



The Hushwing **HERALD**

Blackbrook Audubon Society

Volume 60 Number 3

February / March 2025

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

DATE: Tuesday, February 18, 2025
PROGRAM: Exploring the Olympic Peninsula
SPEAKER: Tony Gazso, Lake Metroparks Interpretive Naturalist
TIME: 7:00 p.m.
PLACE: [Penitentiary Glen Reservation](#)

DATE: Tuesday, March 18, 2025
PROGRAM: Ohio Gray Fox Project
SPEAKER: Caleb Wellman, Wildlife Biologist, USDA Wildlife Services
TIME: 7:00 p.m.
PLACE: [Penitentiary Glen Reservation](#)

The Olympic Peninsula is wildly diverse; from temperate rainforests filled with moss and trees hundreds of years old, to alpine mountain habitats, to pebble beaches and glacial lakes. Each of these habitats encompasses a vast array of plant and animal life that is uniquely adapted to it. Join Tony as he recounts a recent trip to the area and discover some of the amazing flora and fauna from the northwestern most part of the contiguous U.S.

Travel through the Hoh Rain Forest in [Olympic National Park](#) and experience the majesty of the Hall of Mosses, discovering how this forest lives and grows. Take a virtual walk along Rialto Beach, home to Brown Pelican and California Sea Lion, and discover a beach where

Since the 1980s, Gray Fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*) populations have experienced dramatic declines throughout the Midwest. These large-scale declines have resulted in many state agencies listing Gray Foxes as a Species of Greatest Conservation Need in their State Wildlife Action Plans. Much of the available research on [Gray Fox](#) was conducted prior to the population declines, and therefore, the cause of this decline remains unknown. Potential factors influencing Gray Fox populations include habitat loss and fragmentation, changing mesocarnivore (e.g., coyote) community structure, disease, and others. Several Midwest wildlife management agencies



Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*
 Photo by Tony Gazso



Gray Fox on trail camera

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Birding Opportunities!



[Please let us know you are coming to a field trip by sending an email to blackbrookaud@aol.com.](mailto:blackbrookaud@aol.com)

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIP

DATE: Saturday, February 22, 2025
ACTIVITY: Birding Geauga County's farm fields
TIME: 9:00 a.m.
PLACE: [Walter C. Best Wildlife Preserve](#)

Wide open fields entice visiting winter birds like Snow Buntings, Horned Larks and Rough-legged Hawks. Join us at the north entrance of Best Preserve, 11620 Ravenna Rd., Munson Twp., to carpool and caravan to the fields on Hayes Road, east of Middlefield. We'll stop at Swine Creek Reservation and scan more fallow fields along Soltis Road, just south of Parkman. In addition to looking for ground foragers, we'll want to check the skies for Northern Harrier and American Kestrels.

Bring your binoculars and a spotting scope, if you have one. We'll also have binoculars to lend. Bring money for lunch and we'll plan to eat at Mary Yoder's Amish Kitchen in Middlefield.



[Snow Bunting](#)
Plectrophenax nivalis

Non-breeding (winter) male
Stock photo



Breeding male
[Snow Bunting](#)

Photo courtesy of American Bird Conservancy.

They breed on the rocky, Arctic tundra.

The switch in plumage comes from males rubbing their bellies and heads on the snow, wearing down the brown feather tips.

MARCH FIELD TRIP

DATE: Sunday, March 30, 2025
ACTIVITY: Inaugural visit to Nimisila!
TIME: 10:00 a.m.
PLACE: [Nimisila Reservoir Metro Park](#)

Nimisila Reservoir is known as an important staging area for thousands of Purple Martins in August, but many other birds are possible in March. A few days into spring, we'll be looking for waterfowl and gulls, as well as eagles and Osprey that nest there. Since this is an hour south of Lake County, early migrants are always possible, depending on weather patterns. There are limited walking trails so most birding will take place from the several parking lots around the water's edge. We'll meet at the **C1 parking lot** at 5134 Christman Rd., in Green, on the northeast side of the reservoir. If you're interested in carpooling, we can meet at Lakeland Community College at 8:30 a.m. **RSVP at blackbrookaud@aol.com.**

With 222 species, Nimisila Reservoir Metro Park is [Summit County's top hotspot](#) on eBird.org.

Nimisila Reservoir is one of the 13 bodies of water that make up Portage Lakes and was part of [Portage Lakes State Park](#). Nimisila was built in 1936 by the Ohio Department of Public Works with personnel from the federal Works Progress Administration to maintain the water supply for Akron's industry. The reservoir was transferred to Summit Metro Parks in 2015. The Ohio Division of Wildlife retains management of the fishery.

Monthly bird walk at Veterans Park

Come on our monthly bird walk for a mix of woods, wetland and wildlife viewing at Veterans Park. We'll meet at 8:00 a.m. on the fourth Sunday of every month in the main parking lot at 5730 Hopkins Road in Mentor. The path is level.

The list on eBird shows 205 species here. Just under a mile from Lake Erie, Granger Pond and tree cover at [Veterans Park](#) offer birds shelter from blustery lake conditions. We can lend out a couple pairs of binoculars so everyone is able to scan the pond from the scenic overlook.

February program continued Olympic Peninsula from page 1

most of the sand is replaced with large rocks rounded by the battering waves of the ocean. Visit the quiet waters along Clallum Bay located on the northern coast of the peninsula where scoters, loons, and Sea Otters coexist. And enjoy a misty walk along Hurricane Ridge.

We'll also take a virtual pelagic tour off the coast of the Olympic Peninsula. We'll start in the fishing town of Westport, WA where the marina is filled with Harbor Seals, Sea Jellies, and nesting Brandt's Cormorants. Then we'll hop on a boat and travel 42 miles offshore along the edge of the continental shelf where Arctic Terns and South Polar Skuas migrate, shearwaters skim the ocean surface for food, and Horned Puffin and Black-footed Albatross follow fishing boats.



Hoh Rain Forest, Olympic National Park
Photo by Tony Gazso



- Earn a raffle ticket for a gift card by:**
1. Bringing your own mug to a program
 2. Signing up and bringing a snack



Sassafras
[Gray Fox](#)
[resident](#) at
LMP
Wildlife
Center.

March program continued Gray Fox from page 1

are collaborating on a multi-year project to investigate issues affecting Gray Fox populations. The goals of this project are to determine causes for the regional population decline of this canid in the Midwest and to provide management recommendations that can be applied as part of a multi-state effort to promote Gray Fox conservation.

Caleb is the staff wildlife biologist for the United States Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Services program in Ohio. In this role he provides technical assistance and administers a variety of wildlife damage management operations relating to the assessment, reduction, and/or elimination of conflicts associated with wildlife in urban, suburban, and rural environments. Since 2011, he has served as the project lead for Wildlife Services-Ohio's involvement in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, assisting land and resource managers with wildlife management efforts focused on Habitat and Wildlife Protection and Restoration, Nonpoint Source Pollution Impacts and Nearshore Health and Invasive Species in the Great Lakes region of Ohio.

A Few Good Officer Nominations

Every February, Blackbrook Audubon seeks nominees for our four elected officer positions: President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer to serve a one-year term to begin July 1. We'll announce nominees at our March program. The election of officers for our Board will take place at our April 15 program.

Please let us know if you want to nominate someone or have questions and need more details. You can even sit in on a board meeting or start out on a committee and move to officer later. We could also use help setting up or staffing the Blackbrook display at future outreach events where we promote birding and conservation in several communities. We are an all-volunteer chapter of the National Audubon Society serving Lake, Geauga and Ashtabula counties.

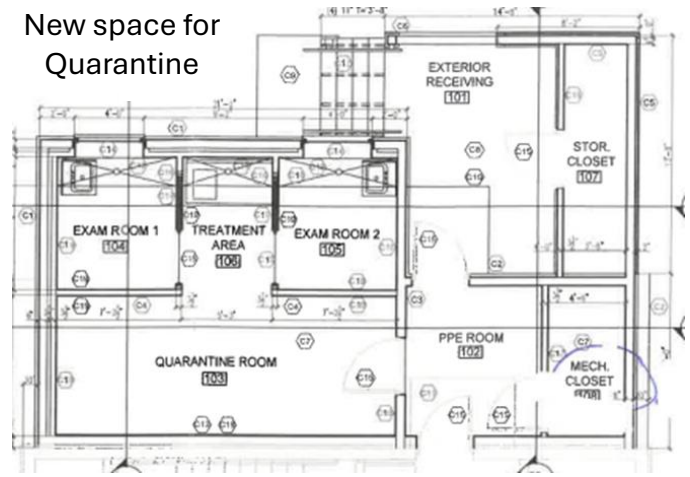
LMP Wildlife Center Expands to Better Meet Patient Needs, Improve Safety for All

by Tammy O'Neil, Wildlife Care Manager

A newly built quarantine addition to the back of the existing building will enhance wildlife rehabilitation efforts at the Kevin P. Clinton Wildlife Center by providing a safe, isolated space for incoming animals. These specialized rooms will allow the wildlife care team to assess and care for animals with potentially contagious diseases without risking the spread to other animals in the facility. Equipped with state-of-the-art ventilation and sanitation systems, the quarantine area is designed to control pathogens and minimize human-animal contact when necessary, reducing stress for the animals during their critical recovery phase.

The rooms are particularly valuable for handling animals rescued from habitats affected by pollution or disease outbreaks. By isolating animals upon arrival, the care team can conduct thorough health evaluations, administer necessary treatments, and monitor for symptoms before moving them to communal enclosures. The new facility not only strengthens rehabilitation practices but also contributes to wildlife conservation efforts by preventing cross-species transmission of diseases. With this addition, the wildlife center is better equipped to return healthy animals to the wild, supporting both individual animal welfare and ecosystem health. Completion of the quarantine facility is expected in late spring of 2025.

New space for
Quarantine



Present Kitchen

Present Nursery

Coping with Avian Influenza

Stark County is one of at least 11 counties that the Ohio Division of Wildlife is monitoring by sending samples from dead, wild birds to the USDA's [National Veterinary Services Laboratory](#) to test for the presence of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) in Ohio. [The Wildlife Conservation Center](#) at Sippo Lake Park, Stark Parks' wildlife rehab facility in Massillon, is taking extra precautions by not accepting raptors, crows, waterfowl, or shorebirds as of January. Several wildlife ambassadors who live at the center permanently will not be on outdoor public display, nor will they leave the center for requested or public programs until further notice. Trail access behind the building is closed and the public is asked to step in the foot bath before visiting the outdoor enclosure area.

The [Lake Metroparks Wildlife Center](#) applied some of these same protocols to protect their resident birds since avian flu first arrived in 2015. This year they will be extending the partial roofs on some outdoor enclosures to full roofs to keep organic matter from passing birds from falling into the cages. They are accepting birds on a case-by-case basis by appointment only and not admitting waterfowl.

[Lake Erie Nature & Science Center](#) in Bay Village is not accepting raptors for rehabilitation but they are taking in waterfowl if a video is sent first to verify the bird's issue is not related to avian flu.

Cases of avian flu in poultry and wild birds can be tracked on the [USDA, APHIS](#) website. So far, they are not recommending the removal of bird feeders, unless they are near a commercial operation or backyard flock. Periodic [cleaning of feeders](#) with a 10% bleach solution, thorough rinsing and drying before adding seed or suet back is always recommended.

Lake Metroparks Wildlife Center Says Goodbye to Two Hawks

Lakota, a Red-shouldered Hawk permanent resident, passed away from a heart attack January 23. She arrived at the Center as an immature bird February 14, 2009. She was blind in one eye and had feather follicle damage. Red-shoulders, *Buteo lineatus*, are vocal hawks and she would express her opinion freely over the years.

The Center takes solace in the successful release of another Red-shouldered Hawk who arrived with spinal trauma. Weeks of medication, physical therapy and practice in a flight enclosure enabled this bird to regain the use of his legs and tail and [to be released back](#) to the skies.



The 2025 [Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp](#) has a pollinator theme.



This image of a Hummingbird Clearwing Moth (*Hemaris thysbe*) taken in Lake County is the [winning picture](#) in the annual photo contest which had 84 entries. The stamp costs \$15 and will go on sale February 22. One dollar from each stamp goes to [Southern Wings](#), which protects the overwintering habitats of Neotropical migratory birds that pass through Ohio. Next year's stamp will feature shorebirds or wading birds.

“Bee” the go-to Place for Pollinators with Plants from these Local Sales

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

Orders are accepted until Friday, March 14, 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 4 or 8 am and 10 am Saturday, April 5. An order form is available.

Geauga SWCD [Order Online](#) or send the [order form](#) with payment by Monday, April 7. Tree and shrub pickup will be 9 am – 4 pm Friday, April 25 and 9 am – noon Saturday, April 26 at the Geauga Co. Fairgrounds in Burton. You can call **440-834-1122** to pay by credit card.

Lake SWCD [2025 Plant Native Sale](#)
Place orders by Monday, March 10 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 25 from 9 am to 6 pm and Saturday, April 26 from 9 am to noon. Walk-ins are welcome, subject to availability.

Caws and Straws: A Community Effort to Clean and Connect with Nature

If you combine the caw of crows (or any other bird species that a ‘caw’ may remind you of), and straws, a symbol of the ubiquitous pollution that affects our planet, you’ll have Caws and Straws, a local group that meets up to not only pick up litter but also engage in birdwatching, all while fostering a spirit of camaraderie and environmental stewardship.

Their mission is simple: clean up our community, reduce waste, and take the time to observe and appreciate the birds that often go unnoticed in our busy lives. And as a bonus, it’s a networking opportunity to meet and connect with like-minded individuals in the area.

Caws and Straws organizer Matt Debelak emphasizes that “Litter is not just an eyesore; it has real consequences on wildlife, including birds, who often mistake debris for food or nesting material. By picking up litter, we help create safer habitats for these incredible creatures.”

Caws and Straws gathers at various locations, bringing their own gloves, bags, and, of course, a passion for nature. They pick up trash from parks, beaches, trails, and public spaces. The real magic, however, happens when they take a break and look up. Whether it’s a hawk soaring high above or a sparrow hopping along the ground, birdwatching reminds them of the beauty and vitality they are working to protect.

Matt would like to encourage anyone with a willingness to get outside, lend a hand, and enjoy the calming presence of our feathered friends to plan your own outing. Whether it’s a spontaneous neighborhood walk, a weekend trip to a nearby park, or a special birdwatching spot you want to explore, just post on the [Caws and Straws Facebook group](#). Share where and when you’ll be meeting and any equipment or supplies you need. Feel free to make it a casual or more structured event. Each meeting is a chance to get some exercise, fresh air and do something meaningful. Let’s make 2025 the year of many meet-ups!

Show birds some love February 14 – 17 by finding birds in your favorite places and reporting them on eBird in the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#).

All Hands on Deck for Ohio's Fifth Annual Crane Count

Volunteers search more wetlands each year for Sandhill Cranes during the Annual Midwest Crane Count. In 2021, Ohio's first year participating in the count, they found 160 Sandhills. Last year, [counters observed 412](#). This year's count will be **Saturday, April 12** and county coordinators are seeking more teams to find Sandhills during their nesting season. Contact a coordinator below to be assigned crane habitat within a 10-square mile survey block.

Ashtabula County **Marc Hanneman** marchanneman@embarqmail.com

2024 was Ashtabula's first year in the count and they found one Sandhill Crane.

Geauga County **Dan Best** 56danbest@gmail.com, **Matt Valencic** mmvalencic@roadrunner.com

Sixty-three Sandhills in 2023 gave Geauga the third highest total for Ohio. In 2024 they turned up 48.

Lake County **Megan Hart** mhart@lakemetroparks.com

Lake was included in the count 2023 and '24, but they came up with goose eggs. However, Megan said a pair of Sandhills was seen the day prior and the day after last year's official count. The survey only has a two-hour window when crane habitat is searched so she's looking for more help to expand Lake's coverage area. Let's put a pin in that map for Lake County!

Bulkier than a Great Blue Heron and standing three to four feet tall, [Sandhill Cranes](#) (*Antigone canadensis*) were once extirpated from Ohio. They returned to Wayne County in 1987 to breed and have been slowly expanding their presence since. They are on the threatened species list in Ohio.

The Annual Midwest Crane Count is managed by the [International Crane Foundation](#), Ohio Division of Wildlife and [Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative](#). OBCI lists county coordinators for the whole state.

Continued Success Banding Northern Saw-whet Owls by Alison Huey



Each fall, beginning shortly after sunset, scientists and volunteers use mist nets and audio lures to capture Northern Saw-whet Owls (NSWO) across Ohio. The audio lure plays the male's call, and when curious migrating owls come to see "who that guy is", they get caught in the nets. The birds are carefully extracted, banded, 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. Geological Survey 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 the bird 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.

Banding stats for each bird are submitted to the [Bird Banding Lab](#), which houses a nation-wide database of all banding efforts across North America; and to [Project OwlNet](#), a citizen science initiative that facilitates communication between NSWO banding stations across North America.

The 2024 season in Ohio netted about 240 birds, with the station here in Lake County banding 22 new birds, plus capturing one previously banded bird, referred to as a foreign recapture. We started our season in mid-October and ended in mid-November when the rain, wind and snow started to pile up. The majority of the birds were banded between October 28 and November 3, with our big night coming on November 2, with six birds. The foreign recapture was netted on November 3, a female, born in the spring, and originally banded on October 12, 2024 near Fergus, Ontario, which is about 65 miles east of Toronto. We caught her just 22 days after she was banded. It would be interesting to know what route she took to get to us.



Continued on page 7...



Nov.
2020



Nov.
2024

Pictured above is **Carson**, the young Bald Eagle who fell from his nest at Mentor Marsh during a storm in June 2020. Unable to fly due to a wing injury, he was transferred from Lake Metroparks Wildlife Center to Eagle Creek Ornithology Center in Indianapolis, IN. This year he will [reach full maturity](#), with yellow eyes and full white head.

Long considered our national emblem and featured on the Great Seal of the U.S. since 1782, the Bald Eagle was finally designated our [national bird](#) in December. A Minnesota author writing a book about the Bald Eagle's role in our history noticed the bird was [never officially given that title](#).

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Continued from page 6

To help answer questions like that, some banding stations across the country, including Ceaser Creek in southwestern Ohio, are attaching nano-tags to NSWO, hoping to gather a bit more data about their migration patterns. Nano-tags are small, lightweight coded radio tags attached to the bird like a backpack. The tags emit a signal at regular intervals which can be picked by [Motus towers](#), if the bird flies close enough. These banding and tagging efforts at stations across Ohio, and beyond, have helped scientists and 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.

The Lake County station, located at the edge of a hemlock ravine along a tributary of the Chagrin River, was start-up funded through the generosity of Blackbrook Audubon and is under the supervision of master bander Dan Best. We would like to thank Blackbrook for its continued support in helping us replace several mist nets this season.

Three Weeks of Christmas Bird Counts

Twenty field observers and two feeder counters experienced temperatures in the 50's on December 28 for the **Ashtabula Christmas Bird Count**. Their compiler, Marc Hanneman of the Sam Wharram Nature Club, said they found 74 species plus four on count week: Iceland and Glaucous Gulls, Great Horned Owl and Cedar Waxwing. The Iceland Gull was also an unusual species requiring more paperwork, along with Turkey Vulture (5), Merlin (3) and Gray Catbird (1).

Species found in high numbers included Northern Flicker, 24 and Eastern Bluebird, 88.

Marc attributes the low count of waterfowl on Lake Erie, like Red-breasted Merganser (187), to exceptionally warm temperatures with an offshore breeze. American Tree Sparrow (22) and Song Sparrow (3) also appeared in low numbers.

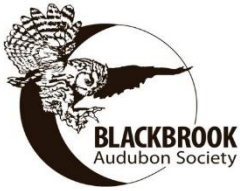
Blackbrook's CBC, centered near Rt. 44 in Painesville, was also December 28. The final tally is still to come, but Dan Donaldson, Blackbrook's compiler, said the best birds were White-winged Scoter, Turkey Vulture, Rough-legged Hawk, Snowy Owl, Short-eared Owl, American Kestrels, Common Ravens, Snow Buntings and Eastern Meadowlarks.

The Cleveland 15-mile diameter circle is centered close to the border of Cuyahoga and Lake Counties and includes the Wickliffe-Willoughby area. Teams fanned out for **Cleveland's CBC** on a frigid, snowy winter solstice, December 21, and Mary Huey coordinated 21 people in the Lake County portion of the circle. Several counters saw or heard groups of Tundra Swans fly over, totaling 364 birds! Tundras outnumbered Canada Geese on the list! Another plentiful species was American Tree Sparrow at 63. Mary said Mallards were up by almost 85% with 180 reported.

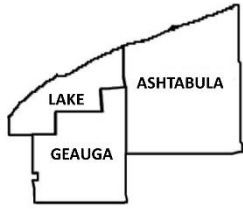
The weather was better than predicted for the 33 field observers of **Burton's CBC** on January 1. Compiler Linda Gilbert said they "had to work to get birds," but they did locate 64 species. A new one for their circle was the Cackling Goose at LaDue Reservoir. The 500,000 strong grackle flock of last year did not appear. They found one Common Grackle and one Rusty Blackbird.

High counts for Burton were Trumpeter Swan (13), Sandhill Crane (18) and Dark-eyed Junco (560).

Nice job everyone on finding the birds.



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View programs on our YouTube channel.

Becky Donaldson - President
Laurie White - Editor

March 3
World
Wildlife
Day

Burroughs Nature Club
free programs

Friday, February 21
BNC Willoughby:
Preserving its History
via Zoom
7:00 pm

Friday, March 21
Keystone Trees in Soft
Landings Gardens
7:00 pm, **in person**
Willoughby UM Church

Ohio Bluebird Society
Conference

Sat., March 1 \$40
for non-OBS member, by 2/17
Ashland University
Theme: Back to Basics
Bluebirds 101,
Kestrels and Motus Towers

Woodland, Water and
Wildlife Conference

Wed., March 5 \$70
if early registration by 2/14
Mid-Ohio Conference Center
Cuyahoga River Restoration,
Tree pruning, Gray Fox, etc.

Home Gardeners'
Workshop

Sat., March 15 \$55
due by March 7
Lake Co. Master Gardeners
Lake Erie College 8a – 4p
Native trees, ornamental grasses,
fungus, hydrangeas

Wildlife Diversity
Conference

Wed., March 19 \$40
before February 28
OH Division of Wildlife
OSU campus 9:00 am – 3:30 pm
Theme: Pass the Torch

Audubon Spring Bird Walks @ Mentor Marsh SNP, Headlands Beach SP, H. Dunes SNP
Sundays, April 13, 20, 27 and May 4, 11, 18 at 7:30 a.m. Everyone welcome!