



GREATER AKRON AUDUBON *Matters*

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My Witt's End — *by Clyde Witt, editor*

Wait'll This Year

I'm reviewing my birding lists as I write this (end of December). I find that it's been another average year—266 U.S. species. It's also been an interesting year. They're all interesting when you're a birder. Once again I've been fortunate to travel—more than some years, less than others. The birds I think of most, however, the ones that pushed 2009 into the better-than-average (mentally) category, have been right in my own backyard—sort of.



Northern Wheatear -- Photo by Clyde Witt

Susan and I chased birds in a lot of places this year, yet, two of the more memorable species were just south of here in Holmes County. First was the Northern Wheatear that set up shop in mid September. Talk about an easy life bird. That visitor stayed around for about two weeks, giving birders from all over the country plenty of great views. More recently, it was an Allen's Hummingbird, also in Holmes county, that got us excited about being birders. We stood and watched this out-of-place, green-and-bronze-colored fellow as he fed at a specially heated feeder in 18-degree weather.

Who'd a thunk it?

What's next?

Who knows?

Fortune has us well in hand. Worrying is a waste of time. All that we know, for sure, is that 2010 will be interesting.

Programs Aplenty

Editor's Note: Because of chapter budgetary concerns, rather than reduce the already over-taxed Newsletter staff, the executive committee has opted to print only four Newsletters this season. Hang on to this one. You'll receive the next issue in early April. For an up-to-the-minute schedule attend the meetings, stay tuned — and keep your eye on the chapter's Web site, www.akronaudubon.org.

Program Schedule

The chapter holds meetings on the fourth Tuesday of the month, except for December when we do the Audubon 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. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. The meeting starts promptly at 7:00 p.m. We usually begin with a short, informative, business session. Meetings are open to the public so bring a friend. Here's the lineup for the rest of the season. You'll receive another Newsletter in early April with more details on the final programs.

January 26 we'll have a special presentation, not to be missed. Lisa Rainsong of the Cleveland Institute of Music will give a presentation related to her work on musical ear-training techniques as a tool for bird song identification. Her presentations have been well received at Holden Arboretum and the Nature Center at Shaker Lakes. Rainsong is also doing survey and recording work for the Geauga Park District at two of its new preserves, information she will share with us.

February 23 is the date of the First GAAS Film and Foto Festival. Our chapter has a lot of talent among its many travelers. This will be your opportunity to see places

far and near from the folks who have done it. If you're one of those people and you'd like to show off some of your photography or war stories, contact Marc Purdy or Wolfgang Pelz for technical details. Presentations should be limited to 15 minutes. Already on the agenda are Marc Nolls, sharing his perilous adventures in the Presidential Range of the Adirondack Mountains this summer, and Clyde Witt, whose photos will take us down to ground level in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Marc Purdy has also promised a tantalizing view of Argentina.

March 23 Author Kim Hinkle joins us to talk about Flying Squirrels. Finally, we'll get answers to questions such as: Why don't we see more flying squirrels? Why do they fly when they can run? Or, are they limited to one carry on bag?

April 27 Special guest James Cole, Bird Conservation Manager for The Nature Conservancy of Ohio, will give us an important presentation on what the Nature Conservancy is doing to protect birding areas, local and international.

May 25 Dr. Gary Riggs, a veterinarian who does work for the Akron Zoo and Ohio Department of Natural Resources is a speaker not to be missed. If you were at the September presentation about Peregrine Falcons, given by Damon Greer, you'll remember the praise heaped upon Gary for work he's done with that species. Now we'll have an inside look at the work of a wildlife vet. He also has his own charitable organization, Wild4Ever. Check it out at www.wild4ever.com, which will give you a great preview of our program. Wild4Ever is involved with projects such as Venezuelan waterfowl, sun bears, jaguars, fauna of Madagascar and Cambodian wildlife.

June 22 The Annual Picnic. Time, place and speaker to be announced

Seed Sale Success

Treasurer Dick Parker reports that our annual seed sale was more productive than usual. A big thanks goes out to all who purchased their winter seed supplies from the chapter. A really big thanks goes to the volunteers whose labor helped put thousands of pounds of seed into buyers' cars. And while we're thanking people, extra kudos go to Mark and Nancy Roesner of Copley Feed and Supply for their continued support of our chapter. Financially, the net profit from the sale was \$2,140, or about what we spend on three Newsletters each year.

Some Bats Find Better Ways

As we humans start to tough it out through the cold and snow, most of our avian friends have headed for warmer climes; furry creatures head for solitary spots underground;

and some of those beasts in between—bats, who can migrate, apparently choose a path in between to hunker down for the winter.

According to eNature (www.enature.com) the Gray Myotis, now on the U.S. Endangered Species List, have wintering caves different from their summer caves. This bat is classified as endangered throughout its range from northwestern Oklahoma to West Virginia, and as far south as Alabama and Georgia. Factors such as disturbances from cave exploration, opening of caves to the public and flooding of caves through dam-building have caused a serious decline in populations.

When humans disturb bats in their caves, the agitated bats may accidentally drop their young to their deaths. Excessive harassment will cause bats to leave a cave altogether. They are sometimes forced to settle in a less suitable roosting spot. Although this bat declined by perhaps 50 percent in the late 20th century, thanks to its protected status, many of its populations appear to have stabilized.

This is a medium-size bat with grayish or brownish hairs uniform in color from base to tip. Its calcar is not keeled; ears relatively short; tragus relatively short and rounded. Its wing membrane attaches at the ankle rather than base of toes.

These bats move in large flocks between summer and winter caves, with hibernating colonies forming in October. Most members of this species hibernate in only a very few specific locations. Eastern individuals have three main wintering caves, one each in northeastern Alabama, central Tennessee, and eastern Tennessee. The one maternity colony in Indiana, with 1,100 individuals (and on the increase), is in a water-filled quarry with several entrances.

Good, Bad Trail News in CVNP

In October, Cuyahoga Valley Trails Council volunteers worked alongside National Park Service staff to assemble and install the Brandywine Gorge Trail Bridge, a three-section, 165-foot-long, fiberglass bridge spanning Brandywine Creek.

This is the first completed project of Trails Forever, an initiative that undertakes capital improvement projects for existing trails within the park. These efforts will take the park's trail system to the highest standards of design and operation.

The new bridge replaces hazardous stepping stones. Regardless of high water, the bridge now ensures that hikers can complete the trail year round.

Previously, the stones would move during high water events requiring NPS staff and equipment to reset them several times a year. With the new bridge, visitor safety is improved while protecting the aquatic resources in Brandywine Creek. The new bridge provides a longer span than the stepping stones, placing the structure beyond a 100-year flood event to avoid future problems.

On the less-than-good news side, NPS has closed three

bridges on the Old Carriage Trail. The steel structures have rusted to the point where park officials felt it necessary to declare them unsafe. A further evaluation of the bridges will be made, probably in February, to determine the viability of the structures and what can be done to give access across ravines on this popular four-mile route.

Seen Any Eagles?

It's time to start watching—and hoping—for nesting Bald Eagles in this area. Bald Eagles along the Cuyahoga River in Cuyahoga Valley National Park are getting to be regulars. In 2006 eagles built a nest in the Pinery Narrows area, the first recorded in Cuyahoga County in more than 70 years.

That nest was unsuccessful. Eagles returned to build another nest nearby the following year. In 2007, the pair successfully raised one eaglet, marking the official return of nesting bald eagles to the Cuyahoga Valley. They returned to the same nest in 2008 and again raised one eaglet.

In February 2009, the eagle pair returned once again and began adding sticks to the same nest used in 2007 and 2008. Unfortunately, the nest fell during a high windstorm in early February. There were no eggs in the nest. The pair remained in the area and began to rebuild their nest nearby, in a new tree.

The female began incubating egg(s) around February 28. Eggs incubate for 35 days. Eagle eggs and young are extremely sensitive to cold temperatures so adults must remain on the nest constantly. Human disturbance can disrupt this constant care, jeopardizing nesting success. Park staff took care to direct foot and water traffic away from the nesting area. It asked visitors to honor the closures so the birds could have another successful breeding year.

Alas, it was not to be in 2009. Park Biologist Meg Plona says, "Nests fail frequently due to weather conditions. The rebuilt nest was somewhat small and there may not have been enough insulation at the bottom of the nest for the eggs. It is also possible that the eggs broke or fell as the parents entered or left the nest. We know that this pair has successfully reproduced in the past, so hopefully they will return, build a better nest and try again."

Coyotes in Winter

Writing on natural history topics in the CVNP news bulletin, Park Ranger Paul Motts says December is a good time to watch coyotes. "These wily critters actively feed in the fields and along the woodlands, often into the late morning."

Their increased activity is due to their need for more food reserves during the harsh winter temperatures. Coyotes pounce on their prey, typically a meadow vole, rabbit, or other small animal that makes up to 90 percent of their food source. They also eat vegetables, nuts, and carrion.

Look for a slender animal very similar to a medium-sized dog with an elongated snout and a distinctive, bushy, black-

tipped tail. Coyotes are generally gray, but may appear blonde in color with reddish streaking to nearly jet-black. They stand one to two feet tall at shoulder, are three to four feet long. Weight ranges from 25 to 45 pounds. Females are smaller.

Coyotes jump around with tails carried down at a 45-degree angle, and generally step in a straight path. In contrast, dogs run with their tails up and tend to meander, often with distinctive overlapping tracks. Typically, coyotes are afraid of humans and run from them. Treat them with respect by observing them at a distance. Coyotes were first recorded in Ohio in 1919. They now reside in all of state's 88 counties.

Duck, Duck, Goose!

The Ohio Ornithological Society (OOS) is planning another of its premiere symposiums, February 26-28. This will be an in-depth study of waterfowl. OOS is partnering with Columbus Audubon to present the three-day waterfowl symposium, headquartered at the new Grange Insurance Audubon Center in Columbus. The event will include entertainment, lectures, and field trips.

The symposium kicks off Friday evening with a musical fundraiser featuring the Swinging Orangutangs. [I know its misspelled. That's the way they spell it.] Saturday morning, emcee Bill Thompson III will open the event with his predictable sense of humor. Speakers include Paul Baicich, Keith Lott, Dr. Gwen Myers, Dr. Azzam Alwash and many more. There will also be field trips—indoors and out. For full details and a registration form, visit the OOS Web site at www.ohiobirds.org.

Got Questions?

If you have questions about bird watching, or need to find answers when someone asks you a question because they know you're "one of them," Cornell Lab of Ornithology has just what you need. One of the most-visited pages at its All About Birds Web site (www.allaboutbirds.org) is the [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page. With their bright colors, funny antics, and tendency to show up in unexpected places, birds are an unending source of questions for the people who watch them. Cornell Lab has calculated that its staff answers some 80,000 questions per year from the public.

So one of the things that its science editor, Laura Erickson, has been doing for the last year is compiling those questions into the [Bird Watching Answer Book](#), handily sized to fit onto a crowded bookshelf or next to your favorite bird-viewing window.

With more than 200 answers, it's like a never-ending conversation about your favorite subject. It includes some of the answers on the rotating [Question of the Week](#) feature. The book's web page has more information, including a video where Laura Erickson explains how and why she wrote it. The book is available from the lab's bookstore, currently on sale for about \$13.50.