

**CUYAHOGA VALLEY TOWPATH TRAIL CENSUS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER - DECEMBER 2023  
(CVTTC)**

**HISTORY & FACTS of the DECEMBER CENSUS**

DECEMBER	13-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS							
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
45 / 1,480	42 / 763	42 / 999	47 / 1,425	40 / 1,790	39 / 1,074	47 / 653	48 / 980	43 / 833
2019	2020	2021	2022					
45 / 810	36 / 758	49 / 1,137	42 / 1,324					

Most Species seen in December : 49 on 12/03/2021.

Most Individual Birds seen in December : 1,790 Total Birds on 12/06/2014.

Fewest Species seen in December : 36\* on 12/05/2020.

(\* = 36 is the lowest species total ever on the census)

Fewest Individual Birds seen in December : 653 on 12/03/2016.

Species Average in December : 43.4 Species.

Total Individuals Average in December : 1,078.9 Total Birds.

Lowest Temperature on December Census : 19-degrees F on 12/04/2010.

Highest Temperature on December Census : 57-degrees F on 12/01/2012.

Longest Time Afield on December Census : 9:00 hours & 40 minutes on 12/02/2022.

Shortest Time Afield on December Census : 6 hours & 15 minutes on 12/04/2010.

**LAST DECEMBER'S FIELD REPORT**

<b>12/02/22</b>	<b>TOTAL SPECIES:</b>	42	<b>START / END TIME:</b>	7:20am - 5:00pm		
	<b>TOTAL BIRDS:</b>	1,324	<b>TIME AFIELD:</b>	9:40	<b>FT. MI.:</b>	13.51
<b>ROUTE:</b>	Red Lock Trailhead south to Merriman Valley - with a stop at Trail Mix in Peninsula.					
<b>TEMP.:</b>	29F ~ 48F ~ 44F ~ 45F ~ 44F	<b>CONDITIONS:</b>	Chilly early with light southerly breezes, gray and cloudy until 12:30pm; then partly sunny until 2:00pm; then turning gray and cloudy again; five minutes of very light sprinkles at 2:15pm, and another five minutes of light sprinkles again at 4:50pm.			
	<b>OBSERVERS:</b>	John Henry and Douglas W. Vogus.				
<b>TRAIL CONDITIONS:</b>	Frozen early, thawing out to wet and muddy in some parts.					
<b>RIVER CONDITIONS:</b>	Slightly above normal from rains on 11/30.					

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Much like August of 2023 with the bat species, the Little Brown Myotis, I don't have any high tallies for birds for this month - they are currently exhausted. And, after all, this is an ongoing record of just about everything seen along the Towpath Census route. Birds, of course, are the main subject, but mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fishes, butterflies, moths, dragonflies, flowers, trees, etc., are all to be experienced and written about. The Northern Short-tailed Shrew is, trust me, an interesting subject, and one I'm sure you will enjoy! How about Ohio's only poisonous mammal!? That's what I thought...!

**ELEVEN YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL**

On 12/01/2012 we had our second high count of the very common, but easily overlooked, Northern Short-tailed Shrew - one of the smallest of Ohio's resident mammals. Often heard - seldom seen, their squeaks and shrieks while fighting over territory are their best giveaway, unless you happen to see one quickly streaking across the trail, never far from cover.

## DECEMBER 2023's MAMMAL SPECIES PROFILE

### NORTHERN SHORT-TAILED SHREW (*Blarina brevicauda*)

**DESCRIPTION:** *The largest shrew in North America. Solid gray above and below, lead in color; short tail; no external ears; eyes so small they are barely apparent. Skull has 32 teeth.*

**LENGTH:** 3 & 3/4" to 5"      **WEIGHT:** 1/2 ounce to 1 ounce (14 to 29 grams)

**VOICE:** *High-pitched squeaks, squeals, or shrieks.*

**HABITS:** *A voracious eater, consuming from half to more than its own weight per day, the Northern Short-tailed Shrew feeds on snails, earthworms, centipedes, beetles, and other invertebrates, and quantities of the tiny subterranean fungus "Endogone." It sometimes feeds on mice, particularly nest young when mouse populations are very high, and it will occasionally eat smaller shrews. Using its sturdy snout as well as its powerful forefeet, this species excavates underground runways, which it patrols for prey mainly in early morning and late afternoon. Males mark their burrows with secretions from well-developed glands on the hips and belly; other males looking for mates will not enter burrows so marked. This system of territorial marking helps prevent meetings between individuals of this species, which often result in fierce combat. However, fights usually end when one shrew assumes the submissive posture of lying on its back, allowing the other to flee. Mates, however, may form unions that are more or less permanent.*

**HABITAT:** *Forests, grasslands, marshes, brushy areas; not restricted. In warmer, drier parts of range, more confined to woods and wet areas.*

**BREEDING:** *Bulky nests, 6 to 8 inches wide, of shredded grass or leaves beneath a log or stump. 4 to 8 young born from spring throughout the year. Gestation period from 17 to 21 days; Two to three litters per year; young born naked and pink, about the size of a honeybee at birth; eyes and ears closed. Burrows are less than 1 inch across and wider than high.*

**RANGE:** *Southeastern Canada and northeast United States south to Nebraska, Missouri, Kentucky, and in mountains to Alabama. Isolated populations in northeast North Carolina and west-central Florida. Home range is 1/2 to 1 acre. Populations as high as 25 per acre, usually fewer.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *The Northern Short-tailed Shrew and the Southern Short-tailed Shrew were previously considered the same species? The two are now recognized as separate since they remain distinct where they occur together in Nebraska.*

**STATUS:** *The Northern Short-tailed Shrew is one of the most common North American mammals.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *The shrews of the genus "Blarina" are unique among mammals in producing poison in their salivary glands? This poison is apparently used to paralyze prey, such as snails and earthworms, which can then be stored for future use. The saliva is not dangerous to humans, but a bite may be painful for several days.*

**Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the N. Short-tailed Shrew in Northeast Ohio.**

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC
Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC

**NOTE: This Mammal is a year-round resident in Ohio. Disregard bird abundancy descriptions below.**

- 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.
- 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 Northern Short-tailed Shrew on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 ~ present.**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.								
FEB.								
MAR.								
APR.								
MAY								
JUN.		<b>2*</b>		<b>1</b>				
JUL.						<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	
AUG.								
SEP.								
OCT.		<b>1</b>						
NOV.								
DEC.			<b>2*</b>					

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
JAN.						<b>1</b>
FEB.						
MAR.		<b>1</b>				
APR.						
MAY					<i>1 (dead)</i>	
JUN.						
JUL.					<i>1 (dead)</i>	<b>1</b>
AUG.						
SEP.						
OCT.						
NOV.			<b>1</b>			
DEC.						

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

## MORE NEWS ON SHREWS...

### **SHREWS - FAMILY SORICIDAE**

Shrews look somewhat like mice but have a long, slender, pointed snout, a continuous row of needle-sharp teeth, tiny eyes, and five clawed toes on both forefeet and hindfeet (mice have four toes on their forefeet). The velvety fur of shrews, as in moles, can lie forward or backward, facilitating movement in burrows. Shrews range in size from less than 1 & 3/8 inches (35mm) long to 7 & 1/8 inches (180mm). Among the world's smallest mammals, weighing no more than 1/16 ounce (2g), are Savi's Pygmy Shrew (*Suncus etruscus*), found in Africa and the Mediterranean region, and a population of the Pygmy Shrew (*Sorex hoyi*), found in southern Indiana. Many shrews have high-pitched, squeaky voices, and some employ ultrasonic sounds for echolocation, like bats. All 33 species of North American shrews have teeth with chestnut-colored tips.

"Busy as a beaver?", shrews are busier! Exceedingly active and nervous, shrews dart about constantly. Their life span is one or two years; most live less than a year. If a shrew is excited or frightened, its heart may beat 1,200 times per minute. These small animals may be literally frightened to death by capture or a loud noise. A shrew's energy output surpasses that of any other mammal. Because of its high metabolism, it feeds frequently, both day and night, resting during intervals between meals. Some species may consume more than their own weight in food per day, eating mainly invertebrates, but also plants, fungi, and small mammals, usually carrion or nest young. Shrews in the wild often undergo daily torpor, reducing their metabolic rate and resulting food requirements. Often several species of shrews occur in size-ranked communities, in which large, medium, and small species generally feed on different-size foods, thus helping to avoid competition among species.

Generally solitary, shrews fight to defend their nest areas and viciously battle any animal they perceive as an attacker, including their own kind. They must engage in complex courtship behavior to progress from aversion to copulation. Musk glands on their flanks exude an odor thought to be repellent to some carnivores, such as cats, which often kill shrews but won't eat them. However, the glands are probably more important for territorial marking and sexual recognition than for discouraging predators, as shrews are consumed by owls, hawks, snakes, and some mammals.

Females may have one or more litters per year, each containing 2 to 10 young, which are born blind, pink, and hairless. An unusual habit, probably unique to some shrews, has been observed in several species of Old World Shrew, including the Asian Musk Shrew (*Suncus murinus*) and the Common Shrew (*Sorex araneus*) of Europe, and is suspected in other species: When a litter of unweaned young is disturbed, sometimes even at the slightest upset such as the sound of rain or a change in temperature, each juvenile uses its mouth to grasp the base of the tail of its closest neighbor, forming a caravan with the mother in the lead. From a distance, the moving chain might be mistaken for a small snake.

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

Shrews run the gamut of both habitat and habits? From the Pribilof Island Shrew, in the Saint Paul Islands west of Alaska, of which little is known about its biology, to the Arizona Shrew of the dry mountainous regions of the Southwest, which was first described in 1977, to the Water Shrew, which can dive and forage underwater, and once it stops swimming, air trapped in the fur pops the animal back to the surface like a cork!



*Even Mighty Mouse can't keep up with the frenetic pace of the Northern Short-tailed Shrew! One of Ohio's most common mammals - and one species most Ohioans know very little about.*

*(photo by: Jim Petranka)*

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

*Growing up in Cuyahoga Falls from the mid-1970's on, and graduating in 1985, there was always an unknown gray area in regards to old Hardy Rd. and the landfill that existed there. It was sort of a no-man's land back then - always off-limits, not part of the then "Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area," an odd area of "not quite Akron, not quite Northampton, and not quite Cuyahoga Falls" - and the urban legend talked about in school that no one really knew the facts about - "Hardy Rd. blew up and a bunch of people died! That's why it's closed!" So... let's get down to the facts and dispel this urban legend once and for all!*

**METHANE CONDEMNS 11 SUBURBAN AKRON HOMES**

*David Henry felt ill and could not sleep. His wife and three young daughters often felt the same way. Mr. Henry moved to the family room to be near the warm fireplace in his three-bedroom suburban house, near the city's 215-acre landfill on Hardy Rd. When he glanced at the ceiling he saw dancing blue flames. The family escaped, three out the front door and two out the back. A moment later an explosion shook the frame house and the Henry's watched the building burn.*

*They did not know the house had filled with methane, a colorless, odorless, flammable gas. "It took the fire department minutes to respond, and it was already gone," Mr. Henry said. "The fire was so fast and so intense. When we opened the doors, that let in oxygen, and it exploded. It literally blew the walls right off the house." City officials said the cause appeared to be methane gas that had formed underground in landfill garbage and seeped into nearby residential property in suburban Northampton Township. Ten other houses in a one-mile stretch of Hardy Rd. were evacuated. The road was closed to traffic and posted with a sign saying, "Explosive Area - No Trespassing."*

*In the seven months since the explosion on March 21, the residents have been able to return to their houses for one hour each Wednesday evening and Saturday afternoon, and then only after signing a liability waiver for the police. The residents, who say they were frustrated in their efforts to be compensated by the city, hired a lawyer, Paul Weimer. Mr. Weimer, who said the city refused to settle with the residents for \$1.6 million, sued in May on behalf of the 11 families. He asked compensation for their loss plus punitive damages of \$1 million for each family. Mr. Weimer described the neighborhood as one of \$50,000 to \$175,000 homes built some 20 to 30 years ago.*

*Harold Stubbs, the city law director, said the houses were not worth as much of the residents believed and their demands were too high. The 11 civil trials are scheduled separately before Judge James P. Winter in Summit County Common Pleas Court. The Henry's case will be the first, starting November 29. "It's not just a financial burden, it's an emotional thing for all of us," said Tammy Heffernan, one of the displaced people. "We're kicked out of our house. Nobody has given us one cent for anything. The city has insurance coverage. They could have settled this thing a long time ago." Mr. Stubbs said that the city admitted liability but that compensation had to be within reason. The complexity of the cases, he said, leaves unresolved how much would be eventually paid by the city's insurance carrier. "Originally, I wanted to be done with this thing," Mr. Henry said. "I wanted to get on with my life. But they've insulted us. They've slapped us in the face."*

*The presence of methane, created naturally in landfills by decomposing garbage, became known in 1983, when Donald Thursby, a next-door neighbor of the Henry's, saw bubbles in a fish pond on his property, Mr. Weimer said. "It was discovered there was a fissure running parallel with Hardy Rd., and gas was coming out of it to such an extent you could put your hand there and feel the pressure of the gas," Mr. Weimer said. "The service director of the city ordered the operator of the landfill to gather clay from the landfill site and fill in the fissure and plug up the seepage of gas," he added. "It was natural that the gas would continue to build up. It was a time bomb." The city agreed to install four monitoring devices to keep check on the methane levels. Three monitors were put in, but Mr. Weimer said the one planned nearest the Henry's property was not installed. "We said the first week after the explosion we were willing to accept all responsibility that flowed from damages resulting in our operation of the Hardy Rd. landfill," Mr. Stubbs said. "We could not agree on a purchase price."*

*From "The New York Times" November 11, 1984*

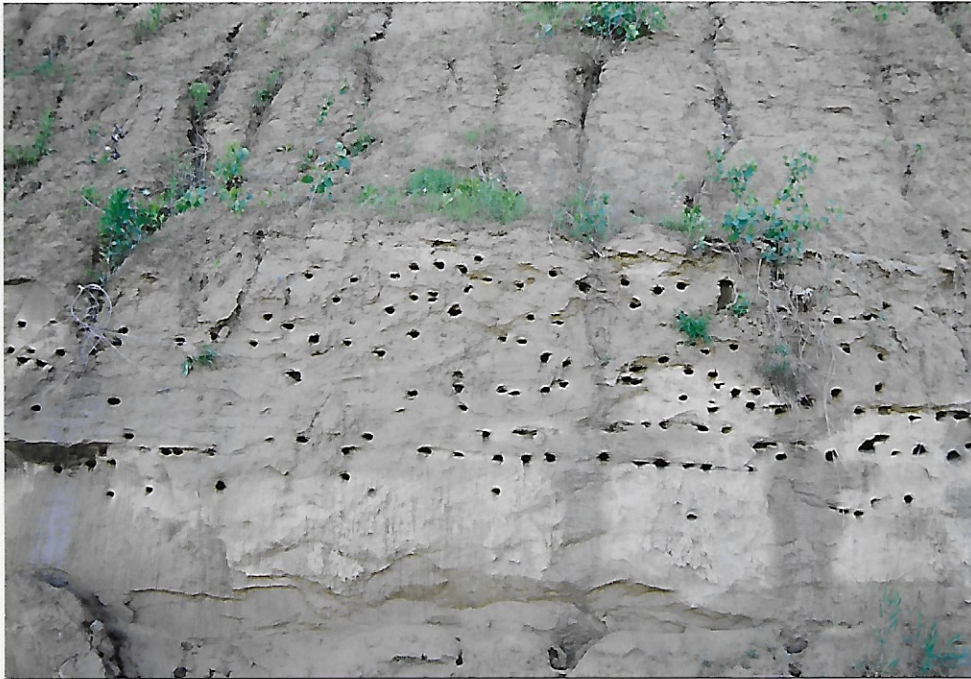
**DID YOU KNOW?:** *I lived on Hardy Rd. (the eastern, still open end) from March of 1997 to January of 2002? The section between Theiss Rd. to the west and Northampton Rd. to the east was a very, very "birdy" area and I amassed a yard list of 157 different bird species in that short amount of time! By comparison, where we currently live, our yard bird list stands at 144 bird species since December of 2003! The benefit of that yard was an old gas well tower at the end of the driveway that I would sit up on most weekends in the early morning or in the late afternoon and just "sky watch." Many great bird sightings were around this area, including a June sighting of an adult Laughing Gull during the annual Greater Akron Audubon Society's Summer Breeding Bird Census, currently the only sighting of this southern species on the census, as well as my first ever sightings of Great Black-backed Gulls in Summit County. The reason? Gulls love landfills, and we had one just down the road!*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *One of the benefits of living on Hardy Rd. during the annual Greater Akron Audubon Society's Summer Breeding Bird Census was that I was already living in that area! The fenced-off, closed section west of Theiss Rd. was more temptation than a chronic bird watcher could resist! Yes - I snuck in, and I snuck in often - even when it wasn't the summer census. My motto then was, "It's only trespassing if you get caught!" Later, through the proper channels, I was able to census it "legally", but I was doing far less harm than the deer hunters poaching it, or the dirtbike and quad riders destroying it. If I'm guilty as charged - so be it.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *Although short-lived, the old Hardy Rd. landfill had one of the best Bank Swallow colonies in Summit County? In a few short years, as the bulldozers carved off soil to cap the garbage, there was a massive Bank Swallow colony you could walk right up to. I was even able to catch photos of the parents with young in the holes with the flash of my old film Pentax camera, as the holes were at eye-level! (Those wondering, I did this one time, just three pictures, on one day, and never bothered them again.) Trust me, it was far less disturbance than the daily bulldozer carving off massive chunks of earth to cap the eyesore, er... landfill! As all the adults poured out of the nest holes and swarmed around me as I walked by, it's an experience burned into my mind that I will NEVER forget!*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *The off-limits area back then was full of surprises? Summer breeding bird species that I found back then included a male Black-and-white Warbler, absolutely ragged, with food in its beak, proof that it had a nest full of hungry young. A singing male Chestnut-sided Warbler that was obviously on territory. Small pothole swamps with both Wood Ducks with young, Green Herons, and highly obscured photos of a Sora through cattails. And another surprise, rounding a quad trail only to be fronted up and barked at by a Coyote. Other notable sightings, outside of the summer breeding bird census period, were of Great Black-backed Gulls feeding amongst the swarms of Ring-billed Gulls and Herring Gulls that would make their daily jaunts to the garbage dump for easy pickings - at the time, my first Summit County sightings of this dominant gull. Trespassing had its perks! The downside of course was of the swallow colony coming to an end. Is it too much to ask that our local park districts (National or County), designate an area to place a large dirt mound, fenced-in, of course, but viewable for the public, to view the captivating magic of a Bank Swallow nesting colony in action? A pair of nesting Belted Kingfishers would be the added bonus. Now that, my friends, would be one heck of an eyes on, fully enveloping, educational tool!*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *Of course living in the remoteness that was Hardy Rd. had its downside. A somewhat forgotten road with no streetlights and a deep ravine on one side meant that it was a clandestine spot for illegal dumpers. On my birding forays down the road there was one thing that always caught my eye - the years of tires, gas tanks, scrap metal, 55-gallon drums, etc., that gnawed at me like an industrial rat. One day, I'd had enough! I spent one whole day cleaning up the ravine at the end of my driveway. Just me, my thoughts, and a brooding anger to those who just don't seem to care! As the pictures that follow depict, I removed 98 tires, eight rusted automobile gas tanks, 3 (thankfully empty) 55-gallon drums, and other various pieces of junk from that ravine, ruining a perfectly good pair of Vasque hiking boots while doing it. The downside? It took me three days of bickering with the city to come and pick up all the junk that I brought up from the depths - all the while worrying that someone would come along later and push it all over the edge. Just one task - and not a lot to ask. What will you do today to make a better tomorrow?*



*Two photos of just part of the massive, yet short-lived, Bank Swallow colony at the old Hardy Rd. landfill. Although the landfill is now "defunct" and capped-over, the area is now home to Summit Metro Parks' Hampton Hills Mountain Bike Area off of Theiss Rd. A past area of mystery, and hopefully now, with some newfound clarity.*

*(photos by: Douglas W. Vogus)*





*"One Man's trash, is another Man's treasure." Not quite - this is trash, garbage, and wrong! Once all the stacking and sorting, and the occasional, "What the hell is this!?" is organized, now comes the hard part. Getting it up a 30-foot hill. Once the water is finally forced out of the empty tires, it's not so bad. Those few tires that still had rims attached and full of water? Now THAT is a workout! I haven't been back to see if the ravine has been re-filled as I prefer this memory!*

*(photos by: Douglas W. Vogus)*



Just part of my "loot" I brought up from the ravine along Hardy Rd. Once brought up, the hardest part was trying to get its removal. I quickly learned that most cities only like these acts in April - only to bolster their "Earth Day" status! Should we only care every April?  
 (photo by: Douglas W. Vogus)

*** Burt, William H. Grossenheider, Richard P.	1952 (Third Edition 1976) "The Peterson Field Guide Series A Field Guide to the Mammals" <i>Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston</i>
*** The New York Times	November 11, 1984 <i>website &lt; nytimes.com &gt;</i>
*** Vogus, Douglas W.	2010-present "The Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census" (CVTTC ~ <i>Personal Records, Personal Experiences, and Mindless Ramblings</i> )
*** Whitaker, Jr., John O. Professor of Life Sciences Indiana St. University	1996 "National Audubon Society Field Field Guide to North American Mammals" <i>Alfred A. Knopf, New York</i>