

# The Hushwing **HERALD**

**Blackbrook Audubon Society**  
Volume 59 Number 2

November / December 2023, January 2024

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

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**DATE:** Tuesday, November 21, 2023  
**PROGRAM:** Bird Trivia Night  
**EMCEE:** Trevor Wearstler  
**TIME:** 7:00 p.m.  
**PLACE:** Holden Arboretum, Kirtland

Join us for a causal night of bird trivia. Grab a partner or team of no more than six people. Teams can be formed on the night of the event. Then pick an awesome team name. Test your knowledge and learn something new with a friendly competition to win some fun prizes. Your host Trevor Wearstler will present several categories of bird-related trivia from picture ID to cultural history. The top three teams will have their pick of prizes and a tiebreaker round to see who reigns supreme.



### Need a taste?

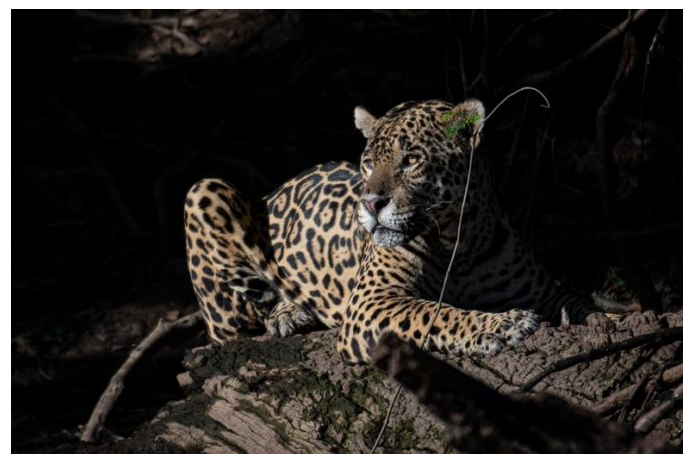
The American white variety of what bird can hold three gallons of water in its bill? If you thought stork, that'd be a good guess, but wrong. It's the pelican.

***Pelecanus erythrorhynchos***  
[Allaboutbirds.org](http://Allaboutbirds.org)



**DATE:** Tuesday, January 16, 2024  
**PROGRAM:** A Brazilian Wildlife Adventure  
**SPEAKER:** Andy and Erin Avram  
**TIME:** 7:00 p.m.  
**PLACE:** Penitentiary Glen Reservation

With the third most bird species of the world's countries, the largest river, and largest tropical wetland complex, Brazil is a wildlife watcher's paradise. Andy and Erin Avram decided to venture to the rainforest in 2020 for Andy's 40th birthday, but after everything was booked, a global pandemic put the dream on hold. As the world started opening back up, the trip was put back into action for 2023. This time around, the pair would be joined by their 9-year-old daughter Ophelia and their good friend, Trevor Wearstler. The two-week trip was split into two legs: a jungle lodge only accessible by boating through the Amazon River and a visit to the Pantanal – the world's largest tropical wetlands and a mecca for Jaguars.



**Jaguar, *Panthera onca***  
Photo by Erin Avram

*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](mailto:blackbrookaud@aol.com).*

## NOVEMBER FIELD TRIP

**DATE:** Saturday, November 18, 2023  
**ACTIVITY:** Oberlin hotspots  
**TIME:** 10:00 a.m.  
**PLACE:** [Oberlin Reservoir](#)

We'll start our exploration of Oberlin birding hotspots at the Oberlin Reservoir by climbing the 26 steps to the top of this upland reservoir's dike, emerging at the top slowly to avoid startling the birds. Late fall is the prime time to see good numbers of winter gulls and waterfowl, prior to the reservoir freezing. On eBird.org, Oberlin Reservoir has [162 species](#) recorded. Meet at 43885 Parsons Road in Oberlin.

Our next stop is close by at the [Oberlin Preserve](#), a Western Reserve Land Conservancy property. This 63-acre preserve features several native habitats - old field, tall grass prairie, woodland, wet sedge meadow, and vernal pools. These attract a good variety of bird species throughout the year. There is a porta-potty at the parking lot and several lunch options nearby.

*We sometimes meet in the Rt. 306 parking lot of Lakeland Community College and carpool to our destination for our more distant field trips. If you'd like to explore carpooling options, please contact us at [blackbrookaud@aol.com](mailto:blackbrookaud@aol.com).*

## Join the Christmas Bird Count for Blackbrook's last bird survey of 2023

Add the birds you find to this early-winter bird census as Blackbrook Audubon joins thousands of other volunteers across the U.S., Canada, and many countries in the Western Hemisphere for the [124th CBC](#). Blackbrook's CBC will be **Saturday, December 30!** Email Dan Donaldson, our CBC compiler, at [danook057@yahoo.com](mailto:danook057@yahoo.com) to find out which locations in our 15-mile diameter circle need to be covered, to join a group, or to find out how you can report your backyard feeder counts. We could always expand our driving CBC routes, too, so if you want to avoid the elements, but still count birds, let Dan know.

Traditionally, we stop for lunch at Fish Bar in Painesville and sometimes continue birding after we recharge. Last year we enjoyed the breakfast buffet at Hellriegel's Inn in Painesville Township. We'll let you know this year's lunch spot, but we hope you come to warm up and add your sightings to the preliminary list we make after we eat. It may be cold, but you'll be contributing to the oldest citizen science birding project that helps scientists get a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. *Let's go find 'em!*

## JANUARY FIELD TRIP

**DATE:** Saturday, January 20, 2024  
**ACTIVITY:** Winter visitors along the lake  
**TIME:** 10:00 a.m.  
**PLACE:** [Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve](#)

Tour the southern shore of Lake Erie with us to search for gulls and waterfowl like scoters and mergansers. We'll begin at Cleveland Lakefront Nature Preserve at 8701 Lakeshore Boulevard, Cuyahoga County's [#1 eBird hotspot](#). Formerly known as Dike 14, this peninsula at the northern end of MLK Blvd. may host Northern Saw-whet Owls and American Tree Sparrows. Local sighting reports will help us zero in on our next stops on the tour. Remember to dress in layers and bring a spotting scope, if you have one.

## Give raptors space to raise their young

As owl breeding and nesting season begins, first for [Great Horned Owls](#), Blackbrook asks all nature enthusiasts to keep a safe distance from these birds so they are not forced to leave ideal nesting territories for less desirable ones.

## Blackbrook will announce cancellations due to weather on the iAlert system.

Check WKYC-TV 3, [wkyc.com](http://wkyc.com); WVIZ-TV 25;  
WKSU-FM 89.7; WCPN-FM 104.9;  
WCLV-FM 90.3; WCRF-FM 103.3.

## January program continued Brazilian Adventure from page 1

The trip's primary focus was to observe wildlife, with special focus on the vertebrates. While it would have been incredible to also observe amazing fish diversity of the Amazon, this was limited to eating some of the tastiest fish ever... and piranha fishing! Insects were hard not to observe, oftentimes in our lodges. Being in a rainforest, we also took time to enjoy the huge jungle trees, flowers, other plants, and even some fungus. With that goal of seeing wildlife in mind, we ended our trip seeing 241 species of birds, 29 species of mammals, 16 species of reptiles, and 8 species of amphibians! We had a few hiccups on the way, but overall, the trip was a lifetime experience and we look forward to sharing our adventure with you!



**Brown Capuchin**    *Cebus apella*  
Photo by Erin Avram

### Checking close by [CBC Circles](#)

The Ashtabula CBC, centered just east of Kingsville, will be Saturday, December 30. [Marc Hanneman](#) compiles this count which covers Ashtabula and Conneaut Harbors, as well as several [Ashtabula County Metroparks](#). He says they can use more help scanning the lake.

The Burton CBC will be Monday, January 1, 2024. [Linda Gilbert](#) is the primary compiler and [Dan Best](#) is listed as the secondary compiler.

Cleveland's East side count will be Saturday, December 16. The Willoughby portion of this circle is managed by Mary Huey.



**Hyacinth Macaw**    *Anodorhynchus hyacinthinus*  
Photo by Erin Avram

### A Winning Night for Birders and Birds

After teams soar high in Trevor's bird trivia competition at the November program, the winning will continue with Blackbrook's annual ticket auction of nature items and 50/50 raffle. Donated goods include nature-themed books, puzzles, decorative items, artwork and a few Christmas items. One prize to apply tickets to will be a five-pound bag of bird seed each month for one year, donated by Wild Birds Unlimited (WBU). Funds raised help Blackbrook purchase Audubon Adventures publications for nearly 800 kids participating in the Geauga Park District's [Nature Scopes program](#). Tickets cost \$1 each or six for \$5. You might win half of the 50/50 pot.

We will also pull the winning ticket in the Bring your Own Mug raffle. Attendees of our September and October programs who brought their own mug or water bottle filled out tickets and are eligible to win a \$25 gift card to WBU in Willoughby/Mayfield Hts. or to Centerra Co-op Country Store in Chardon.

Keep bringing your reusable beverage container to program meetings so you'll be eligible to win a future gift card.



We are sad to report the recent passing  
of Blackbrook Audubon member

*Jean Dively.*

May her love of nature live on in all of us.



## Restoring the Chagrin River and its East Branch for People and Wildlife

The construction phase of the [Chagrin River and East Branch Restoration](#) project is nearly complete. Visitors to Daniels Park and Todd Field in Willoughby experienced park closures at times this summer, but the inconvenience should be worth it when they see the improvements made to the area's habitat and recreation access.

The City of Willoughby approached Chagrin River Watershed Partners (CRWP) to address threats to the Chagrin's water quality from steep riverbanks and crumbling infrastructure within the river. A dam built in the 1920's had collapsed in 2004. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) recommended removal of the dam in 2018. CRWP was awarded a \$2 million grant from the [H2Ohio Initiative](#) to eliminate the sources of erosion on the Chagrin River by

- removing the dam and water intake structures
- stabilizing 700 feet of riverbank
- acquiring land to expand the riparian zone
- treating invasive plants
- rerouting the S-curve in the East Branch.

Boulder clusters and woody debris placed in the river will give fish hiding places. An oxbow wetland will be added to the East Branch to create fish spawning habitat. CRWP says the platform with the railing, bench and pier will remain for fishing access.

[Biohabitats](#) and Meadville Land Service are the design-build team. Another partner in the project, Western Reserve Land Conservancy (WRLC), will protect 78 acres they purchased.

In the spring, ODNR will have a ribbon-cutting ceremony and volunteers will be invited to join a native planting, according to Kimberly Brewster Shefelton, the deputy director of CRWP. **Preserving more land along the Chagrin River**

The City of Willoughby and WRLC will preserve 105 acres along the Chagrin River, formerly owned by Andrews Osborne Academy, with plans to create a park and trail between Daniels Park and Todd Field. The property transfer is thanks to a \$1.7 million grant from ODNR, which received the funds from NOAA under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act. Willoughby's [Chagrin River Floodplain Land Conservation Project](#) will help this floodplain protect nearby developments by absorbing water from heavy rains and also [protect the Chagrin and Lake Erie](#) from pollutants in storm water runoff from new housing developments nearby. Willoughby is seeking more funding, but in time, this project will enhance habitat, provide more public access to the Chagrin River and add to the Chagrin Connect trail plan, a regional effort to create more recreation along the Chagrin to Lake Erie.

### Avian Surprises and Potential along the Chagrin River by Mary Huey

For perhaps 20 years, the City of Willoughby has dreamed of acquiring the abandoned nursery field in the floodplain on the east side of the Chagrin River between Rt. 84 and Rt. 20. Their vision is to connect the two city parks – Todd Field and Daniels Park – with bridges and a trail.

I'm not sure of the exact history of the property but for as long as I've been alive, it was owned by Andrews Osborne Academy. The entire length of the 105 acres sits between the Chagrin River and a wooded bluff about 50 feet high. It may have been a hayfield before Andrews rented the land to the Warner Nursery to grow nursery stock. The field has lain fallow since the nursery went out of business.

In the fall of 2022, the City of Willoughby hosted a public meeting to share that the

property was being acquired with the help of the Western Reserve Land Conservancy and to propose ideas for the development and restoration of the property. I confess I was alarmed by some aspects of the "development" ideas but fully behind the restoration aspect of the project. I decided to get involved by offering to conduct bird surveys and happily WRLC accepted my offer, so during the spring and early summer of 2023, my daughter Alison and I did just that.

We visited the property seven times between March 20 and June 16 walking deer trails with a bit of bushwhacking and the service access road for the existing gas wells. About 75% of the field is open with three or four stands of old nursery

*Continued on page 5...*

## Avian Surprises and Potential along the Chagrin River Continued

stock – mostly arborvitae. The riverbank is wooded between 20 and 70 feet back with large cottonwood and sycamore trees. There is a storm water retention lagoon along the west edge of the field that serves the development above the bluff. The lagoon drains directly into the river at the north end of the field. Across the drainage ditch, a mature forest runs from the river up the bluff to the backside of the school campus. The entire length of the bluff is wooded.

**O**ur list for the survey was 72 species which is encouraging given the location of the property. Our first walk was a cold, sunny March morning and we had 26 species – all the expected suspects with the happy surprise of a little flock of **Rusty Blackbirds** in the drainage ditch. One of the goals of the restoration is to create a wetland to help abate the storm water from the developments up on the bluffs, so finding these scarce blackbirds makes that idea a good one.

Two weeks later, we picked up 12 more species including a few early migrants foraging in the edge habitats which are abundant and the birdiest of any part of the property. The local **Great Blue Herons**, **kingfishers**, and **vultures** were all back flying up and down the river course. The storm water basin surprised us with **Mallards**, **Wood Duck** and **Blue-winged Teal**.

The mid-April visit added 7 more species including **Common Merganser**, **Brown Thrasher**, and a **meadowlark**. That was exciting but momentary as we never saw a meadowlark again. The current vegetation may not be meadowlark suitable but that could change with the restoration. I've been watching the numbers of Common Mergansers increase along this stretch of the river for the past few years and later in the summer, a group of 15 spent a few days fishing and loafing in the area between the now removed dam and Rt. 84.

The first week of May brought in more migrants and the list grew to 56 species. There were two **Green Herons** in the storm water basin and while we didn't see them again, enhancing the habitat could make them regular breeding season residents, if they aren't already. Breeding birds were returning including

**Warbling Vireos**, **Baltimore Orioles**, and **swallow** species. But the best finds that first week of May were a singing **Purple Finch** and a pair of **Orchard Orioles**!

The mid-May walk added 12 new species including **Willow Flycatchers** calling in the field, **Indigo Buntings** and a few **warblers** – **Parula**, **Common Yellowthroat**, **Yellow**, and **Wilson's**. The Yellow and Common Yellowthroats were there for the summer while the others were passing through.

The final survey was in mid-June – we added 4 species and had a walk list of 35 species – safe to say all those species were breeding in or adjacent to the field. This included the **Cliff Swallow** colony under the Rt. 84 bridge and a **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** colony in the shale cliff along River Street north of Daniels Park. The Orchard Orioles were present along with the Baltimore Orioles and perhaps two pairs of **Wood Thrush** using the small woodlots at the north end of the property and across the river below River Street.

The prospects are good for this property provided it is restored and developed with wildlife in mind. There is a ½-mile stretch between the north end of Daniels Park and the south end of Todd Field where you can stand on the riverbank and not see a single structure – just river and trees. I have been birding the west side of the river regularly for about three years and was excited to have a chance to get into the other side of the river for this project. Combining our survey lists with the Daniels Park hotspot list brings the total species (so far) close to 100. As this wild oasis is restored going forward, I expect that number to increase.

**A**ll the lists and a summary of our observations were submitted to the WRLC project manager and used in WRLC's baseline report for the property to be recorded as part of the conservation easement. Our effort means the planners know more about the current status of the property than they would otherwise. While the City of Willoughby is primarily interested in the recreational potential, I hope our work will influence an equal consideration of the wildlife potential of the valley.

Now to wait for the "plan".

## 100 Birds for FUN!

Ever tried to do a January 100? The object is to see or hear as many bird species as you can in the month of January, hopefully totaling 100. However, it is quite challenging and not easy to accomplish. So, let's try to achieve it together.

We are calling the January 2024 birding event 100 for FUN! Bird anywhere in Ohio from parks, and birding hot spots to backyard bird feeders. To participate, please share at least 4 bird lists with Blackbrook Audubon in January. Any ebird lists can be shared with "FriendsofBlackbrook" or you can email your bird lists to us at blackbrookaud@aol.com. Please include the date and location for emailed lists.

Finally, keep tabs on our group progress on the new 100 for FUN page at the blackbrook-audubon.org website. It will launch on January 1st and will be updated on Tuesday and Saturday evenings. Join us on January 28th on our IBA walk at Orchard Hills Park to squeeze in a few more birds followed by a fun wrap-up acknowledging top contributors and most frequently seen birds. Come vote on the rarest bird spotted.

For inspiration, here's a recap of January 100 by an [Ohio Young Birder in 2021](#).



**Because Lake Erie starts here.**

## 2023 Chagrin River Bird Quest Recap

Thanks to perfect weather and the contributions of 18 volunteers from Blackbrook Audubon, the Audubon Society of Greater Cleveland, and the Geauga Park District, Chagrin River Bird Quest 2023 was a great success. More than 100 birders went afield September 8 and 9 on 26 teams and tallied a total of 140 species of birds in the Chagrin River Watershed – a new record!

All participants received a Bird Quest t-shirt and an invitation to the Bird Quest celebration. We appreciate the continued support of Wild Birds Unlimited in Willoughby/Mayfield Heights along with others who donated prizes. Cleveland Audubon led an owl prowls Friday night at the Novak Sanctuary in Aurora plus a Saturday morning bird walk at the Rookery. Blackbrook Audubon led a Saturday morning bird walk at Chagrin River Park, where we ran into other teams participating in Bird Quest.

Recognition for the best team name went to One Tern Deserves a Plover. The rarest bird was the Connecticut Warbler seen by Where's the CONW? Hangry Birders saw the most warbler species at 15. The Amish team, Just Winging It, hired a driver and came in third place with 80 species. They were helpful in pointing out birds to other teams. GPD Nat Catchers camped overnight and tied for second place with Where's the CONW? with 89 species. The Hangry Birders counted 92 species for first place. Blackbrook Audubon's Listless Listers had 54 species.

Bird Quest 2024 will take off September 6 and 7.

Chagrin River  
**BIRD QUEST**



**Brown Creeper**  
*Certhia americana*

They spiral up large trees in mature woods.

**Photo by Debbi Schuster**

**Bufflehead**  
*Bucephala albeola*

As North America's smallest diving duck, you may need to wait for them to pop back up to the surface.

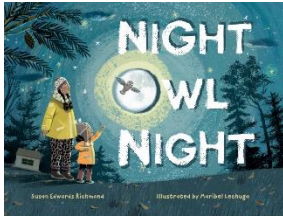
**Photo by Debbi Schuster**





## A Trio of charming children's books

By the end of November, another banding season for the Northern Saw-whet Owl will be in the books in Ohio. A new children's picture book called [Night Owl Night](#) gives readers a clear overview of how the process of mist netting and banding Ohio's smallest owl species works. The young daughter of an owl researcher can't wait to be old enough to accompany her mom on an owl banding night. She just has to be able to stay awake, or be a "night owl," to watch and learn



what her mom does. Several Clevnet libraries have this book, including the three Mentor Public Libraries, Perry and Geauga Middlefield.

The author of *Night Owl Night*, Susan Edwards Richmond, wrote two earlier books for children on wildlife. *Bird Count* (2019) follows a girl on a team of citizen scientists as they go on a Christmas Bird Count, making this book also fitting for the season. This book is available at Mentor Main, Kirtland, Morley, Perry, Geauga West and Middlefield Libraries.

The third book, *Bioblitz! Counting Critters* (2022), is about a young boy and his cousin competing to identify the most species on a biodiversity count at a local park. You can find it at Mentor Main, Morley and Conneaut Libraries.

## Project FeederWatch is underway

Project FeederWatch is an annual winter survey of birds at your choice of location and schedule. This year's [FeederWatch](#) season runs November 1 to April 30. You only need a food source, a bird bath, or plants that attract birds.

This year, they've added the option to record mammals and expanded on the ability to monitor [sick birds](#).

Project FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by the annual participant fee of \$18. This covers materials such as optional double-sided posters of eastern and western feeder birds, staff support, data analysis and a year-end report, Winter Bird Highlights. You also get digital access to the Cornell Lab's *Living Bird* magazine.

The survey is run by the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and [Birds Canada](#), both non-profits.

## Thank You, Everyone!



In this season of gratitude, we would like to thank our generous donors, eager participants at our IBA walks, field trips and programs, our guest speakers and our conservation partners at Lake Metroparks,

Gauga Park District, Holden Arboretum and the City of Mentor Natural Resource Division. Special recognition goes to our Friends of Blackbrook. It is your generous support that enables us to fulfill our mission to promote conservation and restoration of ecosystems with emphasis on birds and habitat through education and advocacy within Ohio's Ashtabula, Lake and Geauga counties and adjacent communities. No need to wait for January 1<sup>st</sup> to make a resolution to enjoy and learn about nature. Let's go together, now!

### 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 \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

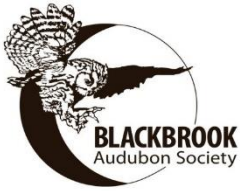
Make checks payable to **Blackbrook Audubon Society**

Mail to: **Friends of Blackbrook Audubon**

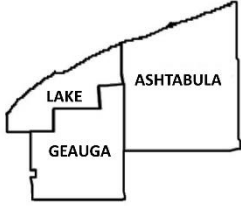
**P. O. Box 1306 Mentor, OH 44061-1306**



*Thank You!*



BLACKBROOK AUDUBON SOCIETY  
P. O. Box 1306  
Mentor, OH 44061-1306



[www.blackbrookaudubon.org](http://www.blackbrookaudubon.org)

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Becky Donaldson - President

Laurie White - Editor

## NOVEMBER

Friday, 17<sup>th</sup> 7:30 pm

[Burrough's Nature Club](#)

Owls of Ohio

by Jim Tomko

Audubon of Greater Cleveland  
at Willoughby UM Church

Sunday, 19<sup>th</sup> 7:00 pm

[The Unusual Birds  
of Winter](#)

Geauga Park District  
The West Woods

## DECEMBER

Sat., 9<sup>th</sup> 8:00 – 12 N

Second Saturday Science  
Open House, Mentor Marsh  
Woodridge Ln & Forest Rd  
Free, utility access path

Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> 2:30 pm

Research in Geauga  
Parks: Survey Results  
Butterfly, dragonfly, bird surveys  
on Zoom

[Virtual program registration](#)

## JANUARY 2024

Nov. 18<sup>th</sup> – Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>

10 am – 5 pm

[Candy Land  
Gone to the Birds](#)  
Penitentiary Glen

Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> 7:30 pm

[Burrough's Nature Club](#)  
The Natural History  
of Fireflies  
by Nancy Stranahan  
via Zoom

**Record birds on eBird for the [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) February 16 – 19.**