Migration Highlights in Late Winter and Early Spring

By Tom Fishburn

It’s getting to be that time of year when we get excited about the changes that late winter and early spring brings. Late winter waterfowl migration peaks in February and March for many sought after species. Hopes of seeing some less common Northern Pintails along with a variety of others gets us outdoors looking. And in April we look for the likes of Common Loons and Horned Grebes in breeding plumage as those later stragglers pass through Ohio.

Although I am a person who enjoys four seasons, the usual long extended winters in northern Ohio makes me yearn for the changes. Temperatures rise and we look for buds to start growing on trees and the wildflowers on forest floors start blooming. For many of us fascinated with birds, we get great joy to see birds returning that we have not seen since last year. As residents in this outstanding migratory area, springtime is a highlight of our year.

So as the waterfowl migration winds down we begin to look for passerines to return. Years ago many of us would consider the return of the American Robin as a harbinger of spring. But since not all robins leave the area the way they used to, we now look at other species as indicators. The Red-winged Blackbird and American Woodcock may be what many consider when the ‘firsts’ return to shout, “Spring is here!”

As for me, I look to the return of swallows. In April we should be seeing the bright iridescent blue backs of Tree Swallows. With their contrasting clear white breasts, those are hard to miss. Colorful Barn Swallows with their forked tails and the dull and dingy looking Rough-winged Swallow soon follow. One may also see Cliff and Bank Swallows.

Early spring arrives and the warblers and many other anticipated species will inevitably follow. We’ll be eager to shed our layers and get outdoors and stretch our legs in the variety of wonderful parks Ohio offers.

Above: Northern Pintail (Anas acuta), Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail, Manchester Trail, Akron, OH; Canvasback (Aythya valisineria), Coe Lake, Berea, OH; Tree Swallow (Tachycineta bicolor), Letha House Park, Spencer, OH by Tom Fishburn.
CBC-Lakewood Circle 2020 Photos: Bird Nerds Birding by Buster Banish; Black Vultures (Coragyps atratus) by Jassen & Laura Tawil; Gulls at the Mouth of the Rocky River by Anna Kozenko; Rocky River Nature Center sunrise by Shawn Missig.

**CBC 2020 - A GREAT YEAR!**

By Nancy Howell, Compiler for the Lakewood Circle Christmas Bird Count

When I first wrote the Christmas Bird Count 2020 article for the Western Cuyahoga Audubon newsletter back in November titled “Christmas Bird Count 2020: It’s Going to be a Good Year”, I never dreamed that the Count would be one of the best EVER! What makes a Christmas Bird Count great? The weather? Sunday, December 27, the day of the Count, had just the right amount of snow. The day was mostly sunny and temperatures were in the mid 30’s to lower 40’s which made walking sometimes a little “too warm” with all of the layers of clothing. The birds? The 2020 Count tallied a record number **89 species on Count Day** and **5 species on Count Week**. Not all routes get rare or unusual species, but ALL species and the number of each species are important. Yes, rare and unusual species are special and the 2020 Count had these species: **Cackling Goose**, **Harlequin Duck**, **Long-tailed Duck**, **Ring-necked Pheasant**, **Black-headed Gull** (first EVER for the Lakewood Circle CBC), **Black Vulture** (first EVER for the Lakewood Circle CBC), **Common Redpoll** and **Pine Siskin** (two species of irruptive, northern finches), and **Eastern Meadowlark**. The people? Yes, our participants ARE the most important part of the Christmas Bird Count. Whether as part of a walking or driving route, or as a feeder watcher, your skills and effort were appreciated. The 2020 Count had **86 participants** logging in 45 minutes of “owling time”, feeder watchers and walking the neighborhood logged in nearly 26 hours, while walking routes tallied 74.5 hours with 73.25 miles walked. Driving routes tallied 19.25 hours and 140.25 miles. I am always amazed at the dedication of every participant. Thank you. Mark your calendars for the Lakewood Circle Christmas Bird Count 2021 which will be held on **Sunday, December 26, 2021**. See, “Christmas Bird Count-Lakewood Circle 2020 Final Report and Community Photo Gallery”.

**WALKS AND FIELD TRIPS >>>**

Photos (left to right): Barred Owl (Strix varia) by Gustino J Lanese; On the trail at Rocky River Reservation by Kaoru Tsubone; Eastern Bluebird (Sialia sialis) by Bridgette Seebacher; Red-bellied Woodpecker (Melanerpes carolinus) by Gustino J Lanese.

**WCAS Bird Walk COVID-19 Protocols**

Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society’s utmost concern is for the health and safety of our members and volunteers, their families, and communities we serve. We are not able to meet for traditionally scheduled chapter bird walks and field trips, but we can stay connected through social media, participate in WCAS community virtual programs and activities, and casually meet with 2-3 birding friends while observing COVID-19 social and physical distancing protocols for mutual health and well-being. Here are **five** reminders: (1) Limit group sizes to 10 people or less. (2) Use social distancing, working in a scattered fashion at least 6’ apart from each other. (3) Plan to travel separately, unless part of a family living together. (4) Plan to bring and wear face masks. (5) Wash hands with soap and water or use a high-alcohol based gel hand sanitizer. Let’s be safe so we can bird together again! Read Online
Virtual Field Trips, Digital Scrapbooking, and Online Community Meet Ups!

Michelle Brosius, Field Trip Co-Coordinator, WCAS, invites birders to participate in a monthly designated field trip location, share stories to a public digital scrapbook, and meet fellow birders in optional online community meet ups hosted at the WCAS Virtual Conference Center. Attendees are encouraged to take photographs, draw a picture or create art inspired by what they see, tally species, create a poem, a Haiku, questions or curiosities about birds, plants, or even a butterfly while visiting the natural area. Contributions are published to the WCAudubon.org website. Email content to MichelleBrosius@WCAudubon.org.

Virtual Field Trip February 2021
Dates: February 1-28, 2021
Location: Cleveland Metroparks, Bradley Woods Reservation, White Oak Ln, Westlake, OH 44145 Park Map
Featured Species: Black-capped Chickadee
Notes: This location is considered a swamp forest and includes a walking path around a lake and over two miles of hiking trails. Meet Up: Wed Mar 10, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
Trip & Meet Up Registration

Virtual Field Trip March 2021
Dates: March 1-31, 2021
Location: Cleveland Metroparks, North Chagrin Reservation, 3037 SOM Center Rd, Willoughby Hills, OH 44094 Park Map
Suggested site: Oxbow Lagoon, accessed just south of Squire’s Castle off Chagrin River Road.
Featured Species: Red-winged Blackbird
Notes: Your visit can include anywhere in North Chagrin Reservation. We are looking for Red-winged Blackbirds found at Oxbow Lagoon. Squires Castle is also a fun site to observe birds. The Nature Center is closed, but surrounding trails, Sunset Pond, and Sanctuary Marsh nearby are a great place to look for birds. Meet Up: Wed April 14, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
Trip & Meet Up Registration

Virtual Field Trip April 2021
Dates: April 1-30, 2021
Location: Lucia S. Nash Preserve, 16429 Snow Rd, Burton, OH 44021 Park Map
Featured Species: Sandhill Crane and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Notes: Owned by the Ohio Nature Conservancy, this preserve opened in Summer 2020 and no historical eBird data exists for the month of April. Let’s change that! Walk the Barbara A. Lipscomb Snow Lake Trail in search of target species and much more. Meet Up: Wed May 12, 2021 at 7:00 p.m.
Trip & Meet Up Registration

Go to the WCAS Virtual Conference Center for chapter virtual programs. Download FREE Desktop & Mobile Apps.
PROJECT UPDATES

Virtual Field Trip Report by Michelle Brosius, WCAS Board Member & Field Trip Co-Coordinator. In July 2020, WCAS kicked off the Virtual Field Trip series of bird walks, designed to be enjoyed independently or with members of your household. There are up to two ways to participate in the program. You can visit the month’s designated field trip location and report back to myself regarding your experience. These reports can take the form of bird species lists, journaling, photography, etc. I compile your submitted items into a digital scrapbook published on the wcaudubon.org website and shared across our social media platforms. The second way to participate is to join me for the virtual meetup on the WCAS Virtual Conference Center during which I present the scrapbook and encourage discussion. Since the program began, we’ve had people participate in both events or just one or the other, depending on availability, mobility, or interest. Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve (CLNP) was our October location and participants searched for fall warblers, kinglets, and sparrows. The kinglets and warblers were easier to find earlier in the month, whereas sparrows were plentiful throughout. We had six participants visit CLNP during the month to provide content for the scrapbook that was shared on social media and at the virtual meetup for discussion. Three participants scored lifers! Al Rand saw a Sedge Wren and Purple Finch, Shaun Missig saw a Golden-crowned Kinglet and a Saw-whet Owl, and I saw a beautiful Marsh Wren for the first time. Nancy Howell was the month’s overachiever, visiting the preserve seven times and tallying a total of 79 species! In November, five virtual field trip participants visited Richfield Heritage Preserve in search of Woodpeckers and Nuthatches. November with its fall colors seemed to be the perfect month to showcase the location. The preserve has a very interesting history as most of the land was formerly owned by inventor James Kirby for many years before it was purchased by the Girl Scouts of North East Ohio. The land served as a Girl Scout Camp for 80 years before becoming a preserve managed by Richfield Joint Recreation District in 2014. Mary Ann Henderson recalled her nostalgic experience camping there as a Girl Scout! Tom Fishburn was granted an off-trail permit and shared some beautiful photographs of Kirby’s Mill and “Secret Falls”. Overall, the location was gorgeous and birding was typical for November. Woodpeckers and Nuthatches were seen by most, and Eastern Bluebirds and a Belted Kingfisher were a joy to see. December’s location was Sandy Ridge Reservation in which participants hoped to see the American Tree Sparrow and winter waterfowl, e.g., American Black Duck. These species and much more can be seen in the trip’s digital scrapbook. I invite you to register for upcoming virtual field trips by clicking on the appropriate tile at the WCAS home page wcaudubon.org.

Above: Eastern Bluebird, Oak Openings, Swanton, OH by Tom Fishburn.

Project – Bluebird Boxes No one we’ve talked to seems to know where they came from, but there are a couple of older bluebird boxes on posts behind the Lewis Road Riding Ring. They are not being maintained. WCAS is launching a project that will remedy this situation. As this is Metroparks property, WCAS has requested and received provisional permission to replace the existing boxes with 4 – 5 new ones. We will also provide the following: New posts, Protective hardware (raccoon guards, which the existing boxes do not have), Weekly monitoring from April 1 to July 31 each year to prevent house sparrows from using the boxes. Training from the Metroparks is required. WCAS is recruiting project volunteers and soliciting donations to help fund this project. The Jean E. Miske Memorial Fund will match 1 for 1 every dollar donated up to $500. Excess funds, if any, will benefit WCAS. Please go here for details and to make a donation.

Memorial funding is a great way to honor a deceased loved one or friend. How better to honor a passed nature lover than to set up a memorial fund benefiting an organization that promotes nature such as WCAS? Similar but different than legacy donations, there may be tax advantages as well. This may be especially true for those who receive an inheritance. Please keep WCAS in mind. ~ Kurt Miske, WCAS Board Member
FUNDRAISING AND ADVOCACY >>>

**SPRING WARBLER CHALLENGE 2021, April 1 through May 31, 2021!** Just what everyone has been waiting for, not just to get out of the house, but to get out and find those spring warblers. Birds are in their flashy, breeding plumage and they tend to concentrate in areas so this should be a fun and exciting Challenge. Through the spring songbird migration, April 1-May 31, WCAS challenges birders to see and list as many species of spring warblers as possible. Here’s what you need to do and the rules:

First, register for the Spring Warbler Challenge [here](#) ● Look for warblers during the dates of April 1-May 31. We will use the honor system for your sightings. ● Remain in the county in which you live. You may travel throughout the county. ● Bird on your own or with a couple of others. Limit your “group” to 3 people maximum. ● Always follow COVID-19 gathering guidelines - wear masks, remain at least 6 feet apart, do not gather in groups of more than a couple of people, wash hands frequently, avoid larger groups and people not wearing masks even when outdoors, and use hand sanitizer. ● Observe other species too, but keep track of warblers using the WCAS chart listing warbler species, as well as date and place viewed. ● Entries are due no later than June 12, 2021 to [info@wcaudubon.org](mailto:info@wcaudubon.org). The entry with the most species will receive a Western Cuyahoga Audubon membership for the year or if already a member, will have the membership extended for another year (a $40.00 value) and an Urban Birding Cleveland t-shirt. If there is a tie, a name will be selected randomly from the tied entries.


**The Council of Ohio Audubon Chapters (COAC),** of which Western Cuyahoga Audubon is a member, met virtually in November, December and January. Jackine Augustine, former President of COAC, has accepted a position as Executive Director of Audubon of Kansas. We congratulate Jackie on this awesome move, but are sad to see her go. Interim President of COAC will be Mark Demyan of Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland. A couple of COAC Board positions are expiring at the end of June 2021. COAC is looking for a dynamic and forward-looking President to lead the organization and assist in bringing together all Ohio Audubon chapters. The Secretary position is also expiring at the end of June and will need to be filled. Roles of the Secretary are to keep detailed notes at the Chapter and Board meetings, send out Agenda for the Chapter and Board meetings which are done virtually, work with other Board members and Chapter representatives in communications. The Treasurer’s position will be vacated in 2022, but a Treasurer’s intern would be good to work with the present Treasurer to become familiar with the finances of the organization. Please send nominations for President, Secretary and Treasurer to info@counciloac.org. The COAC Board decided that the Chapter dues for the 2021-2022 Fiscal year (July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022) would be $75.00/year for Chapter Membership or $300.00/year for a Sustaining Chapter Membership. Individual people who would like to join as a member would be $20.00/year. All are welcome to join the COAC virtual meetings. Audubon Chapters meet on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 PM and COAC Board meetings are the third Tuesday of each month, again at 7:00 PM. Meetings are held via Free Conference Call. For more information, visit the Council of Ohio Audubon Chapters (COAC) website at [https://counciloac.org](http://https://counciloac.org).


**Birthday Fundraisers.** Consider celebrating your birthday with a WCAS fundraiser on Facebook. Or, for an upcoming birthday for a special child, family member or someone you’d like to honor. Support WCAS grassroots action by making a gift at [https://bit.ly/2Wx1rtT](https://bit.ly/2Wx1rtT)

**Thank You Volunteers!** Michelle Brosius, Allan Clayton, Tomas Curtis, Mary Lou Czajka, Karen Czerniawski, Bill Deininger, Laura Erickson, Katie Fallon, Gloria Ferris, Tom Fishburn, Dave Graskemper, Carrie Green, John Hannon, Nancy Howell, Dr. Hunter King, Joy Kiser, Jo Ann Bastian Kubicki, David Lindo, Kent Miller, Mary Anne Pfrogner, Amanda Sebrosky, Chuck Slusarczyk Jr., and Kaoru Tsubone. **Welcome New Members!** Jennifer Codding, Gloria Roth, Elizabeth Schuckert, Colleen Siedlecki, Rita Stevens, Dakota Swisher, Jassen and Laura Tawil.
PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES >>>

Above: (left to right) Dr. Jackie Augustine, Nancy Howell, Carrie Elvey.

Member Meetings and Speaker Series 2020-2021. Programs are free and open to the public. Member Meeting at 7:30 p.m. Speaker at 8:00 p.m. at join.freeconferencecall.com/info8415

“Robots, Drones and the Science of Studying Prairie-Chickens” Presenter: Dr. Jackie Augustine, Associate Professor at The Ohio State University, Lima Date & Time: Tuesday, February 2, 2021 at 7:30 p.m. Description: Dr. Jackie Augustine is a behavioral ecologist who studies the mating behaviors of wild birds. While attending Kansas State University for her doctorate, she fell in love with prairie-chickens, and has now been studying them for nearly two decades. Her research utilizes robots to study how males attract mates in Greater and Lesser Prairie-Chickens, two declining species whose ranges overlap in western Kansas. Another project is determining the future use of drones to survey prairie-chickens. The program will include videos of robots and drones in action. Registration

“What Is That Bird Doing?: Feeding Behavior” Presenter: Nancy Howell with videos by Bill Deininger Date & Time: Tuesday, March 2, 2021 at 7:30 p.m. Description: Birds have behaviors that humans may not quite understand. WCAS gets questions, such as “Why is this bird doing that?” or “I saw a bird doing X, is it okay?” Through the wonderful videos taken by Bill Deininger, we will view many species of birds while feeding, discuss what they are feeding upon, adaptations for feeding, and how using these behaviors can help with bird identification. Viewer participation and questions will be encouraged! Registration

“Cute Chicks” Presenter: Carrie Elvey, Senior Naturalist and Community Engagement Coordinator, The Wilderness Center Date & Time: Tuesday, April 6, 2021 at 7:30 p.m. Description: Examine the lives of young birds, survivorship rates and survival strategies. Registration

Featured Lake Erie Nature and Science Center Wildlife Rehabilitation Programs & Fundraiser. Weekly programs led by Center co-presenters, Wildlife Program Specialist, Christine Barnett and Wildlife Rehabilitation Specialist, Tim Jasinski. Broadcast schedule:
- Monday, February 1, 12:00 pm: “Making Lifelong Connections with Wildlife”
- Monday, February 8, 12:00 pm: “Trashy Situations – How Waste Affects Wildlife”
- Monday, February 15, 12:00 pm: “The Perils of Bird Life and How You Can Help”
- Monday, February 22, 12:00 pm: “Baby Season - Does Baby Wildlife Really Need Our Help?”

Get Tickets and make a generous Donation to the LENS Center Wildlife Rehabilitation Center.

Check the WCAS News Blog for updates and more programs at: www.wcaudubon.org/news-blog

Guardians of Nature. The Guardians continue to provide feedback and suggestions to improve chapter activities. A big thank you to members and fans who believe education is the way to raise the awareness for protecting and preserving habitat for future generations. Seeing the environment through the eyes of birds is a unique and effective way to reach a broad audience and participants help to develop the concept. Meetings: Thursdays Feb 18 & 25, Mar 18 & 25, April 22 & 29 at 7:00 p.m. WCAS Book Club. Two monthly Sunday programs from 7:00-8:00 p.m. The first session features an author speaker with an audience Q&A. The second session book discussion features favorite nature books. It’s especially fun when authors participate! February 21 & 28, March 21 & 28, and April 18 & 25. Book discount codes offered on some books. Tickets are $20 per month for two sessions, or $12 per session for non-members, $10 members. Bird of the Month Photo Contests help raise awareness of bird species through photography excellence. Enter for February, Bald Eagle; March, Turkey Vulture; and April, Pileated Woodpecker. Judges focus on bird action, composition, and portraiture. Winners are announced at monthly member meetings. Prizes.

The local community is stepping up to support the developer’s effort to save the chimney using a GoFundMe effort with the goal of raising $50,000. Any funds procured beyond the actual cost of the structure, will be used to raise awareness, educate the community, document existing roosts, advocate for preservation of chimney habitats, and build new swift towers throughout the city of Bethlehem and the Lehigh Valley. If you would like to help, please go to https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/save-our-swifts and give whatever you can! Support local tower construction efforts by making a donation to the Northeastern Ohio Chimney Swift Conservation Society at http://bit.ly/3nQ5V9T.

~ Amanda Sebrlosky, NEO Chimney Swift Conservation Society

Visit The Rock Pile Garden Center, 900 Nagel Rd, Avon, OH 44011. Mention you’re a member and WCAS gets a small contribution. Tell your cashier you want your donation to go to WCAS! www.therockpile.com

Above: John Noble, property owner and developer, has agreed to "Save Our Swifts", property demolition, and December Swifts at Masonic Temple of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Photos by Peter Saenger & Jennie Gilrain.

**Lehigh Valley Audubon Society efforts to save roosting for thousands of Chimney Swifts**

Bird populations are dropping worldwide for many reasons including poisoning from pesticides, drop in the number of insects as a food source due to pesticides, and habitat destruction. One example of this population drop can be seen with the chimney swifts, which range in all the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. Since the 70’s, the population of Chimney Swifts has dropped by 72%. For Swifts, the habitat destruction was not just loss of forests, but changes to building practices of humans. Chimney Swifts learned to use chimneys as a substitute for the hollow trees in the dwindling forests. Chimneys are used for nesting, roosting for non-mated swifts in the summer and resting spots for migrating swifts in the fall. But now, chimneys are being capped or made obsolete with new building practices. To help replenish habitat, humans are stepping in to build Chimney Swift towers and to preserve chimneys on buildings that would otherwise be demolished. Lehigh Valley Audubon Society has had much success building Chimney Swift towers and is now participating in a new, ambitious project that would save a chimney housing thousands of Chimney Swifts during fall migration. The chimney is large (40-foot-high, 5-foot-square) and could be lost because the Masonic Temple of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, is currently under demolition as part of a redevelopment project. The developer and property owner, John Noble, is committed to saving the chimney for the birds and has developed two options for consideration: Reinforce the existing chimney as a stand-alone structure or build a duplicate replacement, freestanding structure on-site. The optimal option will depend on how stable the existing structure is as demolition progresses. The goal is to complete work by spring migration in April. *(continued next column…)*
Western Cuyahoga Audubon Volunteer Opportunities and Leadership Positions

Get involved! We’d like to hear from you. Begin by completing the WCAS Volunteer Form.

**Recruitment for Board Members and Service Positions.** WCAS invites people interested in the Audubon mission to consider joining in a leadership capacity. Volunteer service is needed in nonprofit board leadership, program development, and fundraising. For example, the **Volunteer and Public Relations Coordinator** oversees recruitment, placement, and retention of volunteers, is an advocate for the Audubon mission and attends Board meetings. There are several rewarding opportunities available to engage in meaningful conservation work! Must be passionate and be able to serve with a smile. Training is available. Begin by taking the WCAS Volunteer Survey so we can get to know you!

**Membership.** Become a member, renew membership, and make a donation online or by mailing a check payable to ‘Western Cuyahoga Audubon Society’. Mail to: Nancy Howell, Western Cuyahoga Audubon Treasurer, 19340 Fowles Rd, Middleburg Heights, OH 44130 or, purchase Membership Online at wcaudubon.org/store/c2/Membership You’ll be glad you did and the birds will thank you for it! Are you looking for a unique gift for a youngster or a teenager? The **Junior Guardians of Nature** is a new membership program that connects youth to nature by generating an understanding of human impact on the needs and behaviors of birds, wildlife, and the environment. Learn more at http://bit.ly/39TG4Jj

“The virtual meetup was great last night and the field trip was really fun! You do not need to be a photographer! I’ve learned a TON about birds and local parks. I challenge my friends who are looking for something new, something exciting, to give this a shot!” ~ Shawn Missig, WCAS Virtual Field Trips

Shop today at AmazonSmile and designate Western Cuyahoga Audubon as your charitable organization of choice. When you shop at smile.amazon.com the AmazonSmile Foundation donates 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to Western Cuyahoga Audubon.