

CUYAHOGA VALLEY TOWPATH TRAIL CENSUS MONTHLY NEWSLETTER - JULY 2021

HISTORY & FACTS of the JULY CENSUS

JULY	12-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS							
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
68 / 823	74 / 935	72 / 1,152	76 / 1,601	66 / 1,008	65 / 1,006	79 / 1,293	71 / 1,014	75 / 1,261
2019	2020	2021						
73 / 811	74 / 1,653	76 / 816						

- Most Species seen in July : 79 on 07/08/2016.
- Most Individual Birds seen in July : 1,653 on 07/03/2020.
- Fewest Species seen in July : 65 on 07/11/2015.
- Fewest Individual Birds seen in July : 811 on 07/05/2019.
- Species Average in July : 72.4 Species.
- Total Individuals Average in July : 1,114.4 Individuals.
- Lowest Temperature on July Census : 55 degrees F on 07/11/2015.
- Highest Temperature on July Census : 99 degrees F on 07/06/2012.
- Longest Time Afield on July Census : 10 Hours & 30 Minutes on 07/06/2018.
- Shortest Time Afield on July Census : 6 Hours & 50 Minutes on 07/10/2010.

LAST JULY'S FIELD REPORT

07/03/20	TOTAL SPECIES:	74	START / END TIME:	6:05am - 4:20pm		
	TOTAL BIRDS:	1,653	TIME AFIELD:	10:15	FT. MI.:	13.85
ROUTE:	Red Lock Trailhead south to Merriman Valley, with stops at Trail Mix In Peninsula and Szalay's Farm Market for lunch.					
			TEMP.:	63F ~ 93F ~ 91F		
OBSERVERS:	John Henry and Douglas W. Vogus					
CONDITIONS:	Sunny and hot.					
TRAIL CONDITIONS:	Good. Detoured section around the Akron Compost Facility is now paved - leaning more towards permanent?					
RIVER CONDITIONS:	Normal, but slightly muddy.					

FIVE YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL

On July 08, 2016 we set a census high with a total of two Brown Thrashers. We tied that high count this year on April 03, 2021. The 2016 sighting was of two juvenile birds along the Towpath Trail in heavy brush between the Ohio Turnpike bridge and Stumpy Basin, even though we never saw or heard any adult birds in this section between April and June. A species fond of thick hedgerows and brushy fields, they are not found in big numbers along the river.

JULY 2021's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*)

DESCRIPTION: *Sexes similar. Similar in size to an American Robin, but more slender, not as bulky, and much longer tailed. Upperparts entirely bright rufous; underparts white to buffy-white, especially on flanks, with extensive black streaking. Wing coverts with black subterminal bar and wing tips, forming 2 wing bars. Bill long and slender, little decurvature, especially compared to western thrashers.*

LENGTH: 10 & 1/2" to 12" **WING:** 12 & 1/2" to 14" **WEIGHT:** 1 & 3/4 oz. to 3 oz.

VOICE: **SONG:** *A long series of varied melodic phrases, each phrase often repeated 2 or 3 times. Although a member of the "Mimidae" (mimics) family, rarely mimics other bird species. **CALL:** Most common calls include a low "churr" and a loud, smacking "spuck", somewhat resembling the call note of the "red morph" of the Fox Sparrow.*

HABITS: *Rather shy, usually when seen it will head to thick cover. Male sings from top of tall tree or tall bush, head high, long tail drooping. Feeds most of the time on or near the ground. Forages among fallen leaves under trees and shrubs, seldom scratches with feet but uses bill to dig and to toss leaves aside; will walk, run, and hop - comfortable on the ground. Feeds on a variety of insects including June beetles and grubs, Japanese beetles, rose beetles, boll weevils, curculios, wireworms, tent caterpillars, gypsy moth caterpillars, grasshoppers, crickets, army worms, cankerworms, cutworms, cicadas; also sow bugs, lizards, snakes, salamanders, tree frogs, blackberries, blueberries, holly berries, pokeberries, waste corn, and wheat.*

HABITAT: *Lives in dry thickets of wooded farming country, brushy pastures, second-growth woods, both active and abandoned railroad lines, fencerows, brier patches, country roadsides. Not a "city bird", preferring thick cover and few people. Can show up anywhere in migration.*

NESTING: **NEST:** *Sometimes on ground, especially in New England and parts of Midwest; Usually low in similax, lilac, forsythia, multi-flora rose, privet, Osage orange hedge, thorn-apple, honey locust, mixed hedgerows, etc.; usually 1- to 10-feet up, sometimes to 15-feet., in small apple, orange, or other trees; nest large, often of several "baskets" or layers of twigs, dead leaves, paper, thin bark, grasses, and cup lined with rootlets. **EGGS:** March - July, usually 4 to 5, pale blue, blue-white, or white, finely spotted with browns. **INCUBATION:** By both sexes, 12 to 14 days; first fly at 9 to 13 days old. Adults often vigorous in defending young - will attack!*

RANGE: *Nests from SE Alberta, across southern Canada to SW Quebec and SW Maine, and east of Rocky Mountains to N Texas, Gulf Coast, and S Florida. Migratory in northern part of nesting range. Winters from E Oklahoma east to North Carolina, southern Maryland, south to south Florida. Irregularly farther north in winter; wanders to California and Oregon, etc.*

STATUS: *Declines have been noted in the Northeast, probably due to habitat loss. This is a growing concern here in Ohio as well, as farming practices have eliminated hedgerows and thickets, farming all the way to the roadsides. And as farming no longer becomes a way of life in Ohio, being replaced by new housing, this trend will only become worse for this species.*

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

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
rr		rrrrrr	uuuuuCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC
Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	uuurrrrrrr	rrrrrrrrrr	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.
- rrrrrrrrrr = Rare. These birds can occur more or less annually but are easily missed in their scant presence in the region.
- ooooooo = 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 Brown Thrasher 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.							2*	
AUG.								
SEP.								
OCT.								
NOV.								
DEC.								

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

DID YOU KNOW?: Western populations of the Brown Thrasher are larger, paler, and with less extensive streaking? Darwin anyone?

DID YOU KNOW?: Georgia isn't all about the Braves, Bulldogs, Falcons and peanuts - their State Bird is the Brown Thrasher!

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



The evil eye is watching you! The seemingly always alert, and never far from dense cover, Brown Thrasher.

(photo by: Martina Nordstrand)

JULY'S DID YOU KNOW?

DID YOU KNOW?: *In 1834, the Englishman William Swainson was at the height of his scientific career? Aged 45, loaded with honors from the scientific academies and institutions of Paris, Quebec, South Africa, Philadelphia and Bermuda, a fellow of the British Royal Society and the prestigious Linnean Society and vice-president of the London Zoo and the British Ornithological Society, Swainson confidently looked forward to extending his reputation as one of the world's leading naturalists. Then his fortunes took a turn for the worse, and he ended up in New Zealand, living out the latter part of his life in hardship, toil and frustration in a society that set little store by his skills.*

DID YOU KNOW?: *William John Swainson was born in Liverpool, England in 1789? As a boy William Swainson had only two passions: drawing and collecting. Plants, birds, shells, spiders and insects were the be all and end all of his world. His father's periodic attempts to instill some rigor into his son's education were of little avail. But his father cannot have been too displeased, for he himself was devoted to natural history. In him the enthusiasm was alloyed with practicality, for he was a hardworking and senior collector of customs. He reportedly caught pick-pockets by deploying fish hooks in the pockets of his frock coat!*

DID YOU KNOW?:

William, on the other hand, dreamed of exotic creatures residing in the lushness of the tropics? In 1803, at age 14, he started work in customs, but three years later his sympathetic father found him a junior post in the Commissary-General (Supply Corps) of the British army of occupation headquartered in Palermo, Sicily. It wasn't exactly the tropics, but it was exotic. Undeterred by any shortcomings of grammar, he wrote, illustrated and published his first book about collecting and preserving natural history specimens at age 19. Swainson's light duties allowed him plenty of time to further his collections of plants and animals from Italy, Malta and Greece, to visit the great art galleries of Florence and Rome and to develop his talent for landscape painting and scientific illustration.

In 1815, in poor health, Swainson retired from the army on half pay and returned to Liverpool. His passion for collecting continued undiminished, however, and later that year he joined parties of German and Italian naturalists exploring the interior of Brazil, from where he dispatched vast collections of indigenous plants and animals to British and French museums. In 1820, a vacancy appeared as a keeper at the British Museum. Swainson applied for the post - backed with impressive testimonials from distinguished biologists - and fully expected to get the job. But, having no academic background, he was passed over - an acute disappointment.

DID YOU KNOW?:

He married soon afterwards, and travelled with his wife, Mary, to Paris? They spent six happy months in France, visiting galleries and theatres and sketching at the Jardin des Plantes. Swainson often moved in exalted circles. He collected specimens for Sir William Hooker at Kew Gardens and for Sir Joseph Banks at the British Museum (the latter supported Swainson's election to the Royal Society), and was in close touch with the professors of natural history at Oxford, Cambridge and Edinburgh. Among his friends he counted several of the Italian nobility, Prince Charles Napoleon, the leading French biologist Baron Cuvier, the poet and bird illustrator Edward Lear, and John James Audubon, the world's finest bird artist. From Audubon Swainson learned the new technique of color lithography, and Audubon acted as his French interpreter when they visited the great Parisian biologist Geoffrey St. Hilaire.

Returning to Britain, Swainson worked prodigiously, writing and illustrating monographs on natural history subjects, "Exotic Conchology", "The Birds of Brazil", "Elements of Conchology", "Birds of Western Africa", "Natural History and An-angement of the Flycatchers", and illustrating Richardson's "Fauna Borealis Americana: Birds". He also wrote and illustrated the encyclopedic "Cabinet of Natural History", "Taxidermy with the Biography Zoologists", and "Zoological Illustrations", published in monthly parts.

His next project was to revise the entomological part of Loudon's "Encyclopaedia of Agriculture and Gardening", to be followed by a companion volume on zoology. He also wrote "On the Habits and Instincts of Animals", "On the History and Natural Arrangement of Insects", and "A Reatise on Malacology" - a total of 20 books in as many years. His speed of work must have been astonishing, for all his publications were enlivened with thousands of detailed, accurate illustrations in pencil, pen, watercolor, steel engraving and litho.

At the time, there was no colored printing, so every colored plate in every copy sold had to have color applied by hand - Swainson's hand. Fortunately, print runs were short, and the plates in some volumes were uncolored.

DID YOU KNOW?:

Everyone agreed that the quality of his illustrations was unsurpassed. But the same could not be said of his text? Long descriptive captions accompanied sheaves of illustrations, and they contained frequent errors. William Broderip, a loyal friend and supporter, took Swainson to task for sloppy proofreading. Thirty errors in six pages was far too many, he commented on one occasion. Swainson saw such criticism as mere pedantry, and deeply resented it. Broderip persisted, and Swainson eventually ended the friendship.

He seems never to have taken criticism as something he could benefit from, but to have closed his mind against it, either ignoring or attacking the critic. When one of Swainson's books was not well received, Broderip, in his last, futile letter to Swainson, noted that an author needs to decide whether "to pass his whole life in warfare or steadily pursue his object."

In the course of his work, Swainson became one of the chief exponents of a cock-eyed taxonomic theory which grouped all plants and animals into fives or multiples of five - the so-called quinary system, which Swainson describes in his "Preliminary Discourse on the Study of Natural History" (1834). Swainson, a devout Anglican, thought these groupings of plants and animals were circular, rather than linear or branching, as we consider taxonomic relations to be today - were ordained by God, and that by understanding them we could look into the mind of the Creator. Other biologists abandoned the system - especially when Charles Darwin began to shed light on the origin of species - but not Swainson. Once his mind was made up, it was not readily altered.

DID YOU KNOW?:

To judge by the many letters and diaries he left, William Swainson's early family life was close, supportive and affectionate, even playful? But in 1835, Swainson's "sainted" wife died, leaving him emotionally devastated and with five children to bring up. "Oh my beloved Mary," he wrote, "the earth is yet fresh over thy grave and with this has departed the greatest blessing with which a merciful Father has blessed me. I am now a solitary mourner with no one to cheer me after the mental labours of the day."

His fortunes in other directions nose-dived, too. His beloved quinary system was ridiculed, and his investments in Mexican gold mines collapsed. With little of a pecuniary nature to show for his immense labors, Swainson's outlook soured. He became bitter and critical about the British scientific establishment, which had failed to embrace his ideas, and decided there was no future for him and his children in Europe. He looked for a brand new start. Australia tempted him for a while, but then he fixed on the fresh young colony of New Zealand.

In 1839, he joined the Church of England Committee to appoint a bishop in New Zealand and the Wakefield's Committee of the First Colony of New Zealand, applying for land in the Wellington district. His decision to emigrate was another example of Swainson's intractability. All his family and friends, including the parents of his deceased wife, attempted to dissuade him from going, but he would not be swayed. Even evidence that Captain Thomas McDonnell - the man to whom Swainson hitched his star - was a swindler, did not derail Swainson. But there was one hitch to his plan. The rules of emigration forbade Swainson from sailing to New Zealand with his children's governess, Ann Baddley, a former school teacher and a pious, virtuous "woman of strong character." So Swainson married her, despite opposition from his children.

Leaving his youngest son, Edwin, to be brought up by the governor of Gibraltar, Swainson, his new wife and remaining four children sailed for New Zealand in 1840. But Swainson's troubles had only begun. Many of the family's belongings and most of Swainson's books and illustration proofs, dispatched on another boat, were lost at sea, and the English fruit trees he carried with him did not survive the heat of the tropics. As had been feared by others in England, the 400 pounds paid to McDonnell for land in the Hokianga resulted in no title, and the family was forced to remain in Wellington where the vessel landed.

The Swainson's spent two years in Thorndon, where Swainson established the Wellington Horticultural and Botanical Society, before moving to a new house on a 150 ha block of bush in the Hutt Valley in 1843 (directly below today's suburb of Melling). He called his property "Hawkshead," after some ancestral land, and set about clearing and stumping the bush. After two laborious years he had cleared only 2 ha, one of which he planted in wheat. To make ends meet, Swainson sold off large collections which he had left behind in Britain, including 10,000 dried plant specimens collected in Sicily and Brazil, thousands of insects, 759 prints and sketches of birds and a large collection of bird skins.

Still misfortune dogged him. A consignment of lithographic plates was wrecked off of Cape Terawhiti. A collection of preserved birds and insects decayed. Creditors failed him. Local petty chief Te Kaeaea, also known as Taringa Kuri ("Dog's Ear"), disputed Swainson's occupation of the Hutt land and set about clearing and burning the bush, driving Swainson's laborers off, planting crops and cutting boundary lines across the farm. On one occasion, Swainson came to blows with Te Kaeaea.

Swainson and his neighbors could never leave their properties for fear of interference from aggrieved Maori who, encouraged by Te Rauparaha and Te Rangihaeata, established a fortified pa nearby. In 1846, troops set fire to the pa, leading to an escalation in violence. Martial law was proclaimed in Wellington, and several of Swainson's settler neighbors were killed. Swainson's eldest son, Willie, 22, fluent in Maori and a capable bushman, joined the military adventures as a scout and liaison, serving at times as a guide for Governor Grey. In the winter of 1846, troops of the 65th Regiment, abetted by Willie Swainson, who had been made one of the leaders of a group of 150 "friendly" Maori, drove marauding Maori from the Hutt Valley. Swainson Jr. was awarded the New Zealand War Medal for his part in the skirmishing, and the governor arranged for Te Kaeaea to be given other land in exchange for the disputed area in the Hutt.

Misfortunes continued for Swainson. In February, 1848, a fire destroyed much of Hawkshead, including six months' provisions, all his farm implements, money to pay for the coming harvest and a cabinet of about 1,000 exotic butterflies. However, there were occasional bright spots. Later in 1848, Swainson sold an acre of land he owned in Melbourne for 700 pounds, which cleared most of his debts, and the governor offered him a job as postmaster general of the southern division. How much of Hawkshead had been rebuilt before the next disaster struck is uncertain, but in October, 1848, Willie wrote of "earthquakes which have been felt, more or less, during the last three weeks. They have entirely destroyed or rendered uninhabitable all the brick houses in Wellington." In December, William wrote, "All the chimneys and the plaster walls inside were thrown down and the timbers so injured that we have been obliged almost to rebuild the walls. The expense has been so heavy that we have only done one half of the house.

DID YOU KNOW?: *Lack of money was a constant refrain with Swainson. Nine months after his daughter, Mary, married, Swainson grumbled to one of his sons: "I was obliged to sell the remaining town acre I had, in order to meet the expenses of your sister's marriage, which was far greater than it ought to have been, considering the altered circumstances of my fortunes... and which she ought to have considered, which she did not, and thus I am suffering and shall suffer the consequences for years."*

DID YOU KNOW?: *Swainson drew many pencil sketches of early Wellington? Its landscapes, roadside scenes, island views and coastlines, stockades, bridges and pa. During three months in 1847 he made 70 to 80 pencil sketches of local scenery and farm livestock. These sketches provide some of the most valuable pictorial records of Wellington's earliest years, especially as they were drawn before the big earthquakes of 1848 and 1855 raised the shoreline and altered the coastal scenery.*

DID YOU KNOW?: *Though no botanist, Swainson persuaded the governor of Victoria to employ him in describing the timber trees of that state? This was no easy task, as their study - notably the eucalypts - had baffled several earlier naturalists. When he submitted his report, in 1853, Swainson claimed to have identified 1,520 species of gum tree and 213 casuarinas. He complained that he had run out of Latin words to name all the new species. But his thinking was flawed by his obsession with the number five, and his report was never published or taken seriously. A contemporary biologist condemned Swainson's writing about gum trees as "an exhibition of species-making unparalleled in the annals of botanical literature" and the great botanist Hooker declared, "In my life I think I never read such a series of trash and nonsense. There is a man who left this country with the character of a first-rate naturalist (though with many eccentricities), and he goes to Australia and takes up the the subject of Botany of which he is as ignorant as a goose." In fairness to Swainson, prior to his visit only some 40 species of eucalypt had been described, and today about 700 species are recognized!*

DID YOU KNOW?: *On December 07, 1855, Swainson died in New Zealand from bronchitis? Disillusioned and forgotten by many, certainly impoverished, but not entirely beaten. His last known letter (to his son, Willie) expressed a desire for fresh bulbs so that he could complete a series of unfinished drawings. He went on to note: "I am much pleased of your increasing fondness for gardening and shall always be happy to send you anything I can spare from this place. A garden, as Bacon says 'is the purest of human pleasures,' and truly do I find it so, as in youth, so in age, and no other outdoor recreation is so delightful to me."*

DID YOU KNOW?: *Swainson's science may have failed him, but his wonderfully delicate, painstakingly executed illustrations show us where his true genius lay. His reputation as one of the world's most eminent nature illustrators has not diminished with the years.*

DID YOU KNOW?: *The next time during spring or fall migration when you lay eyes on a Swainson's Thrush, you will now know more than you did before of the bird's namesake? Besides this common migrant, John James Audubon, in 1834, named the Swainson's Warbler after him, and in 1838, Charles Lucien Bonaparte named the Swainson's Hawk in his honor.*



A portrait of early naturalist William Swainson. A story, albeit exceptionally sad, befitting of a Hollywood movie.

(portrait courtesy of: Alexander Turnbull Library)

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