

HISTORY & FACTS of the APRIL CENSUS

APRIL	14-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	2021	2022	2023				
55 / 1,024	57 / 979	59 / 698	56 / 816	50 / 759				

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 : 829.8 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

04/01/23	TOTAL SPECIES:	50	START / END TIME:	7:15am - 4:00pm		
	TOTAL BIRDS:	759	TIME AFIELD:	8:45	FT. MI.:	13.85
ROUTE:	Red Lock Trailhead south to Merriman Valley, with a stop at Trail Mix in Peninsula.					
TEMP.:	49F ~ 63F ~ 44F	CONDITIONS:	Cool early with south winds, turning sunny with blue skies and no clouds; turning warm with us feeling overdressed; front moved in from the west at 11:50am, turning dark and gray at 12:00pm, with the worst of it appearing north of us, just south of Peninsula; by 12:10pm the stormfront reached us just south of Lock 28 (Deep Lock); rumbles of thunder had us putting on our rain gear; the storm reached us with small hail for about three minutes, temperatures dropping, then rain and into a full-scale thunder and lightning storm with high winds and heavy rain from south of Deep Lock to Szalay's first, northernmost corn field - some gusts of 50-plus miles per hour; storm and dark clouds moved off to the east with brief, partial clearing; cloudy and windy from Szalay's northernmost field to just south of Ira Rd. Cloudy with temperatures dropping even more for the rest of the census, turning colder with us now feeling underdressed; winds shifting to west then northwest; light sprinkles/sleet from 3:40pm to end of hike at 4:00pm - basically all four seasons in just under nine hours!			
TRAIL CONDITIONS:	Horrible; plenty of wet and sloppy conditions with much puddling from first rain storm coming through at 3:00am; as we reached Hunt Farm Visitor Center after our noon storm, the extent of the damage was known: a large cottonwood snapped off at the base and crashed into the Hunt Visitor Center on Bolanz Rd. The damage could have been worse for the little seasonal visitor center, part of the tree scarred the building and knocked off some of the downspouting on the front porch and the two metal trash/recycle cans and the George Washington bench took direct hits from					

(continued...)

the tree and were squashed like aluminum cans and splintered to pieces, respectively. A CVNP park ranger was there photographing the damage, as did we. Had we been a little further along on the trail, we undoubtedly would have been under that porch to get out of the rain! Another tree came down in the Bolanz Rd. parking lot, covering about four parking spaces, but luckily no one was parked there - after all, only an idiot would be out in this weather! Another tree across the Towpath Trail there and a large black walnut along the trail were snapped off at the base, more proof that this was either some seriously fierce direct-line winds or some sort of microburst. From there, in addition to all the puddling and sloppy conditions, the rest of the trail was littered with large to small branches or tops of trees. Thankfully, all of this mayhem was just south of us by about only a half-mile, or "bird forensics" would be piecing this write-up together as our final hike!

RIVER CONDITIONS:	High, swift, and muddy - almost no rockbars or sandbars showing.
OBSERVERS:	John Henry, George Novosel (Red Lock Trailhead to Ira Trailhead), Douglas W. Vogus.

TEN YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL

On April 05, 2014 we had our second sighting of a Great Egret on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census. This bird was seen at "Lock 29 Marsh", the wetland area just north of the Lock 29 parking lot in Peninsula. In all, we've only had three sightings of this species and all of single birds. The first was in May of 2010, observed flying above the Ohio Turnpike and headed due west, and the third sighting was also in April, in 2018, at the Ira Beaver Marsh.

APRIL 2024's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*)

DESCRIPTION: All-white at all seasons; sexes outwardly similar but males average larger; has yellow bill (the smaller Snowy Egret and immature Little Blue Heron have bills mostly black, and white phase Reddish Egret has flesh-colored, black-tipped bill); no crest or head plumes but beginning in January both sexes have splendid cape (nuptial train) of up to 54 long, flowing white plumes growing from the back which are lost by summer; the shed plumes, soiled and worn, are seldom found. Tall, slim-necked, has proportionately longer and broader wings than most other white herons. **NONBREEDING ADULT:** The sexes are similar. The plumage is entirely white. The eyes, lores, and bill are yellow; the legs and feet are black. **BREEDING ADULT:** It develops long, graceful plumes (aigrettes) on the back that extend beyond the tail. Unlike many other herons and egrets, there are no plumes on the head or neck. The lores flush light green and the bill turns orangish. **IMMATURE:** It looks similar to a nonbreeding adult.

LENGTH: 37" - 41" **WINGSPAN:** 51" to 55" **WEIGHT:** 32 oz. to 40 oz.

VOICE: Generally silent except when nesting or disturbed, when it may utter "kraak" call, similar to Great Blue Heron, although not as deep and raspier, or "cuk-cuk-cuk" notes.

HABITS: Has slender form, movements in treetops are light and graceful; flight is buoyant. Unlike other herons, does not feed at night but after feeding during day, singly or in

small groups, at sunset flies in flock after flock to arrive from all directions at a communal roost in trees or shrubbery. Feeds commonly in salt marshes and freshwater ponds and marshes, on fishes, frogs, salamanders, snakes, crayfishes, mice, voles, cotton rats, aquatic insects, mole crickets, grasshoppers, moths, etc.

NESTING: **NEST:** Either singly or in colonies, usually with other herons, ibises, wood storks, cormorants, anhingas, in woods of swamps, mangroves, cypresses, willows near water, nest usually about 20 to 40 feet above ground in medium-sized trees, sometimes in bulrushes or cat-tails only 1 to 4 feet above water; a flimsy platform of sticks and twigs or stems of marsh plants with little or no lining. **EGGS:** In Florida, December to January and into May or June; February in Louisiana; April to July farther north; 1 to 6 eggs, usually 3 to 4 or 4 to 5 eggs, pale blue-green in color. **INCUBATION:** 23 to 24 days; young first fly about 42 days after hatching.

HABITAT: Freshwater and saltwater marshes, mudflats, rice fields, lakes, ponds, rivers, etc.

RANGE: The most cosmopolitan egret; found on all continents except Antarctica. **BREEDING:** In shrubs or trees in colonies with other wading birds. Along the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts, the Mississippi River floodplain, and locally elsewhere in the interior. Also in extreme southern Canada, the West Indies, Central America and South America. **MIGRATION:** Partially migratory; birds mostly resident along coasts and in sothern U.S. Postbreeding dispersal may carry birds north of regular summer range. **WINTER:** Locally in the West and throughout the Southeast; also south of the United States. **VAGRANT:** Casual to southern Alaska and Atlantic Canada; also to southern Africa, Britain, Canary Islands, Clipperton Island, and Scandinavia.

STATUS: Great Egret numbers were decimated by the plume trade in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but they have largely recovered. Some populations are still increasing.

DID YOU KNOW?: In 1930, Ohio experienced its first Great Egret invasion of the twentieth century. This invasion produced sightings of 755 egrets from 110 localities in 45 counties. The largest concentraions totaled 55 in Portage County, 46 near Toledo, and flocks of 20-25 elsewhere. Late summer egrets were regularly reported throughout the 1930s, with invasions during 1933 and 1936. The 1933 movement brought a maximum of 190 egrets along western Lake Erie anf 52 near Youngstown. In 1936, their invasion was most noticeable in the western counties, with early August totals of 64 at Lake Loramie and 212 at Lake St. Marys.

The 1940s brought the first Great Egret breeding records. A single pair was discovered nesting within a Great Blue Heron colony along Sandusky Bay in Sandusky County during 1940. In 1946, a colony of 25 pairs of Great Egrets was discovered on West Sister Island. Away from Lake Erie, 1-2 pairs nested at Lake St. Marys between 1942 and 1944. Their status was also changing as more egrets appeared during the spring. They are now common in western Lake Erie marshes.

DID YOU KNOW?: The largest Great Blue Heron and Great Egret rookery in the United States' Great Lakes region is right here in Ohio? West Sister Island National Wildlife Refuge, part of the Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge Complex, is roughly nine miles off shore in Lake Erie. The 82-acre island is accessed by permit only and surveys in 2022 found 1,170 Great Egret nests, up from 913 nests in 2021. Also on the island were 562 Great Blue Heron nests, (down from 1,037 nests in 2021); 382 Black-crowned Night-Heron nests, (up from 338 nests in 2021); and 2,458 Double-crested Cormorant nests, (down from 2,602 nests in 2021).

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

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
		**OOOrrrr	uuuuuuuu	uuuuuuuu	rrrrrrrrrr
Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
rrrruuuuuu	uuuuuuuu	uuuuuuurr	rrrrrrrrrr	rrrrrrrrrr	oo

- CCCCCCCC** = 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.
- rrrrrrrrrr** = 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 Great Egret on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 ~ present.

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

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
JAN.							
FEB.							
MAR.							
APR.	1*						
MAY							
JUN.							
JUL.							
AUG.							DID YOU KNOW?:
SEP.							A Great Egret in the
OCT.							National Zoo in Wash-
NOV.							ington, D.C., lived to be
DEC.							8 years, 7 months old.

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

But, one wild bird, banded in Ohio, and unfortunately shot in Ohio, was 22 years, 7 months, old!



No head plumes? No problem! Few North American birds can rival the spectacular breeding display of the Great Egret. Unfortunately, the cost was high to the species during the heyday of the millinery trade, all in the name of "fashion."

(photo by: Rebecca Field)

CRIMES OF FASHION: GILDED AGE MILLINERY AND THE PLIGHT OF BIRDS

website < thefrickpittsburgh.org >

It's the iconic fashion statement of the Gilded Age: floor-length full skirts balanced by an enormous picture hat adorned with strikingly arranged feathers. But this look came not just at a steep price in the shops; it also exacted a punishing toll on the world's bird populations.

While the Western millinery trade had been using feathers as adornments for hats and hairpieces for decades, the trend reached its peak - though, for birds, one could say nadir - in the decades prior to the First World War.

Ostrich plumes were perennial favorites, and, despite their size, they were one of the more sustainable choices, as the birds were farmed and their feathers plucked up to twice a year, not requiring any culling of the birds themselves. South Africa was the center of the world's ostrich plume industry. While ostrich plumes could be harvested without harming the birds themselves, other birds were used in their entirety. Whole songbirds, owls, wading birds, and even corvids could be seen atop hats across the Western Hemisphere. As with fabric choices and dress styles, hat adornments also changed with the seasons. The spring and summer brought more demand for the brightly colored plumage of exotic, tropical birds - referred to in the industry as the 'fancy-feather trade'.

Obtaining feathers for the fancy-feather trade was a global process. Producing enough birds to satisfy the demand involved large-scale hunting expeditions, during which hundreds of birds would be harvested at a time. Hunters in South American, African, and Asian countries relied on the knowledge of natives to lead them to their bounty. Birds would be shot with dull arrows, so as not to damage the feathers, and then the harvested bird skins would be smoked to preserve them before being shipped off to market. In many species, only the males were hunted for the trade, as their feathers are generally more colorful and showy - the most prominent examples being male pheasants and birds-of-paradise, which were highly sought after for their feathers' unusual textures and colors. In some species, however, the coloration of males and females is identical, and so both sexes were hunted extensively, which led to the near extinction of the Great Egret and Snowy Egret. A few species, such as the Carolina Parakeet - ("The Towpath Traveler" - August 2020) the United States' only native parrot species - ultimately did not survive the fancy-feather craze.

Once harvested from the wild, bird products would be processed by milliners using bleach and other harsh chemicals to prevent decay. If a bird was not to be used atop a hat in its entirety, it would be separated into smaller pieces. One popular adornment was the aigrette, or fan-shaped array of feathers. One hat accent could represent two or more birds' worth of desired feathers. Feathers and skins would often be dyed to match the fabric of hats and dresses, black being the most frequently used to create accessories suitable for periods of mourning, during which women would not wear colors for months or years at a time.

Large feathered hats became a microcosm of Gilded Age excess. They simultaneously represented the ideas of conspicuous consumption, ostentatious displays of wealth, and man conquering nature. The quintessential symbol of the wastefulness and destructive nature of the industry is perhaps the fact that on its fateful maiden voyage, the most valuable cargo aboard the Titanic was over 40 cases of feathers destined for New York milliners. The crates were insured for over \$2.3 million in today's dollars. At the time, only diamonds were more valuable pound for pound.

The increasing destruction by the industry became the target of grassroots activism by some of the very consumers who had made the trade so successful: wealthy women. In 1896, socialite Harriet Lawrence Hemenway and her cousin Minna B. Hall founded what became the Massachusetts Audubon Society by hosting tea parties in their homes, during which they would encourage their peers to stop wearing feathered hats. The organization grew into the network of local chapters we know today as the National Audubon Society. It was the first formal effort in the United States to enlist ordinary citizens in bird protection activities. The organizations lobbying resulted in the passage of a series of laws governing the feather trade, such as the 1900 Lacey Act, which prohibited the importation of wildlife that had been harvested against local laws in its country of origin. The farthest-reaching and still the most robust of the laws to come out of bird protection activism in this period was the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, signed into law by President Woodrow Wilson in 1918. The law placed all migratory birds under federal protection, making it illegal to kill or possess parts of the covered species, even if they were naturally molted.

In addition to growing legal protections, other factors also influenced the waning popularity of feathers on headware. As war broke out in Central Europe in 1914 and women were needed in the war effort, clothing in general became more practical and less ornamental, and hat sizes shrank. By the 1920s, demand was almost nonexistent. Frank Smith, appointed South Africa's "Special Ostrich Commissioner" to the 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition in London, wrote of his thwarted effort to sell his country's plumes, "Small hats and short skirts had come in, and the ostrich feather simply will not 'go' with either of them."

HOW TWO WOMEN ENDED THE DEADLY FEATHER TRADE

website < smithsonianmag.com >

Birds like the Great and Snowy Egret were on the brink of extinction, all because of their sought-after plumage.

John James Audubon, the pre-eminent 19th-century painter of birds, considered the Snowy Egret to be one of America's surpassingly beautiful species. The egret, he noted, was also abundant. "I have visited some of their breeding grounds," Audubon wrote, "where several hundred pairs were to be seen, and several nests were placed on the branches of the same bush, so low at times that I could easily see into them." Audubon insisted that birds were so plentiful in North America that no depredation - whether hunting, the encroachment of cities and farmlands, or any other act of man - could extinguish a species. Yet little more than half a century after Audubon's death in 1851, the last Passenger Pigeon - ("The Towpath Traveler" - July 2020) - a species once numbering in the billions - was living out its days in the Cincinnati Zoo, to be replaced shortly thereafter by a final handful of Carolina Parakeets, also soon to die in captivity.

The Snowy Egret - and its slightly larger cousin, the Great Egret - were similarly imperiled by the late 1800s, when fashionable women began wearing hats adorned with feathers, wings and even entire taxidermied birds. The egrets' brilliant white plumage, especially the gossamer wisps of feather that become more prominent during mating season, was in high demand among milliners. The plume trade was a sordid business. Hunters killed and skinned mature birds, leaving orphaned hatchlings to starve or be eaten by crows. It was a common thing for a rookery of several hundred birds to be attacked by the plume hunters, and in two or three days be "utterly destroyed," wrote William Hornaday, director of the New York Zoological Society and former chief taxidermist at the Smithsonian.

The main drivers of the plume trade were millinery centers in New York and London. Hornaday, who described London as "the Mecca of the feather killers of the world," calculated that in a single nine-month period in the London market had consumed feathers from nearly 130,000 egrets. And egrets were not the only species under threat. In 1886, it was estimated, 50 North American species were being slaughtered for their feathers. Egrets and other wading birds were being decimated until two crusading Boston socialites, Harriet Hemenway and her cousin, Minna B. Hall, set off a revolt. Their boycott of the trade would culminate in the formation of the National Audubon Society and passage of the Weeks-McLean Law, also known as the Migratory Bird Act, by Congress on March 4, 1913. The law, a landmark in American conservation history, outlawed market hunting and forbade interstate transport of birds.

Harriet Lawrence Hemenway and her husband Augustus, a philanthropist who was heir to a shipping fortune, lived in a tony section of Back Bay. Hemenway, a Boston Brahmin but also something of an iconoclast (she once invited Booker T. Washington as a houseguest when Boston hotels refused him), would live to 102. A passionate amateur naturalist, she was known for setting out on birding expeditions wearing unthinkably unfashionable white sneakers. In 1896, after Hemenway read an article describing the plume trade, she enlisted the help of Hall. The cousins consulted the Blue Book, Boston's social register, and launched a series of tea parties at which they urged their friends to stop wearing feathered hats. "We sent out circulars," Hall later recalled, "asking the women to join a society for the protection of birds, especially the egret. Some women joined and some who preferred to wear the feathers would not join." Buoyed by their success - some 900 women joined this upper-crust boycott - Hemenway and Hall that same year organized the Massachusetts Audubon Society. Audubon societies formed in more than a dozen states; their federation would eventually be called the National Audubon Society.

In 1900, Congress passed the Lacey Act, which prohibited transport across state lines of birds taken in violation of state laws. But the law, poorly enforced, did little to slow the commerce of feathers. Getting in the way of the plume trade could be dangerous. In 1905, in an incident that generated national outrage, a warden in south Florida, Guy M. Bradley, was shot and killed while attempting to arrest a plume hunter - who was subsequently acquitted by a sympathetic jury. The watershed moment arrived in 1913, when the Weeks-McLean Law, sponsored by Massachusetts Representative John Weeks and Connecticut Senator George McLean, effectively ended the plume trade. In 1920, after a series of inconclusive court challenges to Weeks-McLean, the Supreme Court upheld a subsequent piece of legislation, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, writing for the majority, declared that the protection of birds was in the "national interest." Without such measures, he declared, one could foresee a day when no birds would survive for any power - state or federal - to regulate.



A flight of fancy? Millions, if not billions of birds, met their fate to adorn hats in the late 1800s through the early 1900s.

(photo courtesy of: National Audubon Society)

