

**CUYAHOGA VALLEY TOWPATH TRAIL CENSUS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER - APRIL 2021**

**HISTORY & FACTS of the APRIL CENSUS**

11-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS

April	11-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS							
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
49 / 758	50 / 975	57 / 691	52 / 730	57 / 878	59 / 984	49 / 593	57 / 760	61 / 972
2019	2020							
55 / 1,024	57 / 979							

Most Species seen in April : 61 on 04/07/2018.

Most Total Birds seen in April : 1,024 on 04/06/2019.

Fewest Species seen in April : 49 on 04/02/2010 & 04/02/2016.

Fewest Total Birds seen in April : 593 on 04/02/2016.

Species Average in April : 54.8 Species.

Total Birds Average in April : 849.4 Individuals.

Lowest Temperature on April Census : 24-degrees F on 04/06/2013.

Highest Temperature on April Census : 85-degrees F on 04/02/2010.

Longest Time Afield on April Census : 10 hours & 25 minutes on 04/06/2019.

Shortest Time Afield on April Census : 7 hours & 5 minutes on 04/02/2010.

**LAST APRIL'S FIELD REPORT**

04/04/20	TOTAL SPECIES:	57	START / END TIME:	7:00am - 4:50pm	
	TOTAL BIRDS:	979	TIME AFIELD:	9:50	FT. MI.: 13.85
ROUTE:	Red Lock Trailhead south to Merriman Valley. Trail Mix in Peninsula was closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.				
OBSERVERS:	Douglas W. Vogus.		TEMP.:	33F ~ 70F	
CONDITIONS:	Chilly early, slowly warming and turning sunny with blue skies - very few clouds; eventually turning much warmer than the projected high of 59-degrees; a very beautiful day.				
TRAIL CONDITIONS:	Towpath Trail recently re-opened after last week's torrential downpours; some damage to the trail where Brandywine Creek overflowed the old culvert under the trail and washed away the crushed limestone causing some "ribbing" on the trail, and part of the old entrance road to the old Jaite Paper Mill was eroded and washed out at Brandywine Creek; a dead sycamore tree was undercut along the island north of Lock 30 and crashed through the railing along the trail north of Peninsula; all in all, the trail was in good shape, though.				
RIVER CONDITIONS:	Still high and raging - swift and muddy with few rocks showing and no sandbars visible.				

**FIVE YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL**

On April 02, 2016 wet set a census high for Fox Sparrow with a total of ten seen over the length of the census route. This big and robust sparrow is an early spring and late fall migrant and does not nest in Ohio. Overwintering birds are occasionally found from early December through March, but the best time to find them is mid-April and mid-November.

## APRIL 2020's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

### **FOX SPARROW (*Passerella iliaca*)**

**DESCRIPTION:**

The Fox Sparrow has four fairly distinct subspecies groups that differ by consistent plumage traits, range, and voice. Some authorities consider these subspecies groups to be separate species. Due to space and getting into a long-winded ornithological class about geographic variations, I'll write about the "red race" commonly found in the eastern U.S.

Sexes appear alike; heavily streaked breast, brick-red upperparts, bright rufous or reddish tail, gray around face blending in with reddish color and gray streaks through reddish back; bill is noticeably bi-colored, grayish on top and light yellowish on lower half.

**LENGTH:**

6 & 1/4" to 7 & 1/2"

**WINGSPREAD:**

10 & 1/2" to 11 & 3/4"

**VOICE:**

**SONG:** Male usually sings from concealed perch in thickets and in general area of nest. One of the finest, if not best, of singers among the sparrow family - a clear, exultant, melodious, flutelike warble composed of 7 or more phrases sweeter in the northern reddish subspecies, "too-weet-wiew too-weet tuck-soo-weet-wiew". **CALL:** A high, rising "seeep", given commonly on the ground or in thickets. **ALARM NOTE:** A sharp, loud "smack".

**HABITS:**

Forages on ground, scratches, kicking backward with both feet simultaneously so vigorously as to dig a hole in the ground, snow, or leaf litter rich in small animal life, however, essentially vegetarian; eats weed seeds, blueberries, grapes, and other wild fruit; also beetles, crane flies, chinch bugs, spiders, millipedes, etc.

**HABITAT:**

During migration, shrubby areas, hedgerows, and in woodlands with abundant understory. Will also visit birdfeeding stations preferably with ample cover nearby. Breeds in dense willow and alder thickets.

**NESTING:**

**NEST:** Built commonly on ground in thickets, on dry ground edge of bog, on dry hillsides, also in small spruces, willows along streams, small bushes; composed of twigs, mosses, rootlets, dried grasses, weed stems, chips, shreds of bark, cup lined with grasses, feathers, hairs of caribou, dogs, and horses. **EGGS:** May to July, 3 to 5 eggs, pale blue or pale green, thickly spotted with browns. **INCUBATION:** Mostly by female, 12 to 14 days.

**RANGE:**

Breeds in boreal forests and taiga of the far north from the Seward Peninsula in Alaska to Newfoundland and wintering lower thirds of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, southwest to most of Texas east to the Florida panhandle and the Atlantic coast from Cape Cod south.

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

The three other subspecies of this group are the "Sooty" that breeds along the Pacific coast from the Alaska Peninsula to northwestern Washington and they winter south to southern California. The "Slate-colored" birds breed across much of the Rocky Mountains and winter in California, Arizona, and New Mexico. The "Thick-billed" prefers montane thickets and chaparral and breeds in northern Baja California.

**STATUS:**

Common and the current population is stable.

Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the Fox Sparrow in Northeast Ohio.

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
rrrrrrrrrr	rrrrrrrrrr	rrruuuuuu	uuuuuuuu	rrroooooo	*****
Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
		oo	rrruuuuuu	uuuuuuuu	rrrrrrrrrr

- CCCCCCC = Common to Abundant. Frequently encountered in this region during this time of year.
- UUUUUUUU = Uncommon. Occurs regularly during this time of year but not frequently detected.
- RRRRRRRRR = Rare. These birds can occur more or less annually but are easily missed in their scant presence in the region.
- OOOOOOOO = Occasional. Limited history in this region and are not to be expected.
- \*\*\*\*\* = Accidental. Few records in the past 60 years. Not expected in this region during this time of year.
- ||||||||||| = Fluctuating Abundance. May occur some years yet absent other years. Irruptive or overwintering birds.

**History of the Fox Sparrow on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 - present.**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.					1			
FEB.								
MAR.								1
APR.	2		1	3	2	2	10*	4
MAY								
JUN.								
JUL.								
AUG.								
SEP.								
OCT.								
NOV.	3	1	1		1			1
DEC.	1							1

	2018	2019	2020	2021
JAN.				
FEB.				
MAR.	1			
APR.	6	3	6	
MAY				
JUN.				
JUL.				
AUG.				
SEP.				
OCT.				
NOV.	2		5	
DEC.				

**DID YOU KNOW?:** A Fox Sparrow that either never went north to its breeding grounds or arrived extremely late, spent most of June at Summit Metro Parks' Firestone Metro Park? The bird was seen from June 04 through June 26, 1989, and stayed around long enough to make it on the Greater Akron Audubon Society's Summer Breeding Bird Census. To this date, our only record on this census since its inception in 1978.

- \* = HIGHEST COUNT TOTAL ON CENSUS.
- BOLD # = HIGHEST COUNT FOR THAT YEAR.



The eastern "red" race of the Fox Sparrow is a common spring and fall migrant within the Cuyahoga Valley.

(photo by: Evan Lipton)

#### **APRIL'S DID YOU KNOW?**

##### **DID YOU KNOW?:**

*The race to find an overland route from the East to the Pacific Coast was akin to the Space Race? Many failed attempts led to President Thomas Jefferson settling on Captain Meriwether Lewis. At the time, Lewis wanted to lead the expedition, but at only 18 years of age, Jefferson passed him off as obviously too young and insufficiently trained.*

*Earlier, Thomas Walker was chosen, but the French and Indian War intervened before he could get started. Nothing came of the plan after the war.*

*Within weeks of the conclusion of the Revolutionary War, Jefferson wrote George Rogers Clark (Capt. William Clark's older brother). He thought it would take four or five years and regretted that his own business affairs precluded his going. Again, nothing happened.*

*In 1785, Jefferson was in Paris as minister to France. There he learned that Louis XVI was to be sending out an expedition to the Pacific Northwest under the command of Jean-Francois de Galaup, Comte de La Perouse. The French government said the expedition was strictly scientific, but Jefferson knew at once that La Perouse was looking for something more than the Northwest Passage. He wrote on August 14, "They [the French] give out that the object is merely for the improvement of our knowledge... Their loading and some other circumstances appear to me to indicate some other design; perhaps that of colonising on the West coast of America, or perhaps to establish one or more factories there for the fur trade." He added that the real question was whether the French were yet weaned from their desires to have colonies in North America. Admiral John Paul Jones reported to him that they had not, that the La Perouse expedition was preparing the way for French fur trade and colonization of the north-western coast.*

*The following summer, 1786, Jefferson met John Ledyard, who had sailed with Captain Cook and as a consequence was the first American to set foot in the Pacific Northwest. A born wanderer, a great talker, intense, dynamic, he convinced Jefferson that he could travel by land from Moscow to easternmost Siberia, cross the Bering Sea on a Russian fur-trade vessel, then walk*

across the North American continent and eventually march into the Capitol to announce that he had arrived to report on the West. Ledyard proposed to do this with two dogs. Jefferson was supportive. Ledyard set forth. He made it to Siberia, where the absurd idea died when Ledyard was arrested by Empress Catherine the Great and sent back to Poland.

La Perouse, meanwhile, had sailed around South America, come up to the northwestern coast, taken observations and scouted for trading posts, and set sail for home. In January 1788, he made port in Botany Bay, Australia. When he left Botany, he vanished. The wreckage of his vessels was found forty years later on an island north of the New Hebrides.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Thomas Jefferson then passed over Meriwether Lewis yet again, for, ironically, a Frenchman? He then chose French botanist Andre Michaux. Jefferson went over the instructions for Michaux in Washington. Because the country belonged to Spain, not the United States, Michaux should cross the Mississippi somewhere far enough north of the Spanish garrison in St. Louis to "avoid the risk of being stopped." He should then march west until he struck the Missouri, follow it to the mountains, get over them, and descend the Columbia River to the Pacific. Jefferson had selected Michaux because he was a trained scientist; botany, astronomy, mineralogy, and ethnology were among the subjects he had studied. Throughout, the instructions emphasized practical, useful knowledge. There was no hint of encouraging exploration for its own sake or merely to satisfy curiosity about what was out there. This was a true Enlightenment venture. It had, however, an anticlimactic ending. Michaux got started in June 1793, but had scarcely reached Kentucky when Jefferson discovered that he was a secret agent of the French Republic whose chief aim was to raise a western force to attack Spanish possessions beyond the Mississippi. At Jefferson's insistence, the French government recalled Michaux.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Eventually, Jefferson knew that Lewis was his man. Jefferson gave his reasons for picking Lewis to Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia: "Capt. Lewis is brave, prudent, habituated to the woods, & familiar with Indian manners & character. He is not regularly educated, but he possesses a great mass of accurate observation on all the subjects of nature which present themselves here, & will therefore readily select those only in his new route which shall be new. He has qualified himself for those observations of longitude & latitude necessary to fix the points of the line he will go over." The party departed in June of 1803.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** On September 23, 1806, Meriwether Lewis completed the first part of the work that had been his "darling project," and on which he had concentrated with single-minded intensity for the past four years. The second part of this great work, reporting on the results of his exploration to the president - and beyond him, to the people of America and of the world - would require a similar dedication. What he knew, and what he and Clark had recorded in their journals, papers, and maps, was invaluable - but of no value at all unless it was disseminated.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** It was Lewis's unhappy task to tell the president that his hope for an all-water route linking the Atlantic and Pacific was gone. So, even as he pulled into St. Louis in triumph, he carried the burden of knowing that the headline news to come out of the expedition was bad. Never would he hide the truth - Jefferson was above all a man of facts - but if he felt embarrassed by them, or defensive about them, if he went to great lengths to put the best possible face on what he was reporting, it was perhaps understandable.

"The Mississippi River valley in early September 1809 was hot, humid, buggy. Lewis's boat proceeded slowly, since it was necessary for the crew to rest during the middle part of the day. He was in terrible condition, possibly suffering from a malaria attack, certainly in a deep depression that caused him unbearable pain. Twice he tried to kill himself - whether by jumping overboard or with his pistol is not known - and he had to be restrained by the crew."

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

*The actual suicide of Meriwether Lewis is a very sad read, made even sadder by the fact that these delays to final publication of what he and Clark experienced were of his own doing. He carried the entire expedition with him at all times, failing to get the results of the expedition properly published. Eventually William Clark took the journals to Philadelphia, where he called on the men who had helped Lewis prepare for the expedition. After some false starts, Clark persuaded Nicholas Biddle to undertake the work. Biddle was only twenty-six years old, but he was a prodigy. He had been granted admission to the University of Pennsylvania at age ten. After three years, he had completed the requirements, but the university, citing his extreme youth, denied him a diploma. He went to Princeton, from which he graduated in 1801 at the age of fifteen. Biddle was the perfect choice. He threw himself into the work and did it magnificently. As Biddle expressed his fear, "the work will lose some of its interest by so much delay." It took him more than a year to find a publisher. It did not appear until 1814. For the next ninety years, Biddle's edition was the only account based on the journals. As a result, Lewis and Clark got no credit for most of their discoveries. Plants, rivers, animals, birds that they had described and named were newly discovered by naturalists, and the names that these men gave them were the ones that stuck. Lewis had cheated himself out of a rank not far below Darwin as a naturalist.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

*Not only did Alexander Wilson name two species of birds after both William Clark and Meriwether Lewis, but made sure Lewis's burial plot got the recognition it so deserved? Thomas Jefferson received the news of Lewis's death, via either the newspapers or through Major James Neely's letter to him. Neely had arrived at Grinder's Inn on the morning of October 11, after Lewis's death, and had buried him as "decently as I could." Lewis is buried today at the site of Grinder's Inn, along the Natchez Trace. Alexander Wilson saw to preparing a proper plot and putting a fence around it. A broken shaft, authorized by the Tennessee Legislature in 1849 as symbolic of "the violent and untimely end of a bright and glorious career," marks the spot.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

*The death by suicide of Meriwether Lewis truly was an American tragedy. Some three years after his death, in a short biography of Lewis, Thomas Jefferson went into more detail of Lewis's afflictions:*

"Governor Lewis had from early life been subject to hypochondriac affections. It was a constitutional disposition in all the nearer branches of the family name, & was more immediately inherited by him from his father... While he lived with me in Washington, I observed at times sensible depressions of mind, but not knowing their constitutional source, I estimated their course by what I had seen in the family. During his Western expedition the constant exertion which that required of all the faculties of body & mind, suspended these distressing affections; but after his establishment at St. Louis in sedentary occupations they returned upon him with redoubled vigor, and began seriously to alarm his friends...

At about 3 o'clock in the night [of October 10-11] he did the deed which plunged his friends into affliction and deprived his country of one of her most valued citizens."

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

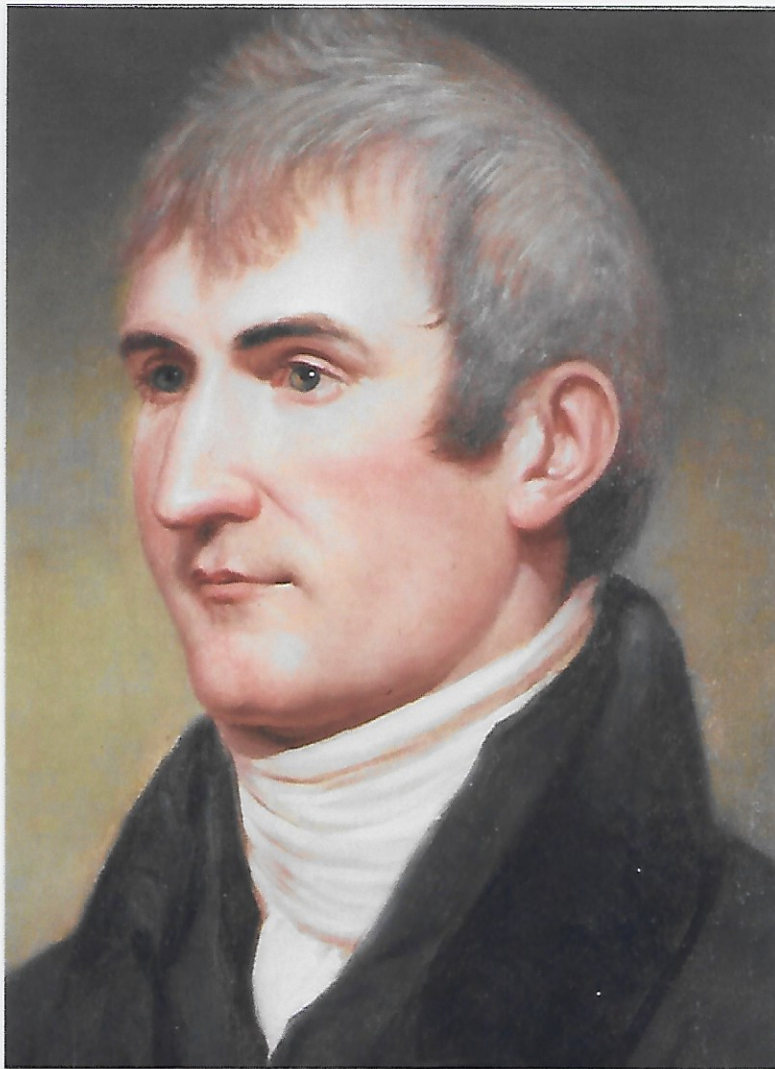
*There is considerable literature on the possibility that Lewis did not commit suicide but was murdered? A suggestion has been made that Lewis's mental problems stemmed not from hypochondria, as Jefferson would have it, or a manic-depression syndrome, but from the effects of an advanced case of syphilis. It is more intriguing and speculative than convincing. What is convincing is the initial reaction of the two men who knew Lewis best and loved him most. William Clark and Thomas Jefferson immediately concluded that the story of Lewis's suicide was entirely believable, Clark on the basis of his intimate knowledge of Lewis's mental state and Jefferson's observations while tutoring him for the Corps of Discovery. Many factors certainly played a part - family history, alcoholism, opium addiction, failed courtships of women, the realization that there would be no all-water route to the Pacific, the stresses of trying to get his papers published, the debt he amassed to his many creditors, and the overall lack of adjustment to civilian life after such an amazing journey, knowing that nothing else would ever compare to it.*

*See You on the Trail! ~ Doug*



*Named by Alexander Wilson in honor of Meriwether Lewis, the Lewis's Woodpecker is found out West and has a unique coloration unlike any other North American woodpecker species.*

*(photo by: Ian Routley)*



An 1810 portrait of early adventurer Meriwether Lewis by Charles Willson Peale.

(Courtesy of Independence National Historical Park)

**A special thanks goes to my Uncle Richard Vogus, who gave me the book on the Lewis & Clark expedition by Stephen E. Ambrose ~ an excellent account of the journey and one I would have surely signed on for!**

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