migrating. Usually these sites stand out as special from the surrounding landscape.

To determine where IBAs are in the state, the Ohio IBA Technical Committee reviews nominations submitted by volunteers. The selected IBAs are identified using standardized, science-based criteria. More than 80 IBAs have been identified so far in Ohio. BirdLife International initiated the first IBA program in Europe and Africa in the mid-1980s. Audubon launched state-based IBA programs in 1995 and is a partner with BirdLife International. Audubon Ohio started identification of IBAs in Ohio in 2000.

IBAs are a natural focus of volunteer, citizen scientist monitoring projects, which can lead to positive local stewardship and advocacy. Identification of a site as an IBA is both a tool for assisting private landowners and public land managers and a rationale for preserving habitat from threats. Most importantly, the IBA Program is a starting point for site-based conservation planning, involving stakeholders in a process that takes all interests into account.

The Pond Brook Conservation Area of Liberty Park is located just East of Twinsburg on State Route 82, at the Summit-Portage County Line. From Interstate 480, take the Route 82 exit at Twinsburg. Head east on 82, past Route 91. The parking lot will be on the left (north) side of the road before you reach Aurora.

There is one hiking trail in the park, Buttonbush, 1.8 miles long. Its surface varies from natural, to some gravel sections and boardwalks to avoid muddy areas. The trail is quite easy to negotiate since it is virtually flat.

Liberty Park is a cooperative effort of Metro Parks, Serving Summit County, and the City of Twinsburg. The City and Metro Parks own and manage the 1,435-acre park jointly for multiple values. Twinsburg manages a portion of the site for active recreation, such as ball fields, and a dog park. Metro Parks manages the vast majority of the area as the Pond Brook Conservation Area, for the conservation of natural resources and limited passive recreation. The trail traverses only a small portion of the conservation area and takes you along old access roads that once served oil and gas wells on this large property, and then into a forested wetland complex. By Preserving this large park that protects a portion of the Pond Brook watershed, Metro Parks not only provides a public amenity beyond compare; they have played an active and important role in helping clean up and prevent future pollution of our nation's water resources.

Other nearby IBAs include Sandy Ridge Reservation in Lorain where we'll be having a field trip later in the year; the Chagrin River Corridor, several areas within the CVNP such as Deep Lock Quarry, Holden Arboretum, North Chagrin Reservation, Cleveland Lakefront, and the Cuyahoga River's upper sections.

Good News and Bad News in the Water Wars

[This article was submitted by Audubon Ohio Grassroots Coordinator Marnie Urso and Executive Director Jerry Tinianow]

Led by Rep. Matthew Dolan, the Ohio House of Representatives voted 88-3 in favor of responsible and balanced water protection by approving House Bill 416, legislation to ratify the Great Lakes Basin Water Resources Compact without amendment. This is a tremendous bipartisan statement that Ohio House leaders are committed to protect our great Lake Erie.

The Compact promises a comprehensive law for Ohio and the other Great Lakes states to control the use of Great Lakes basin water. More than 400 species of birds depend on the Great Lakes habitat for nesting and migration and more than 33 million people depend on it for drinking water. Without the Compact, Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes will remain vulnerable to schemes to siphon water away to the arid Southwest or other parts of the globe.

Now the bad news. In the Ohio Senate, a bare majority of 17 Senators has co-sponsored Senate Bill 291, legislation to ratify a version of the Compact containing amendments that they have drafted and that have not been reviewed or approved in any other state. Audubon Ohio has dubbed the Senate Bill the "Great Lakes NONpact" because it represents a blatant attempt, under the guise of supposedly non-controversial amendments, to unwind the careful eight-state negotiations that lead to the final draft of the Compact and to torpedo the entire Compact process.

Among the supposedly "technical" amendments in the Senate bill is one that would vastly increase the amount of water that could be diverted from the basin, a change that could drop the level of Lake Erie by nearly a foot. Because of the gentle slope of Lake Erie in many places, such a drop could harm natural resources along the edge of the lake.

Other Great Lakes states, as well as several of Ohio's major daily newspapers, have condemned the NONpact legislation, seeing it for what it is—an effort to derail the Compact process. The Cleveland Plain Dealer labeled Senators supporting the NONpact as part of a "lunatic fringe."

The NONpact is undoubtedly drawing cheers from the parched states of the Southwest, which would like nothing better than for the Compact effort to unravel, leaving the Great Lakes vulnerable to the seemingly unquenchable thirst of those overpopulated desert areas. It is hard to fathom, however, why 17 Ohio State Senators would put the interest of Arizona ahead of the interest of Ohio.

Half of the eight Great Lakes states have already approved the Compact and the Ohio Senate is setting itself up as the spoiler, which is ironic since Lake Erie is the shallowest of all the Great Lakes and has the most to lose from proposed water diversions. It is also responsible for generating close to \$10 billion dollars from travel, tourism and the fishing industry. Leaders in the Senate are gambling with the future of one of the largest economic drivers in our state, Lake Erie. Now is the time to work together for what is best for Ohio. It is not the time to play partisan politics.

Call your Ohio Senator today and tell them to pass the real Great Lakes Compact (as proposed in HB416) and opposed the Great Lakes NONpact (SB291), for the best interest of our economy, our way of life and our future generations.

Still Blowin' in the Wind

If, in January 2007, you saw Mark Shieldcastle's stimulating presentation on the challenges of wind-powered electrical generators in Ohio, you know they are a mixed blessing for birders. Here's the latest on Audubon Ohio's stand on the subject. It has recently updated its policy on wind energy:

Wind energy, while clean and renewable, has been controversial because in some circumstances windmills can be hazardous to birds. The National Audubon Society has recently released an updated policy on wind energy. Audubon strongly supports properly sited wind power as a clean alternative energy source that reduces the threat of global warming. Wind power facilities should be planned, sited and operated to minimize negative impacts on bird and wildlife populations.

Wind power is an important part of the comprehensive strategy needed to combat global warming. Wind power is currently the most economically competitive form of renewable energy. It provides nearly 15,000 megawatts of power in the United States, enough power for more than three million households, and could provide up to 20% of the country's electricity needs. Every megawatt-hour produced by wind energy avoids an average of 1,220 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions. If the United States obtains 20% of its electricity from wind power by 2020, it will reduce global warming emissions equivalent to taking 71 million cars off the road or planting 104 million acres of trees. Expanding wind power instead of fossil fuels also avoids the wildlife and human health impacts of oil and gas drilling, coal mining and fossil fuel burning.

Protecting Birds and Wildlife: While Audubon strongly supports wind power and recognizes it will not be without some impact. Production and transmission facilities must be planned, sited and operated in concert with other actions needed to minimize and mitigate their impacts on populations of birds and other wildlife. Several federal and state laws require this and the long-term sustainability of the wind industry depends on it. Wind power facilities impact birds from direct collisions with turbines and related facilities, such as power lines. Wind power facilities can also degrade or destroy habitat, cause disturbance and displacement, and disrupt important ecological links. These impacts can be avoided or significantly reduced, however, with proper siting, operation and mitigation.

Novel Takes on Endangered Species and Extinction

How the Dead Dream, a novel by Center for Biological Diversity staffer Lydia Millet, tells the story of an ambitious young real estate developer in L.A. who, after a personal crisis, becomes obsessed with rare and vanishing animals and starts breaking into zoos at night to be close to them.

According to her publisher, Millet, an award-winning novelist who also happens to be married to Center for Biological Diversity founder Kieran Suckling, has written one of the first American novels to approach the emotional and aesthetic implications of the extinction tragedy. How the Dead Dream is notable for its thoughtful engagement with the social and personal effects of massive species loss.

As the story's protagonist struggles by night with ideas of human aloneness and what it might mean to be a "last" animal, he's building sprawling subdivisions by day, grappling with his suicidal mother, whose husband has left her to find himself

working in a gay bar in Key West, and fending off attacks by his brutal and jealous business partner Fulton.

How the Dead Dream is Millet's sixth novel, and not the first to explore environmental issues; her fifth, *Oh Pure and Radiant Heart*, dealt with the moral, cultural and philosophical legacy of nuclear weapons. Available from publisher Counterpoint, *How the Dead Dream* has already been voted one of the top books of the year by both the National Book Critics' Circle and the American Library Association's Booklist.

Available at Amazon.com for \$16.32, plus handling and shipping.

Here Kitty, Kitty

Thanks to chapter member Joyce Pelz for reminding us about the critical issue of feral cats. As Joyce notes, a plea from National Audubon's *Armchair Activist*, a monthly letter writing campaign, citizens are urged to write letters to our two senators in support of HR 767, the Refuge Ecology Protection, Assistance and Immediate Response (REPAIR) Act. The Act addresses a major threat to refugees: invasive species including feral cats. Opposition to the legislation comes from cat lovers, especially the few who have adopted and domesticated feral cats. Here's more on the issue of feral cats.

At the most recent meeting of the National Audubon Society Board of Directors, the cat issue was addressed as a policy matter and because some Audubon chapters have become involved in the issue in their local communities. After lengthy discussion, the board voted to adopt a resolution regarding the cat issue. It took the following salient and science-based points into consideration before passing the resolution:

- Feral and free-ranging cats kill millions of native birds and other small animals annually. Birds constitute approximately 20%-30% of the prey of feral and free-ranging domestic cats.
- The American Ornithologists' Union, American Association of Wildlife Veterinarians, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, Inc., and the Cooper Ornithological Society have concluded that feral, homeless, lost, abandoned, or free-ranging domestic cats are proven to have serious negative impacts on bird populations, and have contributed to the decline of many bird species. Worldwide, cats may have been involved in the extinction of more bird species than any other cause, except habitat destruction.
- Feral cat colony management programs known by the acronym TTVNR (Trapped, Tested, Vaccinated, Neutered, Released) are not effective solutions to the problem. In fact, these cat colonies are usually fed by very well-meaning cat welfare groups. The unnatural colonies form around food sources and grow to the limits of the food supply. Feeding these strays does not prevent them from hunting; it only maintains high densities of cats that dramatically increase predation on and competition with native wildlife populations.
- Free-roaming cats are likely to come in contact with rabid wild animals and thus spread the disease to people. They pose a risk to the general public through transmission of other diseases like toxoplasmosis, feline leukemia, distemper, and roundworm.