



# WESTERN CUYAHOGA AUDUBON SOCIETY

CONNECT › EDUCATE › CONSERVE

## This Place is For the Birds

By Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser

When I retired from the Federal Government and prepared to return to Ohio from the DC area in 2013, I honed in on finding a location with green space where I could garden and watch the birds. I found the ideal spot, a condo near the Cuyahoga Valley National Park that had a steep bank in the back yard that was in dire need of beautification. It was not maintained by the condo association - they only mowed the grass between the patio and the slope.

When I moved there in April, I was thrilled to observe cardinals in both the front and back yards, even though there were no bird feeders out yet; and also discovered that a robin was nesting in a bush next to the patio.

As I focused my attention on developing the garden on the bank, it was my greatest hope to attract bluebirds. The first additions to the back yard were a bluebird nest box and a blue bird feeder. The house behind me had several acres of grass with tall trees, there were fields nearby, the rear of the development was backup to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and since I had brought a water garden in a large container with me, I thought the sound of the fountain might help to attract bluebirds to my yard.

The bank was wildly overgrown with weeds and stumps from bushes that had died from neglect. I worked for several weeks and may have set the neighborhood record for the number of garden refuse bags set out on the curb – 76 of them!

I had never tried to garden on a slope before. Maybe it would not retain water. How many hours of sunlight did it get? What kinds of plants would grow there? Some pachysandra had crept over from the neighbor's side, so I thought more ground covers was a good place to begin. I had a particular color palette in mind so I chose vinca minor for its blue flowers, sweet

woodruff for its white flowers, and creeping phlox in pink and lavender. Over the years, I have shopped garden center sale counters for bargains and added brunnera, astilbe, hosta, milkweed, day lilies, hollyhocks, foxglove, knockout roses, delphinium, Oriental lilies, butterfly bushes, azaleas, moneywort, and sedum.

I got lots of visitors, but unfortunately, only the jays were blue. House sparrows grabbed every box in the front and back yards. Last year I put a stop to that by overlaying squares of wood with smaller-sized openings over the holes on my existing bird houses and adding two wren houses.

Many years ago, when my children were little, we had a wren house hanging outside our second story window and were charmed daily by the bubbly songs of the occupants. I had heard house wrens at my new home, but had never seen one until one pair discovered one of the altered boxes and another pair moved into one of the wren houses. This year I have two families of house wrens in the back yard and one in the front.

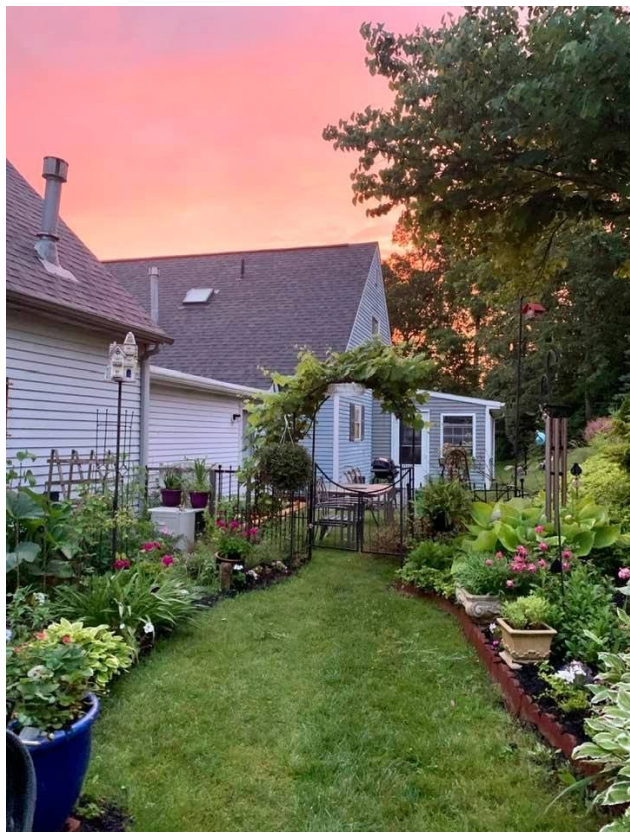
I love to go outside before daylight to watch the world, and the house wrens, wake up.

Here are some of my favorite shots:



Above: The Kiser slope. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.





**Above: Sunrise in the backyard. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**



**Above: Wren (Troglodytidae). Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**



**Above: Wren at its house. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**



**Above: Wren looking out of its house. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**





**Above: Wren poking its head out of the bird house. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**



**Above: Wren head poking out of the bird house. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**



Above: The red roofed wren house! Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.



Above: Wren House roof. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.





**Above: Wren singing in the yard. Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**



**Above: Wren with a twig! Photo by Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**



**Above: Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser. Photo courtesy of Joyce (Joy) M. Kiser.**

**Joy M. Kiser** wrote the Ohioana Award winning book, *America's Other Audubon*. She was born in Akron and grew up in Norton, Ohio.

She began her professional career as the librarian for the Cleveland Museum of Natural History in 1995. In 2001, she moved to the Washington, DC, area to become the librarian for National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and was a Behind the Scenes Volunteer in the Smithsonian Institution Libraries Joseph F. Cullman 3rd Library of Natural History.

When the NEA library was eliminated in 2006, she shifted careers and served as a writer/editor for the United States Department of Homeland Security and finally for the United States Department of Justice.

In 2013, she returned to Ohio and is currently is employed as a specialist for the United Way of Summit County 2-1-1 service.