



GREATER AKRON AUDUBON *Matters*

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

Age is No Excuse

Generally, I don't genuflect at the alter of the Gods of Electronics. I do, however, occasionally find myself on the defensive at the mention of birding software for the iPhone, or, when referring to something on the OOS Listserv. And I do carry enough gadgets that I run the risk of electrocuting myself when birding in the rain.

I recognize the arguments against modern technology; how all the electronic paraphernalia takes away from the birding experience; time spent fussing with gadgets could be better spent looking, etc. And to a degree, I agree, however, it's them they know, not me ... Excuse that flashback to Cat Stevens' music of the early 70's.

After all is said and done, plugged or unplugged, I think technology is as beneficial to birds as it is to birders. As users of the technology we humans learn more and learn it faster. The benefit to the birds is that we can react to their needs; learn more about their habits and habitats, and offer solutions faster.

For example, recently, there was a report from the good folks at Cornell Lab of Ornithology (www.birds.cornell.edu) on its use of passive integrated transponders for tagging feeder birds. These radio frequency tags, thinner than a grain of rice, have been used in larger forms on larger birds. Now, radio frequency tags are gathering useful data on common birds we see every day at the feeder.

It's easy to understand that you needn't understand the complicated technology to understand that we get a better understanding of birds through use of new and better ways to gather information. Understand?

Meetings for January, February and March

The chapter holds its meetings the fourth Tuesday of the month, except December when we do the Annual 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 directions to Sand Run Park. The doors open at 6:30 and the meeting starts at 7:00. We usually begin with a short business session before the main program. Meetings are open to the public so bring a friend.

January 24th

If, in fact, we are what we eat, some of us better start to worry. January's program will offer insight about the financial, ethical and philosophical choices we must all make at the supermarket. Susan Schmidt, Schmidt Family Farms, will speak on "Documented Health Risks of Genetically Modified Food."

February 28th

Maybe there's nothing we can do about winter weather, however, Dan Herms, professor, OSU OARDC, might offer some suggestions on how to live with what we have—or what we're making. He will speak on phenology, the science

of climate influences on annual natural phenomena such as bird migrations.

March 27th

Watch this space. Stay Tuned! At press time we had not received confirmation from our potential speaker. If all else fails, we'll have a return of the ever-popular, Members Pictures Night. Come to the meetings and watch the chapter's Web site, www.akronaudubon.org, for more information.

Great Backyard Bird Count

If it's mid February it's time for Audubon's annual Great Backyard Bird Count, done in conjunction with the folks at Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Anyone can participate in this free event and no registration is needed. Watch and count birds for at least 15 minutes



on any day of the count, February 17-20. Enter your results at www.birdcount.org, where you can watch as the tallies grow across the continent. The four-day count typically records more than 10 million observations.

“When thousands of people all tell us what they’re seeing, we can detect patterns in how birds are faring from year to year,” says Janis Dickinson, director of Citizen Science at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is a perfect example of Citizen Science, says Audubon Chief Scientist, Gary Langham. “Like Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count, volunteers help us with data year after year, providing scientific support that is the envy of many institutions. It’s also a lot of fun.”

The 2011 GBBC brought in more than 92,000 bird checklists submitted by participants from across the United States and Canada. Altogether, bird watchers identified 596 species with 11.4 million bird observations. Results from the 2011 GBBC included:

- Increased reports of Evening Grosbeaks, a species that has been declining;
- A modest seasonal movement of winter finches farther south in their search for food;
- The Eurasian Collared-Dove was reported from Alaska for the first time, more evidence of an introduced species rapidly expanding its range.

Although it’s called the Great “Backyard” Bird Count, the count extends well beyond backyards. Lots of participants choose to head for national parks, nature centers, urban parks, nature trails, or nearby sanctuaries. For more information, including bird-ID tips, instructions, and past results, visit www.birdcount.org.

The count also includes a photo contest and a prize drawing for participants who enter their bird checklists online.

Chickadees, Cold Weather Machines

When I’m out hiking, trying to keep warm, wrapped in



layers of special clothes, I can’t help wonder how birds survive, sporting the same outfits they wear in spring and summer. I first read this article by George

H. Harrison, on eNature.com, a great Web site for all things feathered and furry.

“Black-capped Chickadees have a wonderful assortment of adaptations for the winter,” says biologist Susan M. Smith, who has studied the black-capped chickadee as long

as anyone. “Carefully hidden food items, dense winter coats, specially selected winter roost cavities, and perhaps most remarkable of all, the ability to go into nightly hypothermia, thus conserving large amounts of energy, greatly increases the chances of survival.”

The ability to go into regulated hypothermia actually lowers the chickadee’s body temperature in a controlled manner, down to about 12 or 15 degrees (F.) below their normal daytime temperature of 108 degrees (F.). This remarkable adaptation allows the bird to conserve almost 25 percent of its hourly metabolic expenditure when the outside temperature is at freezing. The lower the outside temperature, the more energy conserved, Smith found.

“Chickadees are not the suburban wimps that some people think they are, says wildlife ecologist Margaret Clark Brittingham. For three winters in Wisconsin, she kept track of 576 black-capped chickadees. She found that every winter morning chickadees had to replace the fat they used overnight. As the small birds struggled against starvation and stinging cold, they earned her respect, too. “They are tough survivors that live close to the edge of life,” she observed.

Birding The Net Inspires Millions

Pelicans flying across computer screens and “spokes-birds” giving clues on Twitter enticed over 9,500 people to play Birding the Net, competing for the grand prize of a cruise for two to the Galapagos Islands, courtesy of Lindblad Expeditions. Audubon’s innovative social media campaign was glimpsed by an even larger audience, earning 91 million web site impressions. The cyberspace event not only doubled traffic at www.audubon.org and increased Audubon’s online community across email and social media, but connected newcomers to the beauty of birds and introduced the next step: birding in the real world, offline and outdoors.

Hundreds of players and fans wrote in on Facebook, Twitter and blogs to share tips with each other, and to praise Birding the Net for opening up a new world of birds and birding.

Aren’t You Afraid?

As one who spends a lot of time in the woods (not nearly enough, actually) more than once I’ve been asked if I’m not afraid of the animals. This is a guaranteed question when people learn that I’ve hiked the Appalachian Trail.

My usual response is that you have more trouble with little things than big things—and they’re all little things—creatures like ticks and mice to name a couple of my favorites.

Well, now a report from eNature (www.enature.com) backs up my experience. Take snakes for example—please. Of the 137 species of snakes one might encounter in the U.S., only 20 are venomous, most of which are in the rattlesnake

family, and they usually give a warning. Out of about 7,000 snakes bites a year in this country, only 15 or so are fatal.

Okay, but what about the Mountain Lion? Turns out, in the last century, there have only been 12 recorded fatalities in the U.S. and Canada.

And so it goes. Probably the most dangerous part of an outing is driving to a trailhead. Next comes getting struck by lightning, which happens to about 300 people per year.

If Ya Can't Beat 'em ...

We still have plenty of winter weather left before spring migration starts so it seems we have two choices: hibernate or get out and enjoy the winter.

Here are some tips from our friends at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources on things to do.

Get out and build a snowperson or some other structure. If the snow does not seem to pack as well as it did when you were a kid, dig out a bucket or sand pail. Any container that is wider at the top will work just fine. Build a photo blind near your feeders to watch the birds.

Take a walk along the Lake Erie shore at this time of the year to see the ice sculptures created by wind and water. Some are really fantastic. The beach at Mentor Headlands, Lorain Harbor or Wendy Park, are great spots. And, with a little luck (okay, a lot) you might see a Purple Sandpiper working in the rocks.

Metro Parks on the Move

Though passersby will spot the Metro Parks portal sign on Turkeyfoot Road in the Portage Lakes area, Confluence Park is still several years from development. This land was purchased for watershed protection with funds through the Ohio EPA. The 110-acre site straddles the Tuscarawas River. With other Metro Parks parcels, land owned by the city of Akron and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, there are approximately 260 acres of protected land and water in the immediate area.

Confluence Metro Park is comprised mostly of high-quality wetlands and land that was impacted from a previous sand and gravel operation. The park district is currently studying the site to determine the most appropriate low-impact improvements. Eventually, we plan to remove invasive species, reintroduce native vegetation and provide a small parking area and hiking trail. Currently, park biologists and volunteers are studying the existing wildlife and habitats. The site may one day be connected to Firestone Metro Park and the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail.

Another work in process is Freedom Secondary Trail. Construction on Phase I, between Tallmadge Circle and Middlebury Road in Kent, began in the fall of 2011. Starting at the Portage Hike & Bike Trail in Kent, this proposed

multi-purpose trail – on land owned by Metro Regional Transit Authority – will follow an unused railroad corridor, connect to the Tallmadge Trail and continue west to the Towpath Trail via a linkage at the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad's Northside Station in downtown Akron. Another section may link to the 33.5-mile Bike & Hike Trail in Munroe Falls.

A feasibility study was completed in 2009. Implementation will take place in three phases through 2014. Engineering is underway for the first phase from Southwest Avenue in Tallmadge to Middlebury Road in Kent. Construction will likely begin in 2012.

A third project we should see results of later this year is Wood Hollow. Located at the northwest corner of Barlow and Stow roads, this Metro Park will open in 2012. All but three acres of this 150-acre park – best described as rolling with small wetlands – were donated to Metro Parks in 2009. When it opens, don't look for deep, wooded ravines as the name might suggest. Instead, try to spot large beech and sugar maple trees that have died and rotted from the inside out. These "wood hollows" are habitat for a variety of wildlife: insects, nesting birds, bats and other small mammals.

The woods also contain swamp and pin oaks, swamp buttercup, milkweed and liverworts. Many common bird species are visible, like nuthatches, chickadees, woodpeckers and hawks. On warm spring days, amphibians can be heard calling from vernal pools.

When You Need to Know, Now!

We all remember the bad old days when you heard about a rare bird in the area three days after it was gone; and then only if you knew the right people. We made progress when we started the telephone bird alerts, which now are almost passé.

Get ready to move into the 21st Century with eBird alerts. Cornell Lab of Ornithology has announced another exciting alert option -- the eBird Rare Bird Alert. This alert basically takes the eBird Notable Birds Google Gadget and moves it into an eBird Alert environment, meaning that you can now receive hourly or daily email summaries, or just go view rare birds on the web at our eBird alerts page. One key update is the addition of counties to the available alert regions, meaning you can customize your rare bird alert experience more than ever. The new Rare Bird Alert notifies you about any unusual bird that has been reported in your region of interest, and provides a link to the location and to the checklist so you can get more information about the sighting, and make the critical call as to whether it's worth calling in sick to work!

If you're traveling to a spot and what to know what's hot, or, if you have some free time and what to chase after a Northern Shrike in the neighborhood, this eMail alert program is for you. Check it out at www.ebird.org.