

HISTORY & FACTS of the JANUARY CENSUS

JANUARY	14-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	2021	2022	2023				
42 / 740	41 / 785	47 / 1,014	41 / 1,508	45 / 2,063				

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

Most Individual Birds seen in January : 2,385 Total Birds 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 : 42.9 Species.

Total Individuals Average in January : 1,392.7 Total Birds.

Lowest Temperature on January Census : 19-degrees F on 01/04/2010.

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

Longest Time Afield on January Census : 10:00 hours & 25 minutes on 01/01/2021 & 01/02/2021*.

* = due to "Winter Storm John" the 2021 census was done over two days. 01/01/21 was from Red Lock Trailhead to Peninsula and 01/02/21 was from Peninsula south to the end in Merriman Valley.)

Shortest Time Afield on January Census : 6 hours & 15 minutes on 01/04/2010**.

** = 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.

LAST JANUARY'S FIELD REPORT

01/02/23	TOTAL SPECIES:	45	START / END TIME:	7:40am - 4:40pm		
	TOTAL BIRDS:	2,063	TIME AFIELD:	9:00	FT. MI.:	13.51
ROUTE:	Red Lock Trailhead south to Merriman Valley with a stop at Trail Mix in Peninsula.					
TEMP.:	44F ~ 50F ~ 49F	CONDITIONS:	Very foggy early, cloudy with very low ceiling and poor visibility; fog lifting somewhat at 8:30am; two rounds of sprinkles to light rain between 9:30am and 11:15am; no wind; no snow cover; very foggy again for last hour of census.			
TRAIL CONDITIONS:	Sloppy, soft, wet, and rutted in some spots; three dead ash trees across trail at the northernmost Szalay's corn field; trail somewhat torn up from heavy machinery at the Akron Compost Facility and many limbs, branches, and debris on and along the trail from Summit Metro Parks' removal of non-native honeysuckle bushes from Akron Compost Facility to end of census route in Merriman Valley.					
	RIVER CONDITIONS:	Slightly above normal.				
OBSERVERS:	John Henry and Douglas W. Vogus.					

ELEVEN YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL

On 01/01/2013 we set a census high for the Cuyahoga Valley's most common duck species, the ubiquitous Mallard, with 264 birds seen. We also tied that high again on 02/01/2014. Common in ponds, lakes, rivers, parks - heck, wherever water is found! - let's take a closer look at this often taken for granted duck.

JANUARY 2024's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

DESCRIPTION: Mallards are large dabbling ducks with heavy bodies and large, rounded heads that transition smoothly into long bills. Both sexes have bright blue speculums with bold white borders on their wings. The central uppertail coverts of the males are curled upwards; a characteristic frequently passed on to hybrid offspring. **MALE:** Distinctive, with bright yellow bill and metallic green head bordered by a white neck ring. Breast is a deep chestnut, flanks finely vermiculated pale gray, and rump black with white outer tail feathers. **FEMALE:** Nondescript medium brown overall, paler tan face with a streaked, brown crown, indistinct brown eye line, and orange bill with a black saddle. The belly is unmarked and buffy, paler than the body, and the outer tail feathers are whitish. Both sexes have bright orange feet.

LENGTH: 21" - 28" **WINGSPREAD:** 30" - 40" **WEIGHT:** Males average 2.75 lbs.
Females average 2.44 lbs.

VOICE: Female utters loud "quack, quack-quack, quack, quack-quack" descending the scale; male utters "raeb-raeb," double note, and a low "kwek" during courtship rituals.

HABITS: Feeds by "tipping up" to reach plants under water as well as surface feeding. Eats seeds of bulrushes and primrose willow, which are staples, also seeds of sedges, pondweeds, wild rice, bur reeds, wigeon grass, fruit of hackberry tree and nuts of oak and hickory. Also feeds in stubble fields on waste wheat, spent grain, wheat, oats, corn, and barley; also fresh-water snails, mollusks, aquatic insects, tadpoles and small frogs, fishes and fish eggs.

HABITAT: Hardy and adaptable, winters as far north as open water allows. Found anywhere with water, from flooded fields to roadside puddles to Great Lakes; in general, avoids saltwater.

NESTING: **NEST:** Built usually on ground among dead grasses, reeds, cattails at edges of lakes, sloughs, reservoirs, on muskrat houses, in marshes or on dry only slightly marshy ground near water, sometimes far from water on higher ground of prairie among dense stands of phragmites, in lightly grazed pastures, on islands or in bulrushes of swampy creek bottoms, sometimes in alfalfa fields, and even under a pile of brush or under a log. Most nests are a bulky cup of leaves or grasses, lined by the female with her down. **EGGS:** In February along the Pacific Coast of Washington, elsewhere may be March thru July; 5 to 14 eggs, usually 8 to 10 eggs, light green to white. **INCUBATION:** By female, 26 to 30 days; as soon as young are dry after hatching, are led by mother to nearest water. Young fly 49 to 60 days after hatching.

RANGE: Nests in North America from Aleutians and Pribilof Islands, northwest Alaska, and Canada south to northern Baja California, southern New Mexico, southern Kansas, northeast Arkansas, southeast Illinois, southwest Indiana, southern Ohio, north and central West Virginia, northern Virginia, and in Eurasia. Winters from central Alaska, southern Canada, Nova Scotia, northern United States south to West Indies and southern Mexico.

STATUS: Abundant and widespread across the Northern Hemisphere. The most abundant duck in North America, the population is more or less stable.

Abundance Codes on the graphs below indicate the best time of year to find the Mallard 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.

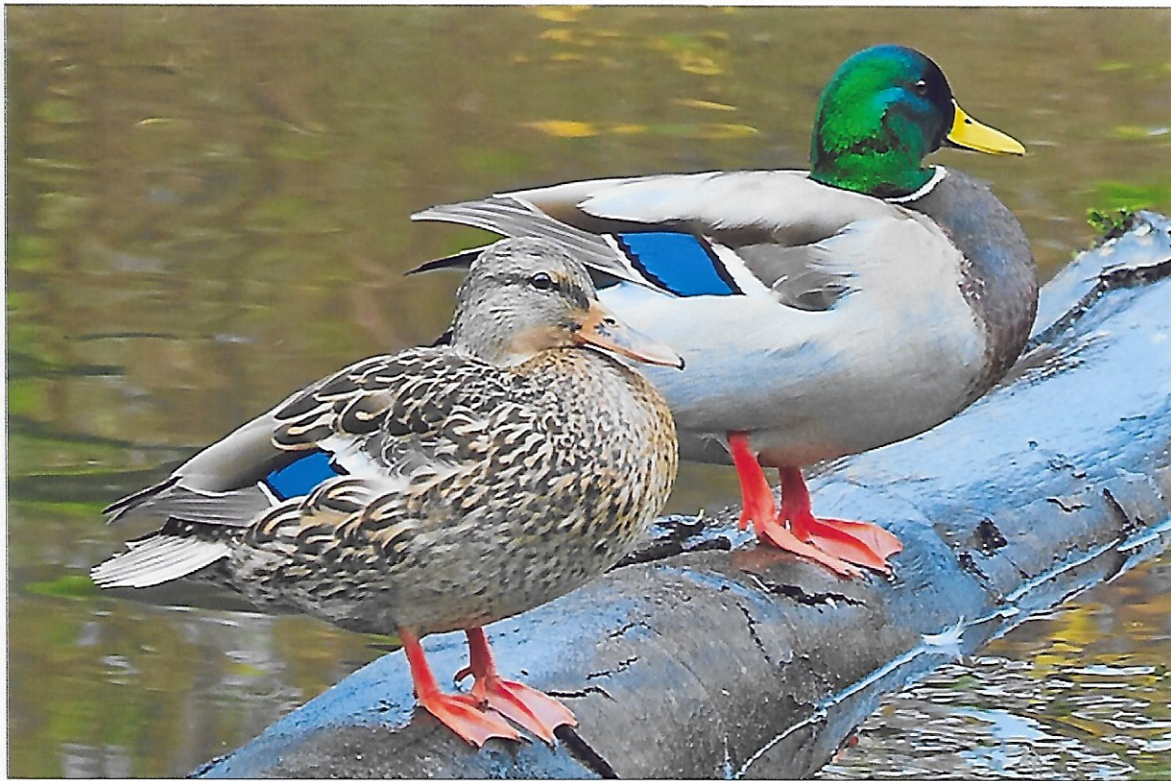
History of the Mallard on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 ~ present.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.	36	88	47	264*	50	107	68	37
FEB.	115	164	34	35	264*	252	70	121
MAR.	44	82	19	37	148	211	37	16
APR.	13	30	22	13	25	27	22	13
MAY	27	7	10	27	13	12	12	18
JUN.	20	6	4	10	2	6	12	2
JUL.	17	3	10	6	2		4	
AUG.	6		2		1	22	15	10
SEP.	7			14	2	11	15	16
OCT.	29	3			12	21	11	15
NOV.	46	17	32	12	48	35	15	19
DEC.	51	32	89	28	22	113	67	37

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
JAN.	160	9	35	12	14	35	DID YOU KNOW?: The Mallard is the ancestor of all breeds of domestic ducks except the Muscovy Duck? Commonly raised in captivity on lakes of sanctuaries, ponds and aviaries, it is the best-known and possibly the most abundant wild duck throughout most of the Northern Hemisphere.
FEB.	73	45	19	34	39	50	
MAR.	19	71	9	30	35	19	
APR.	15	23	14	20	10	14	
MAY	9	18	14	9	8	12	
JUN.	3	10	8	3	6	8	
JUL.	1	3	1	6	3	3	
AUG.	5		8	2	4		
SEP.			2	1	2	3	
OCT.		1	5	13	7	1	
NOV.	16	17	21	17	26	36	
DEC.	8	53	6	16	35	50	

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

DID YOU KNOW?: The Mallard is closely related to the American Black Duck? We have fifteen occurrences of a Mallard hybridized with an American Black Duck - all between November and April, all males, and all from the Ira Beaver Marsh.



Often overlooked and taken for granted, the ever-present Mallard is still strikingly beautiful, whether drake or hen.

(photo by: Mike Hamilton)

DID YOU KNOW?: *Of all the threats to bird species, one of the least known is the "hobby" of egg collecting? It is a secretive world of clandestine collecting excursions, risking life and limb, and of jail time and fines. Even the name for egg collecting is mysterious, "Oology" as it is known, as if missing a prefix, much like the nests left behind missing the eggs. This month we will delve into the unknown world of oology.*

HISTORY OF BIRD AND EGG COLLECTING

For thousands of years, all over the world, wild and domesticated birds' eggs have been collected for food. Collecting birds' eggs for something more than food, however, was actually quite a novel idea, and during the Victorian Era (1800s through early 1900), became very popular among elite gentlemen collectors, naturalists, and hobbyists from England, Europe, and the United States. In addition, government- and museum-sponsored expeditions to document unique species all over the world also fueled a natural history collecting "mania" during this period.

Wealthy collectors amassed incredibly large collections of bird (and other animal) materials. Lord Rothschild of England, for example (who was wealthy enough to loan money at least twice to the National Bank of England during his life), amassed the largest collection of birds and eggs of any private collector on the planet between 1880 and 1931 - more than 300,000 specimens, collected from all over the world. In regard to eggs and nests in particular, he collected approximately 11,750 egg sets and 930 nests, which are now part of the British Museum of Natural History.

Alan Hume, who was British but worked in the Indian Civil Service, had the largest collection of Asiatic bird skins, eggs, and nests in the world - more than 100,000 specimens collected between 1862 and 1885, including ca. 4,000 egg sets. In the U.S., Johnathon Dwight (1858-1929) collected 65,000 bird skins from North America, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, and left the American Museum of Natural History, in New York, 55,000 of these skins at the time of his death and thousands of sets of eggs. And William Brewster, who in the 1880s was the chair of the American Ornithologists' Union Committee on Bird Protection, collected 40,000 North American bird specimens, including thousands of egg sets that now reside at the Museum of Comparative Zoology, in Harvard, Massachusetts.

These collectors contributed a lot of useful information to the science of ornithology. Rothschild, for instance, created his own museum in Tring, England, and made his reference collection of bird skins and eggs, as well as his wonderful bird library, available to researchers. He and other collectors published regularly in scientific outlets such as "The Ibis" and the "Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club" (in England), or in "The Auk" or the "Condor" (in the U.S.). Other periodicals including "The Oologist," the "Journal of the Museum of Comparative Oology," and "The Nidologist" also regularly published descriptive studies of the eggs and nests discovered by egg collectors and by people referring to themselves as "oologists" (individuals that studied eggs).

From the late 1700s until the late 1800s, governments, wealthy collectors, and large museums such as the British Museum of Natural History, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Smithsonian, commonly funded expeditions around the world to procure bird specimen materials - the main goal being to describe new species. These expeditions employed "field collectors" to acquire the materials, and included many famous naturalists who also published the results of their findings, such as Charles Darwin and his contemporary, Alfred Russell Wallace.

*In the U.S., the 1804-1806 survey conducted by Captains Merriweather Lewis and William Clark was the first to bring back birds from the western U.S. In addition, Major Charles Bendire (1836-1897), who worked as an officer of the U.S. Army for more than 20 years in the western U.S., was known for his collection of birds' eggs, and for the detailed notes he took on them and their nests. He donated approximately 8,000 sets of eggs to the Smithsonian that he collected in the western U.S. from Mexico to Canada, and was the first curator of the oology collection for the museum. In a famous story about the realities and perils of collecting eggs in the field, in 1872 Bendire was up in a tree collecting a Zone-tailed Hawk's (*Buteo albonotatus*) egg in Arizona, when Apaches fired upon him. To protect the egg, he put it into his mouth, and was chased back to his camp. At the camp, he found that he couldn't get the egg out of his mouth, and so several men had to help extract the egg - and a tooth - to get it out without breaking it! The egg is still held, unbroken, at the Smithsonian.*

Besides being collected by professional ornithologists and naturalists, birds' eggs and nests were also collected by hobbyists. In the U.S., it was legal for a private individual to collect birds' eggs and nests without a permit, and to sell them, up until the 1940s. Eggs were said to have been collected with "devotion akin to that seen among today's birdwatchers". The hobby probably even surpassed that of stamp collecting. In the U.S., for example, wild bird eggs were advertised for sale and trade in numerous catalogs.

*Of course, some hobbyist collectors were more interested in how many eggs they could get, and how rare they were, rather than their value for science. These individuals eventually gave a bad name to "oology", and led to the publication of books such as "Ethics of Egg-collecting", by Eric Parker (1936), and numerous letters and articles in professional ornithological journals debating the pros and cons of continued egg-collecting. Another group of collectors, which we refer to as the "market collectors", were those people who collected eggs for sale on the mass market for as many types of buyers as possible. Their impact on some bird species in the late 1800s and early 1900s - including penguins off the coast of Africa, and Laysan Albatrosses (*Phoebastria immutabilis*) whose eggs were collected for their whites, to use in the photo industry - may have contributed to declines of such species, especially when they were coupled with the impacts of habitat alteration and the use of parts (such as feathers) in ladies' fashions.*

Market collectors took about 10 million Common Murre eggs between 1850 and 1900 from the Farallon Islands off the northern California coast, for sale to markets and restaurants in San Francisco. Good egg collectors took egg clutches early in a field season so that birds could re-lay; in contrast, destructive egg collectors would take all of the eggs of all of the birds in a locality - for example, a nesting colony - during the entire breeding season. This type of collecting, combined with the detrimental effects of the millinery trade on birds, caused outrage among ornithologists and interested lay-people around the world, and led to the enactment of laws in the early 20th century limiting bird and egg collecting to those specimens needed only for scientific purposes.

At this time, due to the impacts of irresponsible egg collecting, and in addition to, continued professional debate over the scientific value of the discipline of oology, the popularity of this pursuit among both professionals and amateurs began to dwindle. Thus, by the 1940s, with private collecting of wild birds' eggs restricted in the U.S. by legislation protecting birds, and some scientific institutions not wanting to increase (or even keep) their egg holdings, the time was ripe for a safe repository for egg collections in the U.S. It was at this point in time that Ed Harrison created the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology.

Today in the U.S., there are few to no problems with irresponsible collectors illegally collecting eggs, but the problem does still exist in England, where "notorious" egg collectors are still caught and fined. David Schwartz called this a "uniquely English preoccupation". For example, Colin Watson - who died in May 2006 by falling from a tree while investigating a bird's nest - was arrested in 1985 when it was found that he had more than 2,000 egg sets in his home, all apparently taken illegally. In 2005, another seven egg collectors were sent to jail in England for 3 months, and in January 2007, egg collector Greg Wheal was jailed for his 14th illegal egg-collecting conviction since 1987.

Source: Purcell, R., Hall, L.S., and Corrado, R. 2008. "Egg & Nest".
The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

From: Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology <wfvz.org >

INSIDE THE BIZARRE, SECRETIVE WORLD OF OBSESSIVE EGG THIEVES

Audubon talks with filmmaker Tim Wheeler, whose documentary exposes the underworld of Britain's illegal egg collectors.

By Emma Brice

Reporter, Audubon Magazine January 06, 2016

Why do some people who love nature end up destroying it? That's the question documentarian Timothy Wheeler explores in his new award-winning film, "Poached", which investigates the strange British subculture of illegal egg-collecting. While collecting eggs is necessary for some forms of scientific study, that's not the motivation behind the fanatics Wheeler exposes in his film. Instead, these individuals enthusiastically roam huge swathes of Britain's countryside to find eggs, often scaling gigantic trees or abseiling down perilous cliffs to raid nests. The precious tokens are then pierced and the contents blown out to leave the exquisite, collectible casings behind. The resulting collections could tangibly hurt populations: Individuals have been known to amass hoards of several thousand eggs, posing such a danger to species that in Britain, collectors are prosecuted with prison sentences and fines of up to \$7,400.

Wheeler worked with the U.K.'s Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the country's National Wildlife Crime Unit to gain access to some of these individuals, both practicing and reformed, including Britain's most notorious egg thief, Matthew Gonshaw, and a man known only as "Mr. X" who conceals his identity with a crow skull mask, boasting about his personal collection of 3,500 birds eggs.

Through the characters, it becomes clear that egg collectors aren't nursing a hobby, but an addiction. "You watch people as they really struggle with their addiction and try to have a healthier relationship with nature," Wheeler says. "We get to experience what that is like for them." Audubon spoke to Wheeler about how a boyhood hobby transforms into an adult obsession - and how nature feeds this unlikely addiction. The film which premiered last March, will be released on iTunes on January 15th, and is available for pre-order. (article from 01/2016)

AUDUBON: How do people get into egg collecting?

***Wheeler:** It seems to stem from a childhood fascination with birds. There's this weird relationship they have with nature: all of these egg collectors are in fact true bird lovers. But as with any type of addiction, they are somehow able to rationalize their behavior because the lust for the egg becomes more important to them than seeing that they're actually harming the very thing they love.*

A: What kinds of eggs do collectors typically look for?

***W:** They're trying to get the rarest egg, just like a stamp collector would want the rarest stamp: the rarer the bird the more attractive the egg. They're also attracted to "big stick" birds, the Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, or the Osprey - very large birds you might have to abseil down cliffs or climb high trees for. Some of them are attracted to what they say is the beauty of the eggs as well. When they're looking at one, they'll salivate over it as if it's a drug; there's almost a sensual aspect to it too, which is quite bizarre.*

A: This surely poses a serious threat to certain species?

W: The way it's been described to us is that the egg collector can be the final nail in the coffin. Birds may be under threat mostly because of other environmental reasons, but they are therefore rare which makes them more attractive to the egg collector. So for example the Red-backed Shrike [a bird on the RSPB's Red List]: there's known to be one pair that comes back to the UK and it's always uncertain whether they're going to return - yet that one pair has been targeted [by egg collectors].

A: The documentary reveals what viewers may not expect: egg collecting is often high-octane and incredibly dangerous - so are people in it for the thrill?

W: It is absolutely about the adventure. They're not as interested in acquiring mass collections of eggs from other collectors; they're interested in the pursuit, and that each egg has a story. It's kind of like the adrenaline rush of extreme sports. Egg collectors are some of the most expert tree climbers in the world. It is absolutely fascinating and scary to watch them: they'll free-climb a 100-foot tree. And some are extremely anti-authoritarian; some are aroused by the thrill of the cat-and-mouse game with the police. They have to find covert ways of covering their tracks, hiding eggs in safe houses, in floorboards under their homes or in secret rooms. They get into the secrecy of it, much as any drug addict or sex addict may get into the secrecy of their habit.

A: Why do people keep doing it even when they know it's destructive?

W: What I've got from all of them is that this is what they do best. It's a very difficult thing to go out and find these birds - whether you're talking about climbing a 100-foot tree, or being in Dartmoor and finding a nest in that expansive landscape, or locating hard-to-find birds like a Tree Pipit - they find real value in that process and that's what they're best at in life.

A: Collectors face harsh prison sentences and severe fines. But, you make an effort to reveal the human side of these crimes, as well.

W: It's important to not vilify these people. At the end of the day we all have our secrets, though some are obviously worse than others! These are all people that are valuable contributors to society, maybe in other ways, but they have this historical struggle, a collecting addiction that ultimately does harm. We have to understand a psychology like this in order to really combat it.

A: Should other countries become more aware of this issue?

W: I don't want to plant the seed that this is some rising, monstrous problem, but an egg collector can have a devastating impact. There have been major cases in Norway, Sweden, Bulgaria, and I have heard from egg collectors themselves about a couple of potential collectors in the United States. I think it's important that authorities have this on their radar, because it does exist in other parts of the world.



Low-tech gear for high risk and reward. Early egg-collectors braved many obstacles and risks as this old photo shows. Going over the edge of a cliff with just a rope and gloves takes an iron will, that unfortunately still happens today.

(photo courtesy of: Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology Bird Museum & Research Center)



Not exactly the dashing secret agent you were expecting? Author Ian Fleming got the name for his spy novels from an oologist - who knew?! As Paul Harvey used to say, "And now you know... the rest of the story."

(photo courtesy of: Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology Bird Museum & Research Center)

FUN FACT: JAMES BOND - 007 or ORNITHOLOGIST?

Ian Fleming, the author of the fictional character James Bond, was also an avid bird watcher. While living in Jamaica, Fleming came across a bird guide book written by the real James Bond and felt that because his name was "ordinary", asked if he could use it for his fictional novels. Even though his name is far from "ordinary" now, most don't know that the real 007 they read or watched was actually an expert ornithologist.

James Bond was born in the states in 1900 but later moved on to England with his family. Bond studied at Trinity College in Cambridge and moved back to the states in 1922. Bond only spent a few unhappy years in the banking business before switching to a career he felt more passionately about. At the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia, P.A., Bond rose to become the curator of ornithology as well as becoming an expert on Caribbean birds, and an oologist.

From: Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology <wfvz.org >

DID YOU KNOW?:

Before I get a slew of emails wanting to know the extent of my egg collecting, since I've had this bird obsession since my youth, I'll let you know that it ended at ONE egg! I found a lone Canada Goose egg at an abandoned nest when I was about 13 or 14 years old. No other geese were around, they had since moved on, and the egg was in tact, so I brought it home and had it on my drawing board.

Later, the family was preparing to drive out to Arizona to spend a couple of weeks with my grandparents over our summer vacation from school. Right before we headed out the door, I heard a loud 'pop'. Went back in my room and checked. The goose egg popped, juice running down my drawing board, and a fully feathered, dead gosling was in the egg. It did everything but wiggle and honk. Did it smell bad? Oh, did it ever! And, had I not heard the pop, it would have stayed in our locked up house, in the heat of an Ohio summer, for two weeks! Safe to say that I would not be here to type this once we all got home, and the stench that awaited us, as my Mother surely would killed me on the spot! Eggs? Over easy or scrambled will do just fine!

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