



GREATER AKRON AUDUBON *Matters*

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My Witt's End

What's Old is New Again – by *Clyde Witt, editor*

The Cuyahoga Valley National Park has a lot of hidden treasures. Many you have to get off the trail, or at least out of your car, to find. Some are so obvious that thousands of people drive by without giving them a second or even a first thought. One I rediscovered is Wilson's Mill, located on Canal Road in Walton Hills.

This feed mill is a working operation, unlike many of the "exhibits" in the park, which are only relics to educate people on how life was 150 years ago. We stopped in at the mill recently so that Susan could buy some supplies for the bird-feeding stations where she works. While she was talked with the owners, I roamed around the interior.

I've read someplace there are 60 million people in the U.S. who consider themselves birders, or at least feed wild birds sometime during the year. From the looks of the interior of Wilson's Mill, I think about half that number must buy supplies there. Then there are supplies for virtually all the other two- and four-legged creatures.

The cramped quarters inside this building, built in either 1855 or 1853 depending on which historical text you read, is lined with bird feeders and paraphernalia. I tried counting the number of bird feeders hanging from the ceiling and gave up when I hit 100.

There are no straight aisles inside the store. Neither are there any software hands in the hardware store, as John Gorka says. These are working people. The kind of guys who put a 50-pound bag of seed on each shoulder and carry it out to your car for you—with a smile and a thanks attached.

The mill's original name was Alexander's Mill, built to grind wheat into flour. It was built at Lock 37 on the canal and used water from the nearby Cuyahoga River to drive (and here history is a bit clouded as to the style of power generator) the grid stones. It probably used the typical over-shot under-shot style waterwheel. The mill converted to turbines in the late 1800s. This was the last mill in Cuyahoga County to use water for power, and continues as the only mill in the county.



Pieces and parts of those old turbines are still in place, mostly for nostalgic reasons. As I watched the sun come up over the eastern ridge of the valley one morning, I looked at one of those structures and could not help but think that maybe its time has come again: Free power to the people.

Program Schedule

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 Merri-man 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, promptly, 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 outstanding hospitality committee.

For an up-to-the-minute schedule stay tuned and keep your eye on the Web site, www.akronaudubon.org.

May 26

This month's meeting is going to have a home-cooked flavor. We're pleased to be able to bring together three local naturalists to provide information on our own parks. Metro Parks naturalists Maureen McGinty, Pat Rydquist, and Meghan Doran will talk about their favorite birding locales within the Metro Parks. I'm sure they'll be able to talk about wildflowers and other spring topics.

June 23

This will be our annual picnic meeting. We'll be returning to the **Bath Nature Preserve** this year. Along with a great potluck dinner, we'll serve up Dr. Bruce Cushing, University of Akron Biology Department. He'll be speaking on the subject

voles, an important potluck dinner for birds and other animals that call the nature preserve home. Once again, the chapter will provide the necessary soft drink beverages. We ask that you bring a potluck dish to share and your own plates and flatware. If time permits we'll do some quick walks around the property looking for Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks.

Metro Parks Activities of Interest

Along with the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, we are



fortunate to have a quality, local park system. Here are a couple of the many diverse events to be found in our own backyards.

New and experienced birdwatchers can join Naturalist Pat Rydquist every Friday

morning through May 22 for spring bird walks along the Tuscarawas River's migratory flyway. This is an excellent opportunity to see avian travelers on their way to summer breeding areas. All participants will receive a checklist and final tally of the birds seen this season. Firestone Park, Tuscarawas Meadows.

Discover why the tomato was once considered poisonous, not healthy. Mary Ann Ferguson-Rich will discuss the history—and today's relevance—of these fascinating vegetables during "Meet Me in the Garden: Heirloom Tomatoes," Wednesday, May 27 at 7 p.m., at Mingo Pavilion in Sand Run Metro Park. Visitors will learn how to incorporate tomatoes into their home gardens along with other veggies and annual flowers. Ferguson-Rich will also reveal interesting tidbits about the plant, including which group of people first used the tomato as food and when the tomato was first mentioned in cookbooks.

Ferguson-Rich, began gardening at age 11. She is the current president of the Garden Forum of Greater Akron and past president of the Garden Club of Ohio. The Master Gardeners of Summit County, an extension of The Ohio State University, holds monthly programs in Sand Run Metro Park. For more information, call 330-865-8065.

Purple Martin Migration

According to our friends at the Portage Lakes Purple Martin Association, humans were not the only critters trying to get an early start on spring. The first Purple Martin was spotted march 29th by Paul Toth at the State Mill Road nesting site. It's the earliest observation of a martin in the Portage Lakes area.

Area Boy Scout troops and high school classes have been helping the association prepare for the season. Nesting sites have been developed for the martins and Tree Swallows, another good bug catcher.

Members of the association do more than provide habitat for birds. They have a full outreach program to educate the community of the importance of birds. June first and second members of the association will be at Arrowhead Elementary School in

Copley for Environmental Days, showing children the benefits of a balanced environment. On June 21 the association will be hosting the Ohio Martinfest. John Tautin, executive director of the Purple Martin Conservation Association will be the guest speaker.

August 7 through September 1 is Premigratory Roosting Time at Nimisila Reservoir. This is the annual gathering of nearly 10,000 martins. If you want to see Purple Martins up close and personal, the association has a public demonstration of feeding and house viewing each Sunday at the site on State Mill Road. You can feed martins and enjoy the aerial display. Last year the association recorded 118 nesting pairs that fledged 462 out of 574 eggs that were laid. The group's egg fledging success is 80.5 percent compared with a national average of 72 percent.

If you'd like to join this group, or support its efforts in any other way, contact Larry Hunter at (330) 644-1540.

Basic Birding With the Best

This just in from Akron's own, Jen Brumfield. The following information was posted on rarebird.org. The Ohio birding public may find this opportunity very educational and interesting. A great service by one of our premier state birding organizations.



Heading out to look at spring migrants, but feeling a little rusty on identifying warblers, thrushes, flycatchers, etc.? Know someone who's getting started in birding and who wants help in finding birds? As a public service, Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO) will be offering free guided bird walks, several times per day, every day from now until May 25, in the vicinity of Magee Marsh and Ottawa NWR. The first guided bird walk of the day will begin at the West entrance to the Magee Marsh boardwalk at 8:00 a.m. These walks are free, and will last approximately 90 minutes. A daily schedule of BSBO's guided walks will be posted at the Observatory. Stop in and check the daily walk schedule, bird sightings board, and the bird feeders and water feature. Special beginning birder walks will be offered as well. Participants will learn binocular basics, how to spot birds, how to select and use a field guide, and much more.

In addition to these, half-day trips will be offered from 8:00 a.m. to noon on Mondays and Fridays for the first 14 registrants each day. Transportation will be provided on board the famous BSBO Bird Bus! These trips will be open to BSBO members only. To register for a specific date, call the Observatory at (419) 898-4070.

Nesting Bird Census Needs Volunteers

So many birds and so little time! Especially in May—so many walks and talks. Got that post-May let-down? Bird life is not over. Join us for the annual GAAS June bird census. This year's dates are from Friday, June 12th, through Sunday, June 21st.

The span of ten days gives everyone a chance to work around a busy schedule and between the rain drops. Volunteers count the birds both seen and heard within that time frame in an as-

area of Summit County. We always need more volunteers. This is a great way to sharpen your birding skills, check out new areas of the county, and just get outside. And if you are relatively new to birding let us help you. If you can't join us, but you hear woodcocks, nighthawks or owls during those dates, we'd love to know about it. Please call us.

We've been doing this census for 31 years. And now every bird counted is on our website. Check out what we did during all those years at www.akronaudubon.org.

Contact Doug Vogus at 330-865-6706 (email vogeyeye@yahoo.com) or Ann Chasar at 330-467-3664 (email ascdwc43@yahoo.com) for more information. If you helped out last year we will contact you.

Citizen Science at its Best

The latest information from Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology showing the results of this past winter's Backyard Bird Count in February indicates why contributing a little time and a few dollars pays great dividends.

The 12th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) featured two invasions this year: voracious Pine Siskins and a whole new crop of citizen-science participants! Bird watchers shattered last year's record by submitting more than 93,600 checklists during the four-day event, held February 16-19. Participants also identified 619 species and sent in thousands of stunning bird images for the GBBC photo contest.

One of the big stories coming from the GBBC this year was the massive invasion of Pine Siskins and White-Winged Crossbills over much of the eastern United States. These feisty little birds moved southward because of seed crop failures in their usual wintering grounds in Canada and the boreal forests. GBBC participants reported 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. White-winged Crossbills were not as common, but their invasion was still impressive with 4,824 birds on 589 checklists representing a new record over the previous high of 2,854 birds on 135 checklists in 2007. The GBBC continues to show declines in some common birds, especially grassland and shrubland species. Loggerhead Shrike numbers are down, and although numbers



of Northern Bobwhites and Eastern Meadowlarks were both up slightly from last year, they are still being reported in fewer numbers during the GBBC than they were in 2004. These GBBC trends are only preliminary views of what may be going on with these populations, and they must continue to be monitored to get a true long-term view of how these birds are faring. Species reported for the

first time during the Great Backyard Bird Count included two oceanic species--Pink-footed Shearwater and Xantus's Murrelet, both in California. Other first-timers included Baird's Sandpiper, Black-billed Cuckoo and Blackpoll Warbler. Two rare Mexican species appeared on GBBC checklists from Arizona for the first

time: the first Sinaloa Wren ever found north of the border and a Blue Mockingbird.

Top 10 most-frequently reported birds in the 2009 GBBC: 1 Northern Cardinal, 2 Mourning Dove, 3 Dark-eyed Junco, 4 American Goldfinch, 5 Downy Woodpecker, 6 Blue Jay, 7 House Finch, 8 Tufted Titmouse, 9 American Crow, 10 Black-capped Chickadee.

Birding with Technology

This is for people who like toys—or at least like to play with toys. This stuff is too expensive, however, you can still have some fun. If you follow this Web link, http://www.enature.com/birding/migration_home.asp, you can get to a bird migration tracking site. For each species there is a specific, optimal time when the birds need to arrive in their breeding areas. The strongest males arrive first and stake out the prime territories, often in the same location where they nested the previous year. When females arrive, they select the males that occupy the best habitats for raising young. The pair must then construct a nest, incubate eggs, and raise their brood in the short period before it is time to start the journey back to the wintering range.



The maps that accompany this feature illustrate the timing of migration, showing the average arrival dates for 50 species of birds as they return to North America in spring. They are based on the observations of professional and amateur birders who monitored these arrivals over many years.

While there is a certain amount of variability each year, these long-term averages are revealing a disturbing trend. In the last 20 years, many species are arriving earlier, and a significant number of species are also shifting farther to the north. Why? Scientists now believe that climate change caused by the buildup of greenhouse gases is disrupting the timing of migration and sending some species farther north in search of insects.

You click on the region of the country you're interested, select a date to shows birds arriving before that date, then view, either as thumbnails or a list, the birds and when they are passing through. Wilson's Warbler, for example, goes through between May 1 and May 30.

You can learn about migration and a lot more at eNature.com. Get rid of obnoxious cell phone interruptions by downloading ringtones that sound like Eastern Towhee and lots of other birds. Or, if you're brave, download the call of a Howler Monkey to your cell phone.