



# WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

CONNECT › EDUCATE › CONSERVE

## On the Cusp of Spring Migration

By Tim Colborn, Board Member, Western Cuyahoga Audubon

*“When March finds us, we can get truly excited both in the freedom that warmer temperatures bring and the beginning movements of birds back into and through the region.”*

As winter draws to a close in Northeast Ohio and the rivers and lakes begin giving up their icy surfaces to the warmth of longer days, it isn't unusual for us birders to experience an increasing sense of anticipation for the imminent migration. January and February have their charms for the hardcore birder and those who enjoy searching for open veins of water out on the lake for a handful of waterbird species. Indeed, there can be a certain joy in pouring over flocks of hundreds of Ring-billed and Herring Gulls searching for that lone “white-winger”. But when March finds us, we can get truly excited both in the freedom that warmer temperatures bring and the beginning movements of birds back into and through the region.

When the calendar finally flips to the month of March, we know that the waterfowl migration is fully upon us. Ducks, geese and swans all are on the move north including huge numbers of Canada Geese and Mallards. Both dabblers and divers alike fill ponds and lakes on their way here and further north. This is also a great time to be looking for Common Loons and both Pied-billed and Horned Grebes.

As access to water increases, Great Blue Herons and Great Egrets begin their incursion into the northern half of the state joined by the first wave of shorebirds such as American Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, Pectoral Sandpiper and the soon-to-be ubiquitous Killdeer! Keep an eye open for increasing numbers of Belted Kingfishers seeking water bound prey. And try to maintain

your calm when you see those first Tree Swallows gliding over the water in search of the season's earliest flying insects!

Migrating songbirds also make progress into the region as the first Eastern Phoebes may be heard along streams and forest hiking trails. While American Robins are present in small numbers all winter here, their appearance on the first green patches of suburban lawns (switching from their winter sustenance of berries to protein-laden worms) are also a welcomed sight. It may be a little on the early side to start looking for the rush of warblers but the first Pine Warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush are often seen or heard near the end of March along with increasing numbers of Yellow-rumped Warblers.

A number of sparrows, including both Chipping and Field Sparrows, arrive at the same time our winter visitors, American Tree Sparrows, are departing. Blackbird numbers start rising with the first Red-winged in February but they and their cousins, Common Grackles, both increase in number during the month while Rusty Blackbirds (a declining species) become more conspicuous as well.

There are many ways to "kick off" spring birding in March but one Ohio tradition provides a combination of bird-related workshops, vendors, and self-guided field trips supported by experts at several birding locations...the Shreve Migration Sensation! This year's event is scheduled for Saturday, March 17, 2018 and is the 18<sup>th</sup> annual Sensation. The event benefits from a great location near Killbuck Marsh, Shreve Lake, Brown's Bog and Funk Bottoms wildlife areas, Ohio's "largest inland natural wetland complex," covering over 5,600 acres. The event headquarters are at the Shreve Elementary School, 598 North Market Street (State Route 226), in Shreve, Ohio. An admission fee is charged and includes any or all events including several workshops. You can register on the day of the event at the school.

The Migration Sensation takes place smack dab at the peak of the waterfowl migration through Wayne County. Large numbers of Athaya ducks (including Canvasbacks, Redheads, Ring-necked Ducks, and Lesser Scaup) rest and feed in the marshes in Killbuck and Funk Bottoms on their journey north. Dabblers in strong numbers include Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail and both Green-winged and Blue-winged Teal. Bufflehead, Hooded Merganser and Ruddy Duck are also at their peak.

Wherever your March birding takes you, enjoy those returning species that help us appreciate the natural migration cycle of our beloved winged creatures in a pattern that has occurred for thousands of years and will, we hope, continue evermore.