

**HISTORY & FACTS of the JANUARY CENSUS**

January		11-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS						
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
39 / 1,152	40 / 654	42 / 1,400	48 / 2,385	46 / 1,570	42 / 1,484	43 / 2,147	40 / 1,232	45 / 1,365
2019	2020							
42 / 740	41 / 785							

Most Species seen in January : 48 on 01/01/2013.

Most Individual Birds seen in January : 2,385 on 01/01/2013.

Fewest Species seen in January : 39 on 01/01/2010.\*

Fewest Individual Birds seen in January : 654 on 01/01/2011.

Species Average in January : 42.5 Species.

Total Individuals Average in January : 1,355.8 Individuals.

Lowest Temperature on January Census : minus 3-degrees F on 01/01/2018.

Highest Temperature on January Census : 54-degrees F on 01/01/2011.

Longest Time Afield on January Census : 9 hours & 10 minutes on 01/01/2020.

Shortest Time Afield on January Census : 6 hours & 15 minutes on 01/01/2010.\*

(\* = due to terrible trail conditions (snow and ice), the inaugural Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census in 2010 was cut short by almost 2 miles, and Michelle picked me up at the Botzum Trailhead parking lot just south of Bath Rd. To date, the census route has been shortened twice due to trail conditions or weather.)

**LAST JANUARY'S FIELD REPORT**

01/01/20	<b>TOTAL SPECIES:</b>	41	<b>START / END TIME:</b>	7:55am - 5:05pm	
	<b>TOTAL BIRDS:</b>	785	<b>TIME AFIELD:</b>	9:10	
<b>OBSERVERS:</b>	John Henry and Douglas W. Vogus			<b>TEMP.:</b>	31F ~ 40F ~ 36F
<b>CONDITIONS:</b>	Cold and gray early with light SW winds; clouds moving out around 10:20am and turning sunny with blue skies; little snow cover; all water open.				
<b>TRAIL CONDITIONS:</b>	Frozen and icy early; all bridges covered in snow/ice; trail thawing out and turning soft, wet, rutted, and sloppy; many branches littering the trail along some newly fallen dead ash trees.				
<b>RIVER CONDITIONS:</b>	Swift & slightly higher than normal due to two days of rain earlier in the week.				

**SEVEN YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL**

On January 01, 2014 we set a census high with a total of 95 Northern Cardinals on the monthly hike. This high total consisted of fifty-three males, thirty-two females, and ten heard calling, but never seen.

Ohio's State Bird is very common along the Towpath Trail and in the cold winter months can be easily seen and heard, due to the fact that all the leaves are absent during the bleak winter months.

It is also easy to find their now-abandoned nests along the trail during this time of year - some nests so close to the trail that one can only wonder how you missed them during the breeding season. They are masters of concealment and can sit tight while the hustle and bustle rolls by.

## JANUARY 2021's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

### NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

**DESCRIPTION:** The bright red male Northern Cardinal, with its conspicuous crest, is one of the most recognizable birds in North America. It is found abundantly through virtually all of the eastern United States in a variety of habitats, including suburban gardens. Although the cardinal can be secretive and remain hidden in thickets, males usually sing from exposed perches. The species is commonly attracted to feeders and open areas with birdseed. Its thick, reddish cone-shaped bill is specialized for cracking seeds.

**ADULT MALE:** Plumage unmistakable. Males are uniquely colored, with a bright red body, a black face, and an obvious, pointed crest. **ADULT FEMALE:** Females are similarly shaped, but are buffy brown in coloration, with a reddish tinge on wings, tail, and crest. **JUVENILES:** Are a duller version of either adult, with a dark beak compared to the red or orange beaks of adults.

**LENGTH:** 7 & 1/2" - 8 & 1/2"      **WINGSPREAD:** 10 & 1/2" - 12"

**VOICE:** Male sings rich whistled songs every month of the year with innumerable variations; phonetically, some rendered as "whoit, whoit, whoit; what cheer, what cheer; wheat, wheat, wheat" and "pret-ty, pret-ty, pret-ty"; has at least 28 songs. Both sexes sing, sometimes together, but the female's song is usually softer. Call is a sharp "tsip" or "chip."

**HABITS:** Hops about on ground or moves about through trees while feeding. Eats at least 51 kinds of beetles, cicadas, dragonflies, leafhoppers, aphids, scale insects, ants, grasshoppers, sawflies, termites, crickets, caterpillars, codling moths, cutworms, also spiders, snails, slugs, 33 kinds of wild fruit and 39 types of weed seeds. Also waste corn, oats, rice, blossoms, buds of elm trees, and is especially fond of sunflower seeds at birdfeeding stations.

Male often feeds female in courtship and at nest; both roost in thickets, evergreens, hedges, etc. Male is strongly territorial - fights other males over territory and mates - and its own image reflected from windows, car mirrors and hubcaps.

**HABITAT:** Lives year-round in dense thickets along borders of fields, hedgerows, edges of woods, thickets of open woods, swamps, stream banks, city and country parks and gardens of suburbs, towns, and villages.

**NESTING:** **NEST:** Usually built by female, concealed in forks of twigs, sometimes in branch of small tree, but usually in dense tangles of thickets or vines, 2-12 ft. above ground, but usually 4-5 ft., in young evergreens, honeysuckle or multi-flora rose bushes. Bowl-shaped nest is made out of pliable bark, weed stems, grapevine strips, rootlets, leaves, and even paper. **EGGS:** As early as March in the south and as late as August in the north; 2 to 5 eggs, usually 3 to 4, gray-, buff-, or green-white, speckled or spotted with browns, grays, and purples. **INCUBATION:** Is usually by female, 12-13 days; young usually leave nest when 10-11 days old.

**RANGE:** Throughout the East, but also west into Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and Mexico.

**STATUS:** Very common. Northern Cardinals have gradually expanded their range northward during the 20th. Century.

Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the Northern Cardinal 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

- 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 Cardinal on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 - present.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.	61	42	52	<b>50</b>	95*	44	32	43
FEB.	60	<b>77</b>	62	49	67	42	30	22
MAR.	64	76	<b>84</b>	34	55	47	55	43
APR.	55	66	47	43	35	<b>59</b>	32	30
MAY	62	31	34	42	54	47	46	<b>52</b>
JUN.	52	52	31	43	43	37	<b>56</b>	37
JUL.	58	55	37	42	42	31	37	43
AUG.	57	33	27	48	48	38	26	33
SEP.	47	32	54	31	30	20	31	43
OCT.	47	44	47	38	37	18	35	23
NOV.	50	39	35	36	52	23	27	38
DEC.	<b>75</b>	54	37	35	57	44	29	20

	2018	2019	2020
JAN.	25	17	39
FEB.	36	40	20
MAR.	32	<b>68</b>	38
APR.	39	46	<b>50</b>
MAY	40	44	36
JUN.	<b>49</b>	37	28
JUL.	40	26	15
AUG.	36	43	30
SEP.	25	28	19
OCT.	24	35	20
NOV.	35	13	19
DEC.	35	19	21

  = HIGHEST COUNT TOTAL ON CENSUS.

BOLD # = HIGHEST COUNT FOR THAT YEAR.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Besides Ohio, the Northern Cardinal is also the State Bird of Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia?

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Northern Cardinals can sometimes have up to 4 broods per year? The male will often be caring for the first brood while the female is incubating the eggs of the next one!

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Northern Cardinals were named for the bright red robes worn in the Roman Catholic church?



*One of the most recognizable birds in all of North America, a pair of Northern Cardinals, side by side.*

*(photo by: Clarence Stewart)*

---

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

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Many birds' names are named with a direct correlation to their obvious field marks, such as Red-winged Blackbird due to the red "epaulets" on its wings, Black-capped Chickadee due to the black cap it sports on its head, or Scarlet Tanager because of its bright, scarlet red coloration. Though many birdwatchers are still waiting for that red belly to show up on a Red-bellied Woodpecker, but "red-headed" woodpecker was already taken! In 2021 *The Towpath Traveler* will be discussing birds' names on a more personal level - those birds named after a person's last name. How did they get these names and who are the persons to be forever linked to that bird species? So, without further ado, let's play "The Name Game" ...

**DID YOU KNOW?:** Georg Wilhelm Steller, original surname Stoller or Stohler, (born March 10, 1709, Windsheim, Bavaria, Germany - died November 14, 1746, Tyumen, Russia), was a German-born zoologist and botanist who served as naturalist aboard the ship "St. Peter" during the years 1741-42, as part of the Great Northern Expedition, which aimed to map a northern sea route from Russia to North America. During that expedition, while stranded on what is today called Bering Island, Steller sighted a number of animals not previously known to science. Included among them was a large aquatic mammal, now known as Steller's Sea Cow (*Hydrodamalis gigas*), which was hunted to extinction within a few decades following Steller's report.

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *Steller's early education took place in the Bavarian town of Windsheim, where he was born. Between 1729 and 1734 he attended several universities, including the University of Wittenberg and University of Halle (now combined in the Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg). His studies focused on theology, medicine, and the natural sciences, including botany. In 1734 he traveled to Berlin, where he earned his certificate in botany and joined the Russian army, serving as surgeon. In the winter of 1734, after arriving in St. Petersburg, he left the army and took a post as physician for the archbishop of Novgorod, Feofan Prokopovich.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *While in St. Petersburg, Steller also met German naturalist and explorer Daniel Gottlieb Messerschmidt, who was one of the first naturalists to maintain journals of his travels and observations. Steller admired Messerschmidt's work and heard about a possible Russian expedition to the Arctic seas in the Far East. In 1737, two years after Messerschmidt's death, Steller married his widow Brigitta Messerschmidt. That same year Steller was given an appointment in natural history with the Imperial Academy of Sciences and was accepted for the Great Northern Expedition. He departed for Kamchatka Peninsula, located in Far Eastern Russia, in January the following year.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *In March 1741 Steller met Danish navigator and explorer Vitus Jonassen Bering, captain of the ship "St. Peter", one of the two vessels assigned to the expedition (the other ship was the "St. Paul"). That June both ships set sail for North America. The ships were later separated by a storm, and, while the crew of the "St. Paul" went on to discover the Aleutian Islands, the crew of the "St. Peter" sighted a mountain range on mainland Alaska. In late summer 1741 the "St. Peter" anchored off the coast of an island in the Gulf of Alaska (presumably "Kayak Island"), and Steller ventured ashore, becoming one of the first Europeans to set foot on Alaskan soil.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *In early November, with Captain Bering and many crew members suffering from scurvy and with sailing conditions growing treacherous, they dropped anchor near the shores of a desolate Aleutian island (now known as Bering Island), where they would pass the winter. Strong winds later wrecked the anchored ship, and Bering and many other crewmembers succumbed to illness. Steller and his remaining shipmates eventually constructed a small boat from the wreckage of the "St. Peter" and left the island, returning safely to Kamchatka in 1742. Four years later Steller died of a fever in Tyumen, Siberia, on his return overland journey to St. Petersburg. Georg Wilhelm Steller was only 37 years old.*

**DID YOU KNOW?:** *Despite the difficulties of the expedition, Steller managed to bring back to Kamchatka a small collection of specimens from the islands he visited, among which was the palate bone of a sea cow and several species of birds, including a species of jay that was later named Steller's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*). Originally named the Steller's Crow, Steller was correct in his assumption that the bird was related to the Blue Jay in eastern North America, and that this Alaskan land was indeed connected to North America.*

*He recorded his observations of the fauna on and around the islands in "De Bestiis Marinis" (The Beasts of the Sea), which was published in 1751. In that work, Steller detailed the dissection by himself and his crewmates of a female sea cow on the shore of Bering Island. He also described his only sighting of a dog-faced, aquatic mammal, with a tail like a shark, which he dubbed the "Steller's Sea Ape." More on that later...*

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

In his book "The Beasts of the Sea" he recounted his observations of sea lions, sea otters, and northern fur seals. In addition to the sea cow, which was basically a much larger version of the Manatee or Dugong in the warmer waters of the south, but lived and bred in the cold Arctic kelp beds, and the Steller's Jay, many of the other animals the Steller collected or described were later named for him. Included in this list are the mollusk "Cryptochiton stelleri", Steller's Sea Lion, and Steller's Sea Eagle, the third largest eagle in the world.

In 1769, Peter Simon Pallas, eminent German zoologist and traveler, who explored Russia and Siberia, named the eider duck obtained in Kamchatka by Steller, the Steller's Eider with the species name of 'stelleri'. Georg Steller was also the only naturalist to ever see the now extinct Spectacled Cormorant, a flightless fish-eating seabird, alive.

**DID YOU KNOW?:**

During the Great Northern Expedition, Steller described coming face to face with one of the sea's most mysterious creatures, the Steller's Sea Ape. Or did he? Many of the species that Steller described are far from abundant. Both the Steller's Sea Cow and the Spectacled Cormorant are now extinct, both the Steller's Eider and the Steller's Sea Eagle are threatened, and the Steller's Sea Lion is labeled as near-threatened. For years modern naturalists joked that it was bad luck to be named after Steller, although the Steller's Jay is doing just fine. Now, about that Steller's Sea Ape, per Andrew Thaler of "The Portalist"...

Steller identified a curious and enduring cryptid, Steller's Sea Ape, which he describes in "The Beasts of the Seas": "The animal was about two ells (about six feet) long. The head was like a dog's head, the ears pointed and erect, and on the upper and lower lips, on both sides whiskers hung down... The body was longish, round and fat... the skin was covered thickly with hair, grey on the back, reddish white on the belly, but in water it seemed to be all red and cow-colored."

This description does periodically appear on cryptozoology websites, either left unidentified or to be explained away as a mangy Northern Fur Seal, a curious otter, or Steller's own sea cow. All these explanations tend to be unsatisfying and not particularly compelling. Steller's notes indicate that he spent several hours in close proximity to the Sea Ape, watching it feed and play around the ship. He even attempted, twice, to shoot it. Cryptozoologists point to this extended account to argue that it is unlikely that Steller would so badly misidentify a species he, himself, described. In order to unravel the mystery of Steller's Sea Ape, we need to turn not to biology and ecology, but rather history; in particular, the history of Vitus Bering, Georg Steller, and the ill-fated voyage of the "St. Peter."

Though a public success, the Great Northern Expedition was a brutal slog through the uncharted North Pacific. Bering, by all accounts, was not particularly inclined to humor the naturalist. During the entire expedition, Steller was permitted ashore just once, for 10 hours, while the "St. Peter" was resupplied. Many of Steller's species descriptions came from that short jaunt. It would likely be the last enjoyable moment for Steller during the expedition. Though Steller was spared, the "St. Peter" crew and officers were plagued with scurvy, with a total of 28 men dying just on Bering Island. Bering was so sick he barely left his stateroom. Steller's opportunities for further expeditions ashore vanished, something that would not sit well for an explorer to a new land. A month and a half after his one trip ashore, on August 10, 1741, somewhere south of Kodiak Island, Steller pulled out his notebook and described the "Sea Ape."

*During the eight months they spent stranded on Bering Island, Steller composed "The Beasts of the Sea", a popular account of the animals they encountered on the voyage. This document would ultimately be published after his death. The Sea Ape did not appear in any of Steller's official reports.*

*What was the Sea Ape? The secret lies in the breadcrumbs left throughout Steller's notes. His description of the ambling creature, made only three months before the voyage's catastrophic end, is not dissimilar from his descriptions of the captain he despised. The whiskers that hung down the Sea Ape's face bear a striking likeness to the heavy chops favored by Bering. Perhaps desperate to return to land to further his observations and collecting, Steller even fantasized about taking a few shots at the source of his suffering. Its absence from his official report suggest that Steller himself didn't take the Sea Ape seriously. Stranded for months on a frozen island, did a bitter Steller choose to immortalize his hatred for the captain in popular lore?*

*The most compelling evidence for this hypothesis lies in the name Steller gave his Sea Ape. He didn't name it "Simnia marina", literally "sea ape", but "Simnia marina danica" - the Danish sea ape. There was only one Dane aboard the "St. Peter". Its captain, Vitus Bering.*

*There is a tendency to forget when studying natural history, especially of the early days of exploration, that these great scientific endeavors were conducted by people. Relationships have as much, if not more, impact on the success or failure of a voyage than scientific expertise. As Steller's great expedition into the uncharted Arctic descended into an ice-filled slog, he turned to humor to lash out at the man he blamed for their misfortune. At the time, he couldn't have known that things were only going to get worse, or that the story of his sea ape would endure.*



*Georg W. Steller, naturalist and, at least on paper, the Don Rickles of his time, accomplished much in his 37 years.*

*(portrait courtesy of The University of Tyumen, Russia)*

See You on the Trail! ~ Doug



The massive Steller's Sea Eagle is an impressive sight, but, barring an Ice Age, one you won't find in Ohio anytime soon.

(photo by: Michael Pinczolits)

**LITERATURE CITED**

*** Alderfer, Jonathan Dunn, Jon L.	2006 "Complete Birds of North America" <i>National Geographic Society</i>
*** Rogers, Kara	2020 "Encyclopedia Britannica" ( <i>website</i> )
*** Rosche, Larry O.	2004 "Birds of the Cleveland Region" <i>The Cleveland Museum of Natural History</i>
*** Terres, John K.	1956 "The Audubon Society Encyclopedia of North American Birds" <i>Alfred A. Knopf</i>
*** Thaler, Andrew	2016 "The Portalist" ( <i>website</i> )
*** Vogus, Douglas W.	2010-present "The Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census" ( <i>CVTTC ~ Personal Records, Personal Experiences, and Mindless Ramblings</i> )