

The Hushwing **HERALD**

Blackbrook Audubon Society

Volume 59 Number 3

February / March 2024

Spreading the Love of Nature in Lake, Geauga and Ashtabula Counties

UPCOMING EVENTS

DATE: Tuesday, February 20, 2024
PROGRAM: Tales from the Front Lines: The Conservation Work of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History
SPEAKER: Garrett Ormiston, CMNH Manager
TIME: 7:00 p.m.
PLACE: Penitentiary Glen, Kirtland

The Museum's conservation work over the last 50 years has resulted in the permanent protection of some of the most ecologically-significant areas in Northern Ohio. These natural areas represent some of the best remaining examples of the many different habitats and ecosystems that are native to our region. This presentation will explore the process by which the Museum identifies high-quality sites and ultimately works to conserve them. We will talk about how the Museum's collections and scientific research guide this work and why natural history museums are uniquely positioned to spearhead conservation and ecological restoration projects.

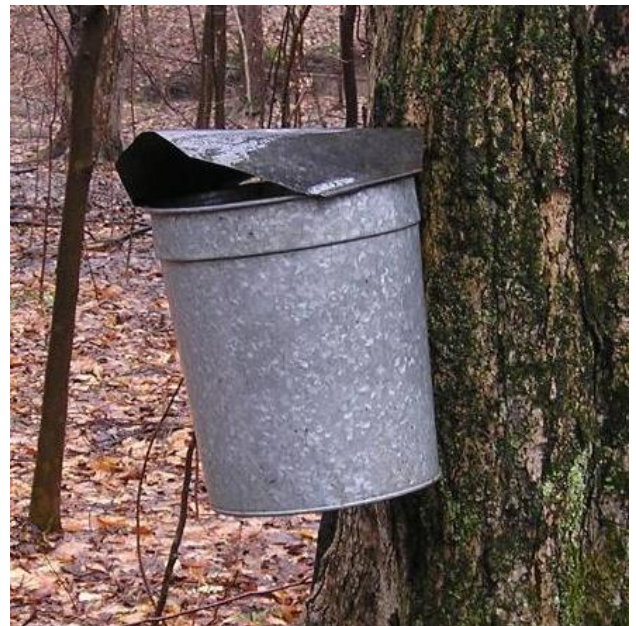


**Fern Lake Bog in Geauga County
acquired in 1956. Courtesy of CMNH.**

DATE: Tuesday, March 19, 2024
PROGRAM: All about Maple Sugaring
SPEAKER: Karie Wheaton, Geauga Park District Naturalist
TIME: 7:00 p.m.
PLACE: Big Creek Park, Chardon

Maple sugaring season is a sweet time of year when we say goodbye to winter and hello to spring! Warm days and cold nights are all we need for the sap in maple trees to rise and for the annual tradition of turning sap into syrup to start. Over 40 gallons of maple sap are needed to create just one gallon of maple syrup!

Join Karie to learn about her favorite time of year—sugaring season! Karie has been coordinating all things maple programming at Geauga Park District for 10 years. With her, we will learn the history and chemistry of maple syrup, how it's made at Geauga Park District, and its surprising health benefits!



Continued on Page 3...



Birding Opportunities!



Please let us know you are coming to a field trip by sending an email to blackbrookaud@aol.com.

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP

DATE: Sunday, February 11, 2024
ACTIVITY: Open-country birding
TIME: 9:00 a.m.
PLACE: [Walter C. Best Wildlife Preserve](#)

Acres of sunflowers and fields spread with waste grain and manure provide a winter buffet for Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs and Horned Larks. We'll gather in the parking lot of the north entrance to Best Preserve, 11620 Ravenna Road, Munson Township and caravan to the fallow fields along Soltis Road south of Parkman. As time and weather allow, we can visit more birdy fields beside Hayes Road and use the facilities at Swine Creek Reservation.



Lapland Lonspur *Calcarius lapponicus*
Photo by Debbi Schuster

Bring your binoculars and a spotting scope, if you have one. We'll keep an eye to the sky also for Rough-legged Hawks, American Kestrels and, if we're lucky, a Short-eared Owl. *Then we would have a Superb Owl on the day of the Super Bowl!*

Important Bird Area Walks

[Orchard Hills Park, Geauga Park District](#)

February 25 and March 24, 8:00 a.m.

11340 Caves Road, Chester Township

Come find the birds at this restored golf course next to Patterson Fruit Farm.

MARCH FIELD TRIP

DATE: Sunday, **March 17**, 2024
ACTIVITY: Follow the rainbow to the Marsh
TIME: 9:00 a.m.
PLACE: [Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve](#)

Keep an eye out for leprechauns as we explore the wild, western end of Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve. Our luck starts with access to the otherwise restricted Lake County utility pipeline road. Blackbrook's President and Marsh Head Naturalist Becky Donaldson will lead us along this flat, straight path and its wide-open views of the western basin. Meet at the entrance gate by the intersection of Woodridge Lane and Forest Road on the north side of the Marsh in Mentor Headlands. We can park along the south side of Woodridge Lane near the entrance gate. Once we bird the length of the pipeline, we walk back out the gate and we can move over to the other, public path that leads to the interior of the Marsh, the Wake Robin Trail boardwalk. For those who haven't visited this boardwalk, a rope railing helps hikers with the short, but steep downhill stretch. If you park in the small lot at 8936 Woodridge Lane, you'll already be at the trailhead of the Wake Robin boardwalk. We may see the American Beaver.

Instead of a pot at the end of the rainbow, we'll be looking for the arrival of spring migrants like Tree Swallows, Rusty Blackbirds, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teals and shorebirds like yellowlegs. We should still get to see the Northern Harrier and may hear Spring Peepers.

Still expressing our Gratitude

In the last issue we thanked our conservation partners but, as often happens when you make a list, we missed someone. We are very grateful to work with the Mentor Marsh State Nature Preserve on spring cleanups, bird walks and surveys and shared outreach space at fairs and events. We also want to recognize [Lake Soil and Water Conservation District](#) for its hard work preserving land and water. **Thank You both!**

April in Ashtabula: evening birding

Let's head out to some Ashtabula birding hotspots and perhaps be the first to add new birds to the list. Join Blackbrook Audubon Volunteer Trevor Wearstler from 6 pm to 8 pm on these bird walks, held rain or shine. Each location has parking and primitive restrooms. Trails may be muddy. Trevor will have binoculars to loan. Beginner as well as more experienced birders are welcome.

Morgan Swamp Preserve is managed by the Nature Conservancy and the other two locations are part of Ashtabula County Metroparks.

Thursday, April 4 [131 species on eBird](#)
[Morgan Swamp Preserve](#), Bissell Nature Center
3973 Callender Road, Rock Creek, Ohio

Wednesday, April 10 [74 species on eBird](#)
The [Upper Grand River Metropark](#)
3199 Cork Cold Springs Road, Austinburg, Ohio

Tuesday, April 23
[Red Brook Metropark](#) [147 species on eBird](#)
4338 Lake Rd W., Saybrook Twp, Ohio



Conservation by CMNH Continued from page 1

Garrett is the Manager of Preserve Operations in the Natural Areas Division of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, where he works on land conservation projects and oversees the management and stewardship of the Museum's [66 nature preserves](#).

Garrett, a life-long Clevelander, has worked in the Natural Areas Division for more than 20 years, and has been integral in helping to conserve many of the Museum's preserves, including Windsor Woods, Geneva Swamp, and Spokane Swamp, among others. Garrett is also a staunch advocate for the use of native plants in the landscape and has spoken on this subject to many garden clubs and other groups over the years.



Invite [Pollinators](#) and Birds with Native Plants from these Sales

Ashtabula Soil & Water Conservation District [Tree Seedling Sale](#) (440) 576-4946

Orders are accepted until Friday, March 15, or until stock is sold out. All orders must be picked up at the District Office in Jefferson between 8 am and 6 pm on Friday, April 5 or 8 am and 10 am Saturday, April 6.

Cuyahoga SWCD 216-524-6580, ext. 1005
Choose from six native seed packets year-round. Four plant kits offer 50 plugs each. Deadline for spring orders on kits is 8 am, Tuesday, March 26. They are shipped early June. Plants are grown by Stantec Native Plant Nursery (formerly Cardno). Order plant bundles of herbaceous [perennials](#), [shrubs and trees](#) by March 11. Bundles come in threes and are shipped in April. They're grown by Hilltop Hollow Farm. [Native plant resources](#)

Geauga SWCD [Order Online](#) or send the [order form](#) with payment by Thursday, April 4. Tree and shrub pickup will be 9 am – 4 pm Friday, April 19 and 9 am – noon Saturday, April 20 at the Geauga Co. Fairgrounds in Burton. You can call **440-834-1122** to pay by credit card.

Lake SWCD [2024 Plant Native Sale](#)
Place orders by Monday, March 11 for best availability. For a printed order form, contact soil@lakecountyohio.gov or **440-350-2730**. Order pickup will be in the Natural Resources Building at the Lake County Fairgrounds, 1301 Mentor Ave., Painesville on Friday, April 19 from 9 am to 6 pm and Saturday, April 20 from 9 am to noon. Walk-ins are welcome.

Madison Sends Cleaner Water to Lake Erie through Refurbished Wetland

We often lament the loss of 90% of Ohio's wetlands over the last couple hundred years, but Madison recently restored and even expanded a former wetland, thereby improving water quality, reducing future flooding and erosion and creating more habitat for wildlife.

The Madison Village Stream and Wetland Restoration project is located on Hubbard Road, just south of the Madison Senior Center, in the Arcola Creek watershed. The project was funded by ODNR's H2Ohio program, which focuses on creating, restoring, and enhancing wetlands around Ohio. Construction began in the fall of 2022 and was completed by July of 2023. Lake Soil & Water Conservation District (LSWCD) partnered with Madison Village, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Partners for Fish & Wildlife to execute the project.

Caitlin Stillisano, Watershed Coordinator for LSWCD, explained that the site is 19 acres of former nursery land now owned by Madison Village. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers delineated 6.29 acres of this land as wetlands in 2015. The historical land use of nursery production had drained these former wetlands for more than 80 years. Two irrigation ponds remained from that era. A tributary of Arcola Creek flows onto the property from south

to north and empties directly into Lake Erie a few miles downstream. More than 500 feet of the tributary had been channelized as a ditch that ran along Hubbard Road to the east.

The stream was relocated and restored to a meandering two-stage channel flowing through the wetlands rather than in a channelized ditch. A total of 1,300 linear feet of stream was restored. Three beaver dam analogues were installed to increase the complexity of the stream ecosystem, reconnect and expand the floodplain, and recharge the adjacent wetlands. The drainage ditches were plugged to reestablish the natural surface hydrology, raise the water table and expand the existing wetlands. The berms surrounding the irrigation ponds were excavated down to match the elevation of the water's surface, allowing the ponds to overflow onto the landscape. The area was then planted with native wetland species. These steps resulted in an entire acre of additional wetlands. To improve habitat and water storage, a total of 11 vernal pools were excavated through the site.

Village Administrator Dwayne Bailey said work on a parking area, trail and observation deck began in the fall and should be completed in the spring.

Hopefully, over time, we can watch this new habitat fledge into eastern Lake County's newest birding hotspot.



Calling for Officer Nominations

Blackbrook Audubon Society members will vote for the four officers on our Board of Directors in April. If you would like to nominate someone or add your own ideas and skills to the group, please email blackbrookaud@aol.com. We will announce final nominees for president, vice president, treasurer and secretary at the March 19 program at Big Creek Park. Officers commit to a one-year term from July 1 to June 30. They can be reelected for no more than three consecutive years. The board meets at 7 pm on the first Tuesday monthly, with July and August meetings combined, usually at Mentor Marsh Nature Center. *Come check out a board meeting!*

BYOM and Win!

To reduce waste at our programs, bring your own reusable coffee mug or water bottle and be entered into a drawing to win a \$25 gift card to either the Wild Birds Unlimited stores or to Avonlea Gardens native plant nursery. The winning ticket will be drawn at our April program from entries submitted in February and March. The winner need not be present.

Congratulations to Dave Isacco who brought his own mug to Blackbrook's November program and won a \$25 gift card to Centerra Co-op Country Store in Chardon. We will draw the winner of the November - January BYOM at our February 20 program at Penitentiary Glen.

Banding Ohio's Smallest and Most Elusive Owl

by Alison Huey

[Project OwlNet](#), founded in 1994, is a largely citizen science initiative that coordinates communication between banding stations across North America where scientists and volunteers spend evenings in October and November catching and banding [Northern Saw-whet Owls](#) (NSWO). The goal of this project is to understand more about the migration patterns of this rarely seen bird, who's currently on [Ohio's Special Interest list](#). There are thirteen stations across Ohio, including one in Lake County. The Lake County station, originally at Lake Erie Bluffs, was start-up funded through Blackbrook Audubon and is under the supervision of master bander Dan Best. Owls were scarce at the Bluffs, so after eight years (including 2020 when no banding took place), the station was relocated in 2022 to a hemlock ravine along a tributary of the Chagrin River. The privacy of this site provides the advantage of very little human disturbance within a significant natural area, and the first two seasons of data are promising for future success.

Beginning shortly after sunset, mist nets and audio lures are used to capture Northern Saw-whet Owls (*Aegolius acadicus*). The audio lure plays the male's call, and when curious owls come to see "who that guy is", they get caught in the nets. The birds are carefully extracted, banded, then weighed, measured and aged. A small aluminum band with a unique nine-digit number is placed around the bird's leg. These bands are issued by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to licensed bird banders and help track the birds if they are ever recaptured.

Northern Saw-whet Owls weigh between 70 – 120 grams, roughly the same as a lemon or two, with females outweighing males; the wingspan is 16-18 inches for both sexes. Birds are aged by looking at the pattern and color of feathers on their wings. This is achieved by shining a black light on the underside of a gently outstretched wing. New feathers have a fluorescent pink glow (from a compound called porphyrin), while older feathers look whiteish. If a bird's feathers all glow pink, banders know that they have a bird that has just hatched that year. Older birds have varying patterns of pink and white feathers, which banders can "read" to help figure out the age of the bird. After the data is collected, birds are carefully released away from the nets.



Northern Saw-whet Owl migration seems to begin each autumn around the time the leaves start to fall. However, much like Snowy Owls, numbers vary from year to year depending on the amount of prey that was available during the breeding season.

In 2022, the nine active stations in Ohio caught and banded a total of 326 NSWO, plus caught 15 NSWO that had been previously banded at other banding stations. In 2023, the same nine stations caught and banded 141 NSWO and eight previously banded NSWO.

In 2022, the Lake County station caught a total of 39 NSWO, three of which were foreign recaptures, already banded birds. The first foreign recapture was banded in October 2020, about 45 minutes southwest of Toronto, Ontario and the second was banded in October 2020 near Indiana Dunes National Park. Both birds were banded the fall after they hatched, making them two years old when they were recaptured here in Lake County. The third foreign recapture was banded near Mackinaw City, Michigan, in March of 2022 as a one-year-old bird. Of the 39 NSWO caught in 2022, 34 were caught in October and four were caught in November. All the October captures were during the last week of the month, with 13 in one night. 2023 was a different story.

It was predicted to be a down year, as the rodent population up north was low. The Lake County station caught a total of 17 NSWO, one of which was a foreign recapture. It's assumed the foreign recapture was originally banded some time earlier in the fall, because data for the bird was not yet in the [Bird Banding Lab's](#) national database. Only three NSWO were captured in October, but migration picked up in November. The highest total for one night was three NSWO. It was more of a steady drizzle of owls in 2023, compared to the downpour in late October of 2022.

The banding efforts of stations across Ohio, and beyond, have helped researchers paint a [clearer picture of the Northern Saw-whet Owl](#). Once thought to be a rare bird, and even feared endangered at one time, it is now clear that Northern Saw-whet Owls are more abundant than suspected, and dependent on the natural areas in northeast Ohio and across the continent.

Photo: a hatch year Northern Saw-whet Owl as shown by the UV "black" light, taken by Trevor Wearstler

The Wildlife Diversity Conference will have a NSWO talk.



A Little Bird Told Us

Eremophila alpestris Photo by Deb Schuster

✦ Come Count Cranes

Ohio is one of seven states where volunteers will look for Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) and Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) during the [Annual Midwest Crane Count](#). Last year, 63 Sandhill Cranes were found in Geauga County, but none turned up in Lake County. The count lasts 6:30 – 8:30 am on **Saturday, April 13**. Survey blocks in Lake County are assigned by Megan Hart at mhart@lake-metroparks.com. [Dan Best](#) and [Matt Valencic](#) are the count coordinators for Geauga County. The Ohio Division of Wildlife and [Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative](#) coordinate with the International Crane Foundation on this project.

✦ All Things Butterfly Workshop

Whether you want to brush up on butterfly and moth ID or discover which plants attract various butterflies, you can pre-register for the Annual Butterfly Identification and Monitoring Workshop put on by the [Ohio Lepidopterists](#) by March 30. Butterfly enthusiasts will flutter to The West Woods in Russell for concurrent sessions from 10 am – 4:30 pm on Saturday, April 6. The \$20 fee includes lunch and handouts.

✦ Visit lakeconservation.org

The [Lake Soil and Water Conservation District](#) has a new website where they still offer help with protection and restoration of our soil and water resources for residents and communities. Plus, they have an online store!



✦ Great Backyard Bird Count

If you're tired of only birding through your window, head outside for the 2024 [Great Backyard Bird Count](#). Spend at least 15 minutes in your yard, favorite park or anywhere birds are active as many times as you want between February 16-19. Use [Merlin](#) to help ID birds and record the ones you see or hear on [eBird](#). The [Audubon Bird Guide app](#) may also help. You'll be contributing data to a global event that scientists use to track where the birds are over time.

Help tally birds 11 a.m. - 4 p.m. Friday, Saturday or Sunday at [The West Woods Nature Center](#) in Russell Township. They have several feeders outside large viewing windows.

This mid-winter bird count is led by [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#), [National Audubon](#) and [Birds Canada](#).

✦ Set up housing for native birds

No registration is needed for [How to Be a Successful Birdhouse Landlord](#) at 2 pm Sunday, February 18 at The West Woods. Join a naturalist for tips on how to attract cavity-nesting birds such as bluebirds, tree swallows, wrens and chickadees and how to monitor birdhouses to increase their abundance. Enter a birdhouse raffle thanks to Nature's Way Bird Products.

✦ The 2024 Wildlife Legacy Stamp featuring Cedar Waxwings



will go [on sale](#) February 22!
Order online or with a mail-in form.

Fourteen dollars of the \$15 cost go toward habitat restoration, wildlife and habitat research and printing wildlife educational materials. **Pollinators will be the subject of the 2025 stamp.** The image will come from the winning submission to the 16th annual Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp Photo Contest this summer.

Amazing Christmas Bird Counts

After reviewing their videos and consulting with experts, Linda Gilbert and her **Burton Christmas Bird Count** team are reporting an "immense flock" of 510,000 Common Grackles in the Troy/Parkman area January 1. This is the same area that Passenger Pigeons were described as reaching their peak numbers in 1820 in [Pioneer History of Geauga County](#).

The Geauga CBC also saw a rebound for American Tree Sparrow (230), reversing three years of low counts, and the highest count ever for Rusty Blackbird (85). Open water allowed for high counts of Ring-necked and Ruddy Ducks and Common Merganser. Bald Eagle (21) and White-throated Sparrow (58) also had high counts. Count day species totaled 70.

Favorable conditions enabled 17 observers and one feeder counter to log 68 species for the **Ashtabula CBC** on December 30, the same day as Blackbrook's count. Counters at Ashtabula Harbor witnessed many waterfowl hunters doing a "significant amount of shooting," mostly at mergansers.

Ashtabula CBC's compiler, Marc Hanneman of the Sam Wharram Nature Club, reports that two Common Ravens turned up, a new species to their count. Compilers have extra paperwork to submit when unusual or rare species are spotted. This year these also included Merlin, Iceland Gull and Greater White-fronted Goose, though the last two were from count week.

Birds that are found three days before or three days after the official count day are place holders, but do not count toward the official census. Other count week birds were Ring-necked Pheasant, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Great Horned Owl.

While they had historically low numbers for Redhead, Greater and Lesser Scaup, they did have 174 Common Goldeneye and 824 Red-breasted Merganser. Marc noted that Hooded Merganser, Belted Kingfisher, and Cedar Waxwing were missing from their list.

Blackbrook also had about 70 species on December 30, including Horned Grebe at Fairport Harbor, Pine Siskin at Beaty Landing, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at Holden Arboretum, Common Gallinule at Shipman Pond and Eastern Towhee at Penitentiary Glen.



Prizes flew out the door at our November program

K.K

Congratulations to the "[Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers](#)" team, who won our first ever Bird Trivia challenge. In addition to prizes given to all members of the first, second and third place teams, we had a white elephant table with books, jigsaw puzzles, Christmas and miscellaneous decorations for people to help themselves.

In addition to ticket raffle prizes donated by Wild Birds Unlimited stores in Willoughby/Mayfield Hts., we had hand-made quilted items, mugs, field guides, and artwork. Mary Ann won the bird seed each month for a year plus a bird feeder. Trevor won the \$25 WBU gift certificate and calendar. Roger was the lucky winner of \$35 in the 50/50 raffle. We appreciate the participation and support of all attendees. Blackbrook was able to raise a total of \$209 toward the purchase of Audubon Adventures for kids in the [Nature Scopes program](#).

Friends of Blackbrook Audubon

☐ New

☐ Renewal

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Email _____

Blackbrook Audubon does not share or sell its mailing list.

_____ \$30 Individual _____ \$45 Household

☐ Hushwing Herald newsletter via email

☐ Hushwing Herald via snail mail
(for Friends of Blackbrook only)

I do **not** wish to be a Friend of Blackbrook, but would like to donate \$ _____.

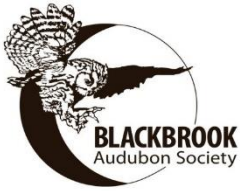
Make checks payable to **Blackbrook Audubon Society**

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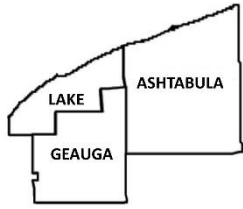
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Thank You!



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www.blackbrookaudubon.org

Follow us on Facebook.

View programs on our YouTube channel.

Becky Donaldson - President
Laurie White - Editor

March 3 World Wildlife Day

Burroughs Nature Club free programs

Friday, February 16
American Chestnut
Foundation, **via Zoom**
7:00 pm

Friday, March 22
A Walk through
the Tree Museum
7:00 pm, **in person**
Willoughby UM Church

Ohio Bluebird Society Conference

Saturday, March 2
Ashland University
Theme: Bring on the Bugs!

Woodland, Water and Wildlife Conference

Wednesday, March 6
Early registration by 2/17
Mid-Ohio Conference Center
3 Ps of pollinator habitat,
Invasive plants, Recovery
of fish-eating raptors

40th annual Wildlife Diversity Conference

Thursday, March 14
Theme: Building towards
a Better Future
OH Division of Wildlife
OSU campus 9:00 am – 3:30 pm

Home Gardeners' Workshop

Saturday, March 16
Lake Co. Master Gardeners
Lake Erie College All day
Native plants, trees, groundcover

Audubon Spring Bird Walks @ Mentor Marsh SNP, Headlands Beach SP, H. Dunes SNP
Sundays, April 14, 21, 28 and May 5, 12, 19 at 7:30 a.m.