



WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

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Birding IS for Everyone!

By Nancy Howell, WCAS Board Member

As a birder I have found that birders are some of the most giving people. A bit biased perhaps, but when out in the field, if someone spots an unusual or even common species that needs identification, birders will take the time to share their information. Birders often take new birders, young or old, “under their wing” to share knowledge. Birders love their birds and the outdoors. Now is the time to take steps that may not be easy - increase the birding experience with a more diverse and inclusive audience in a more equitable and just manner.

As a birder or nature enthusiast stepping outdoors, do you feel safe? Do you feel that you can walk in your neighborhood and admire the plants and wildlife, enjoy the sun and breeze? If you are walking in your neighborhood with binoculars, are you stopped or questioned? Not everyone shares these opportunities ... why? It may be as simple as not having a greenspace to go to and explore. It may be as complex as not feeling safe going beyond one’s own home. It could be a deeper underlying factor that people don’t feel welcome being outdoors and enjoying nature due to their skin color, economic status, religious beliefs, or gender identity. The outdoors IS for everyone and everyone MUST be welcomed! Not long ago Western Cuyahoga Audubon created a policy that addresses equity, diversity, and inclusivity. See, <https://bit.ly/3wlrLBC> This was drafted shortly after the incident in Central Park with black birder Christian Cooper. More recently, birder, J. Drew Lanhan, wrote a hard-hitting article, “*What Do We Do About John James Audubon?*” in which he questions John James Audubon enslaving “at least nine people”. In response, two articles from National Audubon’s staff, “*Why Audubon Magazine Turned Its Spotlight to John James Audubon*” and “*Revealing the Past to Create the Future*”, brings to light National Audubon’s views. A quote from the first article by Jennifer Bogo reads, “...that puts our own identity in the spotlight or challenges our parent organization (NAS) to reexamine its priorities.” David Yarnold’s quote states, “... we (NAS) can do far more as organizations and as individuals than we thought possible even six months ago. In order to do that, we have to

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own up to our pasts even while we chart a new future.” Acknowledging these facts may be the beginnings of opening up the organization, but is it enough?

WCAS strives to be more diverse and inclusive, yet our chapter struggles as well. How do we develop a more diverse Board? What steps should our chapter take to go into neighborhoods to share the joy of birds and the outdoors? Is there a way to bring the excitement of birding and the outdoors to others virtually? What community leaders should we communicate with to bring the Audubon message to neighborhoods? We need the assistance of our members and social media community. Audubon chapters are the grass-roots of the parent organization, the National Audubon Society, and chapters will take leading roles in social change. Won't you join WCAS to help us begin working toward charting a socially just and inclusive future for those who may or may not have experienced a love for the outdoors and birds? You could be the spark and change someone's life.