

HISTORY & FACTS of the MARCH CENSUS

MARCH	14-YEAR TOTALS of SPECIES / INDIVIDUALS							
2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
47 / 1,220	46 / 1,327	47 / 1,008	44 / 689	50 / 1,871	51 / 1,466	43 / 1,078	46 / 906	47 / 744
2019	2020	2021	2022	2023				
44 / 1,721	48 / 681	50 / 692	56 / 1,221	50 / 805				

Most Species seen in March : 56 on 03/03/2022.

Most Individual Birds seen in March : 1,871 on 03/07/2014.

Fewest Species seen in March : 43 on 03/04/2016.

Fewest Individual Birds seen in March : 681 on 03/03/2021.

Species Average in March : 47.8 Species.

Total Individuals Average in March : 1,102.1 Individuals.

Lowest Temperature on March Census : minus 2-degrees F on 03/06/2015.

Highest Temperature on March Census : 56-degrees F on 03/02/2012 & 03/03/2020.

Longest Time Afield on March Census : 9 hours & 55 minutes on 03/06/2015.

Shortest Time Afield on March Census : 6 hours & 50 minutes on 03/04/2011.

LAST MARCH'S FIELD REPORT

03/06/23	TOTAL SPECIES:	50	START / END TIME:	6:35am - 4:20pm		
	TOTAL BIRDS:	805	TIME AFIELD:	9:45	FT. MI.:	13.85
ROUTE:	Reverse of normal route - Merriman Valley north to Red Lock Trailhead with a stop at Trail Mix in Peninsula.					
TEMP.:	34F ~ 28F	CONDITIONS:	Chilly and cloudy early, turning partly cloudy with ice pellets falling at 8:55am but lasting less than five minutes; back to partly cloudy, then cloudy again; sprinkles from 2:45pm to 2:55pm; winds light and variable all day; no snow cover.			
TRAIL CONDITIONS:	Good; a few usual low spots with puddling and mud.					
RIVER CONDITIONS:	High, swift, and muddy from heavy all-afternoon rains on 03/03; no rockbars or sandbars showing.					
OBSERVERS:	John Henry and Douglas W. Vogus.					

FIVE YEARS AGO on the TOWPATH TRAIL

On March 01, 2019 we had our highest census total to date of an uncommon bird down in the riverbottom, the diving duck known as the Lesser Scaup. A duck more commonly found on large bodies of water like reservoirs and Lake Erie, the fourteen birds we had on this date were a fly-by just south of the Akron Compost Facility. We've only had five sightings of this species since 2010 and the sighting on this date was the last sighting we've had on the census route.

MARCH 2024's BIRD SPECIES PROFILE

LESSER SCAUP (*Aythya affinis*)

DESCRIPTION: *The most abundant, frequently encountered "Aythya" in North America, the Lesser Scaup is smaller than the Greater Scaup and usually more common in freshwater. Lesser Scaup are medium size with small, narrow heads; high, peaked crowns; and thin necks. Their bills are small and thin, with only a small amount of black surrounding the nail.*

MALE: *Dark head has a purple gloss in good light, but may also appear green. It has a vermiculated gray back and lightly vermiculated flanks that may appear light gray or white.*

FEMALE: *Dark brown head with a moderate white ring enclosing the base of the bill. Back is dark brown, and flanks are a mottled mix of gray and brown. **FLIGHT:** White wing stripe is strong on the secondaries and very faint on the primaries.*

LENGTH: 15" - 19" **WINGSPREAD:** 24" - 33" **WEIGHT:** Males: avg. 1.82 lbs.
Females: avg. 1.65 lbs.

VOICE: *Generally silent; utters "scaup" (skawp) notes; in courtship male utters low short whistle, "whew"; female, a peculiar rattling purr, "kwuh-h-h-h-h".*

HABITS: *Expert diver, swims rapidly underwater by using feet, with wings held tightly closed; confined mostly to freshwater, and most feeding is in depths of 5-6 ft., but as deep as 20 feet. Eats seeds of pondweeds, wigeon grass, wild rice, sedges, bulrushes; also eats snails and other mollusks, small shrimplike crustaceans and aquatic insects. Flocks together in large rafts.*

HABITAT: *Concentrates on lakes and reservoirs, but when stopping to feed, spreads out into marshes and shallow ponds. Breeds in prairies and wetlands in northern Canada to Alaska.*

NESTING: **NEST:** *Well concealed in tall prairie grass, sometimes on islands in small lakes, usually on dry ground, and some may be far from sluggish channel, creek, or prairie slough, in grass-sedge-sow thistle meadow, hay meadow, occasionally in shallows at edges of bays, and sloughs among bulrushes; nest is in a hollow in the ground, profusely lined with female's down and some dried grasses. **EGGS:** May to July, 6 to 15 eggs, commonly 9 to 12 eggs, dark olive-buff. **INCUBATION:** By female, 22 to 27 days; young first fly about 49 days after hatching.*

RANGE: **BREEDING:** *Nest near lakes and pools and large, permanent potholes in the western prairies. **MIGRATION:** In spring, some Lesser Scaup begin to leave their winter range in early February, while large numbers remain through April. Mid-Atlantic and Great Lakes peak early April, late March in the Pacific Northwest. In fall, they remain on the breeding grounds until September. South of its breeding range, in the lower 48, the fall peak occurs in the first two weeks of November virtually everywhere. **WINTER:** Found on lakes, reservoirs, and coastal lagoons. The bulk of the population winters near the Gulf of Mexico in Florida, Louisiana, and Texas. **VAGRANT:** Casual to Bering Sea, north to Greenland and Europe. Accidental in S.A.*

STATUS: *Abundant and widespread in North America, south to northern Colombia. No strong population trends. Overall, the Lesser Scaup seems to be declining slightly, but the breeding range has expanded due to the creation of reservoirs.*

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

Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.
CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCCCC	CCCCuuu	uuuuurrr	rrrrrrrrrr
Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
rrrrrrrrrr	rrrrrrrrrr	rrrrrrrrrr	uuuuuuuu	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 Lesser Scaup on the Cuyahoga Valley Towpath Trail Census 2010 ~ present.

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
JAN.								
FEB.								
MAR.					1	11		
APR.								2
MAY								
JUN.								
JUL.								
AUG.								
SEP.								
OCT.								
NOV.								
DEC.								

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
JAN.							
FEB.	1						
MAR.		14*					
APR.							DID YOU KNOW?:
MAY							Both the Lesser Scaup
JUN.							and the Greater Scaup
JUL.							are very similar, especially
AUG.							at a great distance. They
SEP.							are a commonly hunted
OCT.							duck and most hunters
NOV.							simply refer to them as
DEC.							"Bluebills" instead of

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

trying to differentiate the two species. Other "slang" names for this species are Blackhead, Blackjack, Bullhead, River Bluebill, and River Broadbill.



A pair of Lesser Scaup, a species that stages in extremely large numbers every spring and fall on Lake Erie.

(photo by: Feng Yu)

DID YOU KNOW?: *To many birdwatchers the subject of duck hunting can become a heated debate - why support something that eliminates birds? It truly is a double-edged sword for many and one most of us have wrestled with. This includes me, especially in my younger days, and to this day when I see a couple duck hunters sitting in a blind with the cold, wet sting of a winter gale battering them as they wait for hours for approaching ducks, I still can't help but think, "You know, they sell chicken and even ducks at the store!" But I'm sure plenty of duck hunters would look at me staring at a mudflat through a spotting scope at Ottawa N.W.R. in early August, temperature hovering around 95-degrees and no shade in sight, and think, "You know, they have birds at the zoo!" Every duck hunter, before every duck hunting season, must purchase what is known as the "Federal Duck Stamp" that ensures that there will always be habitat for waterfowl hunting. But it is much greater than just duck hunting and anyone can purchase the stamp to help protect entire ecosystems. As the certificate for the 2023-24 stamp states: "Whether you are a waterfowl hunter, photographer, artist, stamp collector, refuge visitor, bird watcher, or just interested in helping wildlife and the outdoors, your purchase of an annual Duck Stamp is a simple and effective way to contribute to habitat conservation. Thank you!" Research biologists assess the duck populations each year and bag limits are set so the take doesn't exceed the production, far different from the old days when the wanton slaughter of any all ducks was the norm.*

DID YOU KNOW?: *Since 1934, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (Duck Stamp) has been a vital conservation tool. In its 89-year history, the Duck Stamp has raised over 1.2 billion dollars which are dedicated to conserving important wetland habitats. As part of the National Wildlife Refuge System, these lands are home to hundreds of species of plants, mammals, fish, amphibians, insects, and a myriad of wetland and grassland birds. It's not just wildlife that benefits. Wetlands acquired with Duck Stamp dollars help purify water, aid in flood control, reduce erosion and sedimentation, and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities.*

The Junior Duck Stamp Conservation and Design Program has been influencing our next generation of wildlife conservationists and artists for over 30 years. Kindergarten through twelfth grade students in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and the U.S. territories participate in this educational program. Students learn scientific principles of waterfowl biology, wetland ecology, and conservation through a dynamic curriculum. Students share their knowledge of the beauty, diversity, and interdependence of wildlife, habitats, and communities through state and nationally sponsored art and literature contests. Over 300,000 students, educators, families, and community members are engaged annually through the program. Sales of Junior Duck Stamps support programs that connect young people with their natural world through science and the arts. Junior Duck Stamp artists have gone on to careers as wildlife conservationists and wildlife artists and share their talents as teachers.

As we release the 90th Federal Duck Stamp, we celebrate the millions of people who voluntarily invest in protecting quality wildlife habitat and engaging our youngest citizens so they grow up appreciating nature. By purchasing Federal Duck Stamps and Junior Duck Stamps, you have made a valuable and timeless contribution to habitat conservation.

*Martha M. Williams - Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

DID YOU KNOW?: *One of the best examples of a relationship between hunting and conservation can be found right here in northwest Ohio? The Winous Point Shooting Club in Sandusky Bay southwest of Port Clinton has been around since 1856 and has quite the story to tell.*

**WINOUS POINT: CONSERVATION AND RESEARCH PLAY KEY
ROLES IN HISTORY OF ONE OF THE OLDEST HUNTING CLUBS**

By James Proffitt

Two simple, white signs marked "WPSC" on small posts are all that mark its existence to most of the public. The posts sit on either side of a narrow road that turns to gravel then disappears shortly after into the woods and is the gateway to the oldest continuously operating - and most storied - waterfowl hunting club in North America.

While great hunting has been a hallmark of the Winous Point Shooting Club for more than a century and a half, its true nature leans more towards innovation and conservation - especially since the creation of the Winous Point Marsh Conservancy two decades ago, a natural evolution for an organization some of whose members years later would also help establish the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

It was in 1856 that a handful of avid hunters and outdoorsmen from Ohio, New York and Pennsylvania established a hunting club on Muddy Creek Bay. A number of those gentlemen had been spending time in a downtown law office owned by Leonard Case, Sr., a well-known attorney and philanthropist. His sons, William and Leonard Case, Jr., operated their retired father's business. The office was nicknamed "the Ark" because it was filled with pairs, male and female, of numerous species of mounted birds and other animals. While the men who gathered at the Ark were younger and had varied careers, all were deeply interested in wildlife and natural sciences.

Authors Tod Sedgwick and Ray Krolls' book, "Winous Point, 150 Years of Waterfowling and Conservation" (a massive, richly illustrated affair from Derrydale Press, 2010), describes the site: "The Ark was a filthy, haphazard combination of natural history museum and club with no bylaws, rules, regulations, no archives or records. It was situated in a two-room building. One room was an office turned into a gathering place and the other a tool room with drawers containing materials used for taxidermy. Legend has it that it was customary to clean the Ark no more than once a year, and that one year they forgot to clean it and cobwebs, filthy from soot, stretched from floor to ceiling. In its focus on hunting, natural history and fellowship, the Ark clearly was a precursor to the Winous Point Shooting Club, as well as the Cleveland Museum of Natural History." With \$400 for 205 acres and \$870 for a clubhouse, the 20 men established the Winous Point Hunting Club. And the rest is history.

BENEFITS OF GOOD STEWARDSHIP - Andy Jones, curator of ornithology at the CMNH, said he's made trips to the marsh for some years now. "The invitation was kind of in recognition of the long connection between the two," he explained. "In the founders of both, there were some names in common. There are names I see on specimen tags that are also shared with Winous Point folks. I know on our lower level, one of our exhibits is one of the waterfowl that are supposed to be at Winous Point. I know the shooting club's founders were comprised of wealthy folks and so were the museum's founders. It wasn't a big community, so it just made sense for those environmentally focused people to be pulled into both. We still share people, there are members of the Marsh Conservancy board who are also board members at the museum." Jones is now a board member of the Winous Point Marsh Conservancy and described Winous Point's contributions to conservation and science as lengthy and significant.

Since 1862 the Shooting Club has kept a meticulous record of waterfowl harvests, including which members took which ducks and how many. Less than a decade later some members were already looking toward the preservation of natural resources in the region as well as nationwide. This included Civil War financier and Shooting Club member Jay Cooke, who helped fund a series of lectures creating enthusiasm for the establishment of the nation's first national park, Yellowstone. While spring hunting wasn't nearly as fruitful as autumn, it was practiced for a short time during Winous Point's early years, though some members quickly soured on the activity since it intercepted birds aiming to breed. Member David Cross wrote in his 1880 book, "Fifty Years With the Gun and Rod," "Spring shooting of ducks, especially those that breed here, should be prohibited by our game laws throughout the United States." The last record of ducks killed during spring at Winous Point was in 1884, two years before the club rules prohibited it and 35 years before the federal government outlawed the practice.

Cross also wrote about the changing attitudes of hunters: "But now, and for several years past a more exalted policy has prevailed, and the people themselves have taken that matter in hand; formed numerous sporting clubs; secured the passage of more stringent and effective game laws, and have shown a worthy and laudable disposition to yield a part of their private rights to the public good. For years baiting, using corn or grain to attract ducks, was a common and accepted practice among the many duckhunting clubs in northwest Ohio. It began when duck populations plummeted in the early 1900s as a result of unregulated sport hunting and market hunting, where large numbers of birds were taken in commercial operations which sold ducks to retail markets.

While some Shooting Club members resisted, new laws eventually enacted prohibiting baiting, and lowering daily bag limits, among other restrictions. The membership as a whole eventually embraced them. Member Chester Brooks, according to Kroll, persuaded members to contribute \$50 each to More Game Birds in America, the predecessor to Ducks Unlimited. At one point, members were poised to fully support a closed season with no duck hunting, if federal scientists said it was needed. By 1945, the Shooting Club began to incorporate wildlife biologists in its operations, thus beginning the constant study of the waters, ducks, birds, fish and flora of the marshes of Muddy Creek and Sandusky bays. Unpredictable fluctuations in Lake Erie water levels also meant an unprecedented era of stone-moving, earth-moving and dike-building would soon begin.

MANY WIDE-RANGING ACHIEVEMENTS AT WINOUS POINT - Jones describes Winous Point as a remarkable place. He was reluctant to cite a single notable achievement, instead noting there are many. "I feel like it's really a body of work. Early on it was very duck-focused, and now instead of taking away that focus they've expanded into non-game things. They've really been doing work that's led to contributions to the bigger picture about how to manage waterfowl correctly for the entire continent," he said. "Winous Point has been contracted to analyze data at the state level on banded ducks harvested by hunters," going on to say the ODNR implicitly trusts the organizations scientists and science.

In recent decades a multitude of research topics have been facilitated by Winous Point, including:

- *** Mercury, cadmium and selenium accumulation in eggs and chicks of Great Blue Herons.
- *** Use of Northern Pike to control carp.
- *** Dietary and reproductive habits of Blanding's Turtles.
- *** DDT in marsh ecosystems and waterfowl.
- *** Factors affecting reproductive success of Common Terns.
- *** And dozens of others.

Brendan Shirkey, research coordinator for the Marsh Conservancy, said he and other researchers assist the Ohio Department of Natural Resources and Canadian scientists on projects. "We do a lot of wetlands research that has nothing to do with ducks or duck hunting, and that's the way the trustees want it," he said. "One of the really big projects they did out here was on drawdowns and how succession happens in a wetland and what vegetative response is when you draw water levels down. That's a lot of the management we do now and a lot of the management that's done all over the country. Wetlands are meant to be dynamic and changing. That was some of the first work ever done on drawdowns. That was, I think, the vision of the trustees with the research program. It's great that we can manage our own 3,000 acres the way we want to provide healthy, high-quality wetlands, but through research hopefully we can have an impact far beyond our borders."

A MARSH THAT NEVER SHRINKS - "Right now it's close to 3,500 acres," said John Simpson, executive director of the Marsh Conservancy. "It's the largest privately held marsh in the region." And Simpson said, it's always growing. "We've slowly been adding to it," he said. "We just purchased a small parcel last year and a larger parcel, about 400 acres in Sandusky County, about 10 years ago. Slowly but surely we're adding to that acreage. The Marsh Conservancy works to protect all that acreage under permanent conservation easement."

According to Simpson, about half the acreage gets hunted during waterfowl season and the other half rarely. And speaking of rarely, the once-rare American White Pelican has been showing up in greater numbers at Winous Point every year. So have Sandhill Cranes, which now nest and breed on the marsh. Also showing up at Winous Point in greater numbers are people. "We host a lot of meetings and classroom events for Ohio State and Hocking College and other non-profits like Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever," Simpson said. "The Division of Wildlife uses our facilities and there are a few women's events the Ottawa Soil and Water Conservation District puts on out here. The research program is probably the biggest thing. Last year I think we had 14 students and technicians living at our place doing research on eight different projects from Blanding's Turtles to King Rails and herons, and duck and waterfowl projects, of course. And we just wrapped up a bunch of shorebird projects.

Jim Schott described Winous Point's role in conservation as ever-expanding as its former interns and research students graduate from their universities and enter into careers. "I'm not sure how many students they've had since the inception of the program, but there's been hundreds of kids over the years that drove down that long lane and left with a lot of experience and knowledge," he said. "There's a lot of them here in Ohio but they're all over the country, with the USFWS, Ducks Unlimited or other wildlife services. It's pretty amazing how many folks are out there when you talk to them and end up finding out they worked at Winous."

A STORIED MARSH OPENS TO THE WORLD - While the Shooting Club delivered nearly a century and a half of fine hunting and ever-improving marsh management, it also blossomed into a site that produced a long line of conservationists with its internship program. This program, which began in 1983, saw two college undergrads spending six months on the property each year performing all manner of work, including maintenance, improvements and various wetland projects. It was the 1999 morphing of the longstanding Winous Point Research Committee into the Marsh Conservancy that saw research project numbers grow quickly on the property. The new Marsh Conservancy, a nonprofit with a focus on science and education, saw a renewed and extensive focus on the preservation, improvement and sometimes acquisition of wetlands in the region. The move opened the site to a new avenue for the future of wetlands in the region and, as a result of research, wetlands nationwide.

"Ever since the inception of the Marsh Conservancy they've really opened their doors," said Schott, a former intern who now oversees the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' 3,200-acre Pickerel Creek Wildlife Area. "I was around in the '90s and back then Winous Point was kind of a quiet place, it was just a shooting club. Yeah, they brought in interns and there were some masters students from Ohio State, but once the conservancy was developed they really opened up the doors."

"A Day on the Wild Side" is one example of Winous Point's vision. The annual summer event (canceled last year and likely this year due to COVID-19) brings in kids from all over northwest Ohio to experience everything Winous Point has to offer. That includes activities like bird banding, fishing, shooting shotguns and rifles, archery, a trip through the marsh on a punt boat and, of course, pizza. "It's a day geared around getting kids outside and learning what we have right here in our own back yard," said Joe Uhinck, who also interned at Winous Point and is now a district program technician at the Ottawa Soil and Water Conservation District. "We get their feet in the water and they get the feel and touch, the whole experience of the marsh as well as other experiences."

Uhinck said it's especially nice to see kids show up who have little to no outdoors experience. "That's one of the greatest things, getting kids with different backgrounds, different experiences," he said. "Just about everyone that does it leaves pretty excited and pretty happy. They learn a lot of new things and always want to come back." Sandusky County Park District Research Coordinator Tom Kashmer spends time at Winous Point working both with birds and people. "Three times a year I lead tours for the public out there and go through the clubhouse, give them the history of the club. Most people think of hunt clubs as just a hunting club, where Winous Point is so different than other clubs," he said. Kashmer's job currently involves pulling several duck species from marsh traps where he bands them and records data before releasing them. Kashmer hosts workshops, including at Day on the Wild Side, where songbirds, warblers and other birds are netted, banded, analyzed and then released. "I've banded hundreds of Redheads, maybe 50 Canvasbacks over the years, Ring-necked Ducks, Northern Shovelers, Gadwalls. And I couldn't think of a better way to get kids involved with nature than birdbanding," he said. "They actually see, and in most cases actually hold, wild birds that most people don't even know exist. The looks on faces are pure joy and excitement."



An aerial view of the Winous Point Shooting Club, America's oldest hunting club and a mecca for wildlife research.

(photo by: John Clem)

Of course for every good story on hunting, there are plenty of bad ones. It's these types of people who really give hunting a bad name.

MEN WHO SHOT 58 DUCKS SENTENCED IN 'WORST CASE' OF WATERFOWL POACHING

By John Agar < mlive.com > Published: December 14, 2016

OTTAWA COUNTY, MI - Four men convicted of killing 58 ducks over a bait pile were each fined nearly \$6,000 and given suspended jail sentences. Conservation officers considered the killings among the areas worst cases of waterfowl poaching.

Justin Allen Beckman, 20, of Coopersville, Michael Duane Sorensen III, 20, of Marne, Colson Thomas Modderman, 22, of Wyoming and Tyler John Meerman, 24, of Conklin pleaded guilty to hunting/taking ducks over bait. Other charges were dismissed in a plea agreement. The men were sentenced Tuesday, Dec. 13, by Hudsonville District Judge Kenneth Post.

He ordered the men to each pay fines of \$5,890, spend 18 months on probation, lose hunting privileges this year and the following three years and forfeit firearms. The judge sentenced them to suspended terms of 90 days in the Ottawa County Jail to be served if they violate probation.

A day after the waterfowl season opened Oct. 9, the state Department of Natural Resources investigated a tip about duck poaching on a pond near the Grand River watershed in Ottawa County's Chester Township. The four had taken 58 ducks, more than twice the limit for the size of their hunting party. They took 23 Mallards and 35 Wood Ducks. They had thrown corn into the pond and along the water's edge. Conservation Officer David Rodgers hid nearby and watched the men.

"I sat and hid for probably a good hour watching the activity, seeing what they were doing, watching them handling birds, looking for birds," Rodgers earlier told The Grand Rapids Press and MLive. "They shot a very large amount of birds in a short time so they had a lot of birds on the ground, in the water, in the weeds, in the cornfield. ...I watched for quite a while while they retrieved birds, and they were laughing about all the birds they shot." He called the incident "the worst case of over-limit on waterfowl I've seen in my (20-year) career."

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