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My Witt's End – by Clyde Witt, editor

When Bad News Can Be Good News

I'm not sure whom we should thank for the current irruption of finch species into this area—global warming or a failure in the conifer seed crop in Canada. Regardless, it's been a banner year for crossbills, redpolls and recently, a Bohemian Waxwing.

We're used to seeing an exciting assortment of gulls along the shores of Lake Erie, and we usually have to pay the price of frozen faces and fingers. The warm weather, however, has made chasing birds this winter a delight. And when it comes to sorting out finches versus sorting out gulls, gimmie the little guys every time.

Recently, there was an exception to that challenge, however. Susan and I successfully chased down the reported Bohemian Waxwing at Holden Arboretum, then went after the reported Common Redpolls, amongst which was a Hoary Redpoll. At the allocated spot in the arboretum, we found an interesting array of some of this region's top birders. A debate ensued over varying shades of white, streaking on under-tail coverts and comparative bill sizes in birds smaller than a House Sparrow. Oh my. This was not going to be as easy as I thought.

The upside of the hour's discussion was, because temperatures hovered at 60 degrees, standing around was pleasant. For that, I suppose, we have to thank climate change. And more good news: If you haven't gotten out to see these gorgeous visitors from north of the lake, we still have a couple more months of winter and plenty of opportunities. Join the listserv at Ohiobirds.org and you'll have plenty of distractions to take your mind off cold and snow.

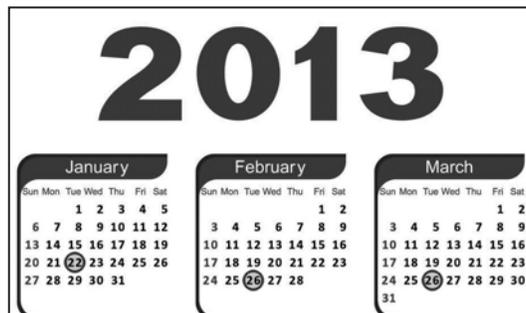
Meetings

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 begins 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.

Programs

January 22: Dave Sherman, ODNR Division of Wildlife, "Sandhill Cranes." Their calls are as distinctive as their appearance; you can't confuse Sandhill Cranes with anything else. The proliferation of Sandhill Cranes in Ohio, once a secretive event, is now almost a slam-dunk when birding places like Funk Bottoms and other extensive wetland areas. The reason for the increased numbers in Ohio, plus some notes on their biology, will be the highlights of our January



meeting.

February 26: Dr. Keith Tarvin, Department of Biology, Oberlin College, knows a lot about birds, particularly the minutiae that birders love to talk about. This will be your opportunity to learn a lot about a little.

March 26: Lions, Tigers and Birds, oh my! An animal specialist from the Akron Zoological Park will talk with us about the importance of zoos in our culture. Expect the unexpected.

Wintertime Help for Critters

Hope you didn't toss that Christmas tree on the recycle pile. There is a better use for holiday trimmings than just throwing them away. The folks at eNatureBlog (www.wild.enature.com) tell us this is the best time of the year to create some brush piles for the birds in your backyard. Fall trimmings can be piled up in a corner or along the edge of the yard, where it will give ground-inhabiting birds additional

cover against winter weather and predators.

About half the birds we feed in our backyards spend much of their lives on the ground nesting, roosting and in search of food. Piles of brush are ideal protective cover for resident and migrating White-throated, White-crowned, and Fox Sparrows. Song Sparrows, American Tree Sparrows, and Field Sparrows all visit backyards, and should benefit from brush pile cover. Dark-eyed Juncos, towhees, Winter Wrens, quail, pheasants, and doves also spend a great deal of their lives on the ground, and seek the kind of cover in backyards that brush piles offer.

An evergreen tree that has been cut down will also make excellent cover for ground inhabiting birds when the tree is laid on its side along a fencerow or in a corner of the yard. Discarded Christmas trees give the same kind of cover. Even piles of rocks and logs will furnish some cover for birds during cold weather or when there is a threat from predators.

Around the Region

If you're looking for some close-by, in-and-outdoor activities, your first stop should be the on-line newsletter of the Metroparks serving Summit County (www.summitmetroparks.org) and its calendar of events. Here's a sampling: On **January 19** it will hold a Wildlife & Wood Workshop. You'll learn all about suet feeders and the vast array of bird species that prefer the kinds of things we humans try to avoid. You'll have to purchase a \$15 kit and register in advance at (330) 865-8065.

On **January 26**, Naturalist Meghan Doran will host the monthly series, Coffee With the Birds at the F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm. The park will provide the coffee, but you'll have to bring your own mug—coffee cup, that is. This is a great way to watch and learn about feeder birds as you sit around the nature center's windows, hoping for a special visitor.

If you like getting out in the woods, **January 31** will be a great opportunity to join Naturalist Mike Greene on a two-mile hike along the Piney Woods Trail. The event begins and 10 a.m., and, should we even say, dress appropriately. A bit further afield, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History's Frontiers of Astronomy free lecture series on March 7 will present a program entitled Astronomy: It's the Nightlife! Dr. Rachel Kuzio de Naray will provide a rare, behind-the-scenes tour of observatories in Arizona and Chile. When most people are heading for bed, astronomers are preparing to stay up all night.

If you're wondering where you are these days, the Cleveland MetroParks are offering a class in Winter Orienteering on **February 9**, from one to four p.m. You'll learn how to use a map and compass in gorgeous winter settings;

skills you should have before you even step out the door. Register by phone, (216) 341-1704. The class will be held in Brecksville Reservation.

Around the State

The Ohio Ornithological Society is presenting its Owls of North America symposium, beginning **February 15** at Mohican State Park and Lodge. The OOS symposium is held in conjunction with Greater Mohican Audubon Society. Featured are lectures by well-known owl experts such as Denver Holt, founder of the Owl Research Institute. There will be field trips to nearby birding habitats in search of owls and anything else with feathers. To register, visit the OOS website, www.ohiobirds.org.

ODNR Authorizes Tree Removal

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources continues its battle against the non-native Emerald Ash Borer. Since discovery of the insect in some of our parks' ash trees in the western area of the state, ODNR's Division of Forestry

has launched an effort to remove the affected trees. The ODNR Division of Forestry started working on removing trees from Indian Lake State Park on Dec. 11 before starting at Grand Lake St. Marys State Park. According to Maxfield, the tree removal at Grand Lake St. Marys and Lake Loramie will be completed, soon. It

is anticipated that removal of the trees from the three state parks will be finished by early January.

The leftover wood from the trees is free to any individual at each of the three state parks in designated areas from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. seven days a week. All interested individuals should contact the park offices for more information. It is recommended that firewood from the ash trees be burned locally by April.

Beat the winter blahs

Stuck inside dreaming of warmer weather? Now is the perfect time to shake the winter blues and plan a summer vacation at the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' (ODNR) Ohio State Parks!

Grand Lake St. Marys State Park will offer extended discounts in 2013. Camping, docks and day use fees will all be cut 50 percent, while getaway rentals will be discounted 25 percent. These special rates will begin on April 1 and last until Oct. 31.



“Many families begin planning their summer vacations during the winter months,” said ODNR Deputy Director Glen Cobb. “With these discounts, we hope to encourage people to choose Grand Lake St. Marys State Park as their vacation destination and save them a little bit of money at the same time.”

The discounts may not be used during the following dates: May 24-26, June 30-July 6, Aug. 30-Sept. 1, Sept. 20-22 and Oct. 4-6.

Contact the Grand Lake St. Marys State Park Office to schedule a visit or ask about the discounts at 419-394-3611.

Ohio State Parks consists of 75 state parks located across Ohio that are utilized by 55 million visitors per year—with free admission. With so many state parks across the state, there are numerous opportunities to hike on trails, ride bikes or horses, swim, golf and enjoy a multitude of other outdoor pursuits. Visit ohiodnr.com/parks to learn more about the lodges, camping, getaway rentals and other fun activities available through Ohio State Parks.

Your Backyard Counts

After 15 years of success in North America, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will open up to the entire world for the first time in 2013. Anyone, from anywhere on earth, can participate by visiting www.birdcount.org and reporting the kinds and numbers of birds they see during the 16th annual count, February 15-18.

A joint project of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with partner Bird Studies Canada, the four-day count typically receives sightings from tens of thousands of people reporting more than 600 bird species in the United States and Canada alone.

“This year’s count will give us a whole new perspective as sightings pour in from around the globe in real time,” said Marshall Iliff at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “Millions of people encounter birds every day all over the world. Imagine what scientists will learn if each one of us shares observations from our own area!”

During the 2012 count, participants reported 17.4 million bird observations on 104,000 checklists. Snowy Owls thrilled many participants when these striking birds-of-prey ventured south from the Arctic in record numbers. In 2013, scientists predict that U.S. and Canadian bird watchers will see an influx of Red-breasted Nuthatches and winter finches (such as Pine Siskins) because of scarce food supplies on their northern wintering grounds.

“The GBBC is an ideal opportunity for young and old to connect with nature by discovering birds and to participate in a huge science project,” said Gary Langham, Audubon’s Chief Scientist. “This year, we hope people on all seven continents, oceans, and islands, will head out into their neighborhoods, rural areas, parks, and wilderness to further our understanding of birds across the hemispheres.” Participating is easy. Simply watch birds for at least 15

minutes at the location of your choice on one or more of the count days. Estimate the number of birds you see for each species you can identify. You’ll select your location on a map, answer a few questions, enter your tallies, and then submit your data to share your sightings with others around the world.

The global capacity for the count will be powered by eBird, an online checklist program for all of the world’s 10,240 bird species. Participants will be able to view what others are seeing on interactive maps, keep their own records, and have their tallies recorded for perpetuity.

“The popularity of the Great Backyard Bird Count grows each year,” said Dick Cannings, Senior Projects Officer at Bird Studies Canada, “and with the new features, participation will be even more exciting.”

1. Create a GBBC account. Beginning in 2013, the GBBC will be integrated with eBird—a worldwide bird data collection program used for keeping track of your personal bird records and bird lists. The change means you must create a free GBBC account in order to enter your bird checklists, even if you have participated in the GBBC before. It also means you will be able to access all your GBBC observations and eBird observations under a single account. If you’re already registered with eBird, you can use the same login information.
2. Count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the GBBC. You can count for longer than that if you wish! Count birds in as many places and on as many days as you like—one day, two days, or all four days. Submit a separate checklist for each new day. You can also submit more than one checklist per day for each new location or even from the same location. Estimate the number of individuals of each species you saw during your count period.
3. Enter your results on the GBBC website (or eBird). You’ll see a button marked “Enter Your Checklists!” on the GBBC website home page beginning at 7:00 AM Eastern time (U.S.) on the first day of the count. See our downloadable instructions below for additional details on entering your checklists via your GBBC account. If you already use eBird, please continue using eBird to submit your sightings but be sure to enter at least one checklist during the GBBC weekend!

Learn About Birds

Along with the Great Backyard Bird Count, the Lab of Ornithology has a useful electronic tool called, Learn About Birds. The online guide allows you to browse 600 species for identification, natural history information, photos, sounds and maps. It also has tricky ID tips to help sort out similar-looking species. If you’re interested in new birding equipment, feeding instructions, or are an educator and need some tips for the classroom, you’ll find it all in the Learn About Birds section of birdsource.org.