



# Columbus Audubon Song Sparrow

February-March 2005  
Volume 36, No. 3

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## Creature Feature

### Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

By Rob Thorn

One of the most ubiquitous birds of eastern North America, The Northern Cardinal has benefited from an uncanny ability to adapt to human-modified habitats. Both the common and genus names refer to the rich red robes and caps of Catholic high-priests called cardinals, but this color is only in mature males (of the bird, that is). However, their crest is shaped more like the miter of a bishop than the skullcap of a cardinal.



Female Northern Cardinal visits a feeder.

**Relationships:** Cardinals are members of the Family *Emberizidae*. This is the huge family of grosbeaks, sparrows, buntings, wood-warblers, and tanagers. It was constructed in the 1980s after DNA evidence showed that all of these disparate groups of birds were actually quite closely related. Cardinals are in the subfamily *Cardinalinae*, the cardinal-grosbeaks, which include a wide variety of big-billed fruit- and seed-eaters of the New World. As with many of our Ohio birds, there are more species of cardinals in the tropics than here, including the Vermillion Cardinal of Columbia and Venezuela and the Pyrrholuxia (or Mexican Cardinal) of Texas, Arizona, and Mexico. Closely related is the Brazilian Cardinal of the genus *Paroaria* that many of you may have seen in Hawaii or Florida, where it has been introduced from its South American home range.

**Range:** Eastern and central North America, extending from Maine and Nebraska south to Florida and Texas, then southwest into southern Arizona and virtually all of Mexico. Don't look for them west of the Rocky Mountains, except in southern Arizona and New Mexico; they are a very rare vagrant to California and Oregon. They also have not been able to colonize much of Canada, perhaps because of the extreme winter weather. The heart of their range is the many edges of the deciduous forest of the central and eastern U.S., but their adaptation to human yards and farms has allowed them to spread west across much of the Great Plains. In many parts of their range, these birds are more common around human settlements than in wild habitats, especially in the arid parts of the Great Plains, Texas, and Mexico.

**Field Marks:** Cardinal males are unmistakable, with their brilliant scarlet chest, neck, and crest framing a dark black face. The brilliant red color is over most of their body, and may act as a marker of good health that allows females to choose only the most disease-free, vibrant males as potential mates. Females and juveniles are much more subdued in color, but still beautiful birds in their own right. Females have a rich tan-brown color, with scarlet highlights on their wing primaries, tails, and crest. Hatching-year juveniles are similar to females except that they are grayer over-all, with much less red on their wings and tail, and none on their crest. One of the quickest ways to separate them out is to look at their bills: adult bills of both males and females are red-orange, while juveniles have dark gray bills, which gradually turn to pink then orange as the birds mature.

**Voice:** A beautiful clear-whistled repetitive song that varies distinctively between different males. Some sound like 'whoit whoit whoit ...' while others sound closer to 'teuw teuw teuw...'. Older males appear able to make several different songs, and even to vary phrases within a song, and may use this expanded repertoire to make themselves more attractive to potential partners and more intimidating to potential rivals. They can even add other chips and sounds into their song on odd occasions, and quite a few birds appear to end their songs with a bizarre mechanical

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The Song Sparrow is published 5 times per year by Columbus Audubon, a chapter of Audubon. Stefanie Hauck, editor, stefanie.hauck@gmail.com or (740) 972-1680.

## Audubon at Home grant update

# Getting ready for a busy Spring at the Dempsey Wetlands

By Beth MacLehose

**B**efore the holiday break and wintry blast, my class was busy learning all about water testing.

The Healthy Water, Healthy People test kit finally arrived and had wonderful lesson plans to go with it.

My students have been learning how to use the science probes that record water and soil temperatures along with the different tests in the test kit. We are going out to the wetlands site weekly and are collecting data from the wetlands pond and surrounding areas.

The students will be teaching other science classes how to collect this data so that we can not only share the knowledge, but also get a break from the cold weather.

In addition, another seventh

grade science teacher, Megan Pollock, and I will be speaking at the Schoolnet State Technology conference.

The topic of our presentation is how we are integrating technology into our lesson plans as our classes study our wetlands area.

Hopefully this will encourage other teachers to monitor wildlife areas around their schools as part of their lesson plans.

I also received a grant from State Farm Insurance for a project on National Service Day.

Part of this grant includes money for purchasing waders for students and teachers to go in and pull some of the cattail plants before we lose our pond.

In April, we plan to host a clean up of the wetlands in



By Beth MacLehose

Students collect samples at the Dempsey Middle School wetlands.

involving members of the community.

We hope to have at least draft copies of our wetlands field guides available at that time, as well as the field guides purchased with the

grant for volunteers to use that day.

We are also hoping to set up a student-led field trip to the wetlands sometime in the Spring (date TBD) involving Audubon members.

## Trustee nominees

*For three-year terms 2005-2008:*

### Paul Gledhill

Paul Gledhill has recently taken a position at the Ohio EPA as a water quality modeler and was the former watershed coordinator for the Upper Scioto River. He has a bachelor's degree in Environmental Science from Muskingum College and attended the New Albany Environmental Science Program. During an internship at Penn State, Paul helped conduct intensive avian surveys for the development of an upland indicator of ecologic integrity in the Mid-Atlantic Piedmont and Coastal Plains regions. Paul is dedicated to natural resource protection and enjoys attending Audubon birding events.

### Karen Augenstein

Karen Augenstein is a software engineer with interests in conservation and wildlife, especially birds. Karen has been a Columbus Audubon member since 1994, having participated in several Birdathons and Christmas Bird Counts over the years. She has also been a volunteer in the Audubon Ohio office for over a year, mostly doing database design and data entry. This past spring, Karen became the Columbus Audubon webmaster.

### Darlene Sillick

Darlene Sillick is an active birder and amateur naturalist and works very passionately on many conservation and nature related educational efforts. She is presently finishing a Trustee term with Columbus Audubon where she has assumed the role of Field Trip Chair. She has been active with the education committee and has established the well received 101 series of classes,

workshops and outings. Darlene is also a trustee and active member of the education committee with Ohio Wildlife Center and specializes in giving presentations with the education raptors and animals at OWC. She is program chair at the Delaware County Bird Club, a member of Columbus Astronomical Society, Ohio Ornithological Society, Cornell, Ohio Bluebird Society and North American Bluebird Society. She has been very active with bluebird and other cavity nesting species conservation projects over her 16 years of birding. She is also a 16-year volunteer with Highbanks Metro Park. Darlene is an Executive Assistant at Cardinal Health where she placed bluebird boxes and bird feeders on the grounds before she received her first paycheck!

*For the two-year term (2005-2007) replacing Ken Buckley:*

### Michael Packer

Michael Packer is an optical design engineer, amateur astronomer and birder who has made a career out of his interest with the outdoors and light by designing and specifying environmentally friendly "dark sky" lighting. He has a master's degree in physics from San Francisco State University. He is a member of the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America (IESNA), past vice president of the Columbus Astronomical Society and an active member of several Ornithological societies. He also enjoys worldwide travel and collecting of few rare bird books.

*Bios for two additional open trustee positions were not available at press time. If possible, we will post them on [www.columbusaudubon.org](http://www.columbusaudubon.org) before the annual meeting.*

# President's message: It's still all about birds

By Dave Horn

Once again I arose in the predawn darkness of New Year's Day to join a small army of Columbus Audubon members and friends for a Christmas Bird Count (CBC). This one was centered around Kingston (on the Ross-Pickaway county line) and has been an annual event since its start in 1970 by Columbus Audubon member Irving Kassoy. "Irv" had a keen interest in the biology of owls, especially the barn owl. He was a native of New York City and a charter member of the Bronx Bird Club when it grudgingly admitted a young upstart from upstate (Jamestown) named Roger Tory Peterson.

I thought about old Irv as Bob Conlon, Bill Whan and I dutifully drove every mile of the central part of the count circle, frequently stopping to listen, or to take a short walk, or to re-check the Spencer Road pond (three times) because something interesting *had* to be there. I wondered if Irv had in mind that "Birding for the Christmas Bird Count allows you to have fun while generating important information that will be used in our bird conservation effort," according to Geoff LeBaron, National Audubon's CBC director. Well, we were having fun, despite straining to see distant hawks perched in the fog. If nothing else, since it was January 1, even starlings counted for the 2005 Year List. And the Laurelville lunch when teams compare notes and turn in the morning's tallies to compiler Brad Sparks is always jolly, replete with talk about whether we'll card more than 70 species, and

"just where *did* you see that shrike?"

But as importantly, we were getting useful information. The Kingston area is different from 35 years ago and the birdlife reflects some of those changes. Wintering raptors are no longer numerous, and huge blackbird flocks were seemingly everywhere. It's good to document these trends. This year National Audubon will undertake a comprehensive study of the CBC results from the past 39 years to be included in the 2005 "State of the Birds Report." To quote from their press release, the CBCs provide "important information for those working on the science of bird populations and bird conservation. CBCs are vital in monitoring the status of resident and migratory birds across the Western Hemisphere.

The data, 100 percent volunteer generated, have become a crucial part of the U. S. Government's natural history monitoring database. For instance, articles published in the 103rd CBC issue of "American Birds" provided ornithologists with more information to better understand the magnitude of the effects of West Nile virus on regional bird populations." We were happy to be part of the effort, and I think Irv Kassoy would be pleased. CBC results from 1900 to the present are available through Audubon's website [www.audubon.org/bird/cbc](http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc).

P. S. Once the fog had lifted there was indeed something interesting at Spencer Road pond: a greater white-fronted goose and two blue-phase snow geese! Some years I go 365 days without seeing either.

## The red fox tale

By Dorenda Watson

In Native American culture, the red fox is portrayed in stories as a shy, indifferent, trickster...an ally to his wiser, cunning "brother," the coyote. He is small and secretive and avoids contact with man at all cost, so it is a magical moment if you catch a glimpse of this 12-to-15-pound sprite in your travels through the woods!

And contrary to his name, a red fox is not always red. His coat can range from brown, yellow or gray to black and silver.

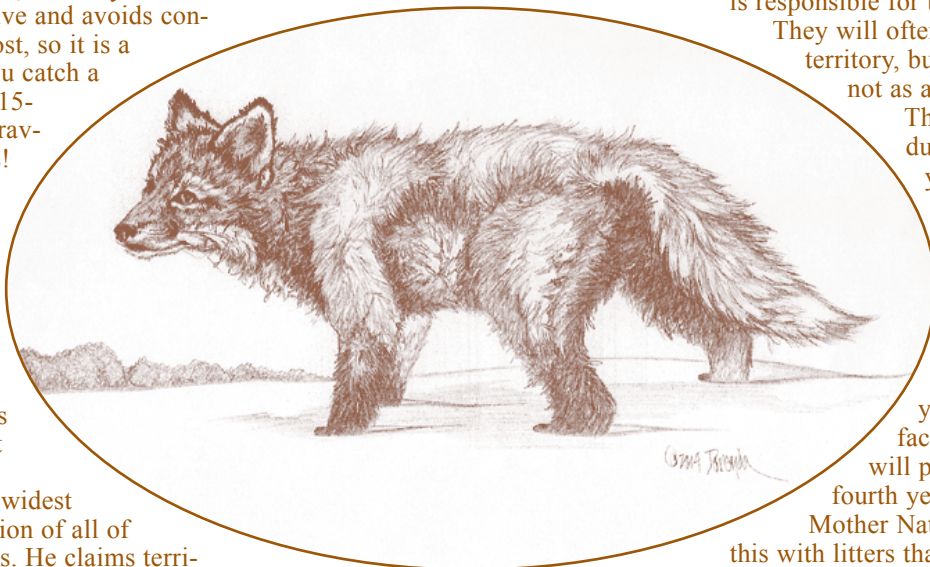
One of his most unusual characteristics is his elliptical or "cat eye."

Red foxes have the widest geographical distribution of all of the 23 species of foxes. He claims territory throughout the northern hemisphere as well as Australia, due to human introduction. He can survive in desert, tundra, farmland and the city. One reason for this vast expansion is his ability to exist on almost any kind of food ... from insects and rabbits to fruit and fast food!

I know a particular red fox that hangs out at a Bob Evans restaurant here in

town just waiting for some dumpster delicacies!

The red fox is known for his ability to "mouse." He uses his fantastic hearing to locate his prey to within one degree of



its location. He will then pounce through several feet of snow or brush to claim his prize. A fox will often spend all day collecting a cache to hoard for leaner times.

Often the red fox lives in a group consisting of a lead male, several related females and the cubs of the dominant

female. They do not, however, operate as a pack like wolves. They will all participate in raising the young, but all other daily duties are done on an individual basis. This means that each adult is responsible for their own food.

They will often travel around their territory, but again as individuals, not as a unit.

They will communicate during these travels with yips and barks ... not howls, like the coyote.

The average life span of the red fox in the wild is not great, with an average of only a few years. As a matter of fact, ninety-five percent will perish before their fourth year.

Mother Nature compensates for this with litters that can range from five-to-fourteen cubs!

March and April are great months to be on the lookout for the red fox.

Although they are quite elusive, your patience will be greatly rewarded.

*-Dorenda Watson is a local wildlife artist and teacher.*

# Coming Up

Columbus Audubon activities are for nature enthusiasts of all ages and skill levels. We invite you to join us for a field trip or program to learn more about birds and their central Ohio habitats, as well as other natural history topics. Our activities are free and open to the public and there is no need to register unless otherwise noted.

## Field trips

### Winter Birds of Hoover Reservoir

*Saturday February 12, 8:30 a.m.*

**Leader:** Rob Thorn

**Skill level:** All

Join Rob Thorn on a journey to Hoover Reservoir to see what unusual wintering birds can be found. We'll visit some of the hotspots on the reservoir, depending on where there is open water. Because Hoover is not hunted and rarely boated in winter, it accumulates a good diversity of wintering waterbirds, and we'll look for over-wintering loons, grebes, cormorants, goldeneye, mergansers, and other diving ducks. Dabbling ducks are often numerous, as are gulls, especially around the edges of ice shelves. Hawks and Eagles are also likely, and falcons and vultures have been regular in recent winters. Meet at the dam parking area along Sunbury Road. Dress warmly. *For more information, contact Rob Thorn, (614) 471-3051 or robthorn@earthlink.net.*

### Winter Birds at The Wilds

*Sunday February 13, Noon*

**Leader:** Mike Flynn

**Skill level:** all

Join Mike Flynn on a return trip to same outstanding habitat where over 100 birds of prey were observed in February 2004. Birds observed were Prairie Falcon, Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle and many other raptors, waterfowl and songbirds. Dress warmly and bring a snack. There will be a stop for dinner on the way back. Meet in the parking lot of the Cracker Barrel restaurant at state Route 256. **Directions:** From Columbus take I-70 East to exit 112 (Rt. 256) turn right, then take the first right and the Cracker Barrel is on the right. *For more information, call Mike Flynn at (614) 882-9493.*

### Birding the Urban Primeval Forest

*Saturday February 19, 9 a.m.*

**Leader:** Dave Horn and Darlene Sillick

**Skill level:** All

You don't have to drive for miles for good birding. Join Darlene Sillick and Dave Horn for a walk through Walhalla Ravine followed by a visit to a remnant of what may be primeval forest in the midst of Clintonville (Webster Park). This part of Columbus harbors a remarkable variety of birds especially in migration. Cooper's and red-shouldered hawks, barred, screech and great horned owls are resident, if not always obvious. Meet in the parking lot of McDonald's, 3095 N. High St. (between North Broadway and Dodridge St. - Look for a green Subaru Outback, plate # "MOTHMAN"). We'll finish about 11 a.m. *For more information, contact Darlene Sillick (614) 761-3696 or azuretrails@columbus.rr.com.*

### Ohio Wildlife Center Bird Count

*Sunday February 20, 9 a.m.*

**Leader:** Darlene Sillick

**Skill level:** All

Meet Darlene Sillick at the Ohio Wildlife Center's Cook Road facility in Delaware County where we will continue to compile a list of birds we see on this property, adjacent to the Twin Lakes Nature Preserve. Dress for the weather. **Directions:** Take state Route 315 to Powell Road. Turn left. Follow Powell Road until it

dead ends into state Route 257. Turn left and immediately turn right onto the O'Shaughnessy Dam. Drive over the dam and turn right at the traffic light onto state Route 745. Follow 745 about 4 miles. Look for the OWC sign and turn left. The facility is at 6131 Cook Road. *For more information, contact Darlene Sillick at (614) 761-3696 or azuretrails@columbus.rr.com .*

### Birds of Big Island State Wildlife Area

*Sunday March 6, Noon*

**Leader:** Mike Flynn

**Skill level:** All

This wetland area is excellent habitat for waterfowl, wading birds and shorebirds in the appropriate seasons. On this trip we will be looking for early spring waterfowl as they migrate northward to their breeding grounds. Ducks, geese, swans and other new migrants along with resident species should give us great opportunities for a rewarding day in the field. *For more information, call Mike Flynn at (614) 882-9493.*

### Early Spring Waterfowl at Killbuck Wildlife area

*Sunday March 13, 11:30 a.m.*

**Leader:** Mike Flynn

**Skill level:** All

This expansive natural area, located in quiet Amish country provides significant habitat for thousands of native birds and animals. This trip is timed to coincide with the waterfowl migration season. Impressive numbers of ducks, geese, swans and other migrants move through this great natural corridor. Meet at the Worthington Square Mall parking lot. We will have dinner in Shreve before heading back. *For more information, call Mike Flynn at (614) 882-9493.*

### Monthly Walk at the Columbus Zoo

*Saturday March 19, and April 23, 9 a.m.*

**Leader:** Barbara Revard

**Skill level:** All

*New!* The Columbus Zoo will host a monthly bird/nature walk around the fringe areas of the zoo's diverse habitat to note bird species in an area rich with several habitats. Join Barbara Revard and Darlene Sillick at the Shipping and Receiving gate area (second gate east on Powell Rd). Meet behind the warehouse. We will roam some of the wild edges of the zoo property. Wear proper footwear as we will be making our own trails in some areas. *For more information, contact Barbara Revard, Assistant Director, Conservation Education at (614) 645-3448 barbara.revard@columbuszoo.org.*

### Calamus Swamp Hike

*Sunday March 20, 2-4 p.m.*

**Leader:** Jim Davidson

**Skill level:** All

Join Jim as he meanders through the swamp in search of all creatures great and small. You will be enlightened on this walk through Columbus Audubon's property while Jim amazes you with his knowledge of the natural world. Appropriate footwear necessary in the wet swamp! Meet in the Calamus gravel parking

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# Columbus Audubon annual potluck meeting and program

Tuesday, February 15, 2005 at 6:30 p.m.

Clintonville Woman's Club, 3951 North High Street

Please join us for food, fellowship and a tale of a whirlwind journey to find birds at Columbus Audubon's annual potluck dinner Feb. 15. Please bring your family and friends! The evening will include a short business meeting before the presentation by our featured speaker. Non-members are welcome but may not vote during the business meeting, which will include the election of trustees (*See page 2 for their biographies*). Each individual or family is asked to bring a substantial dish large enough to share with 12 other people. You may bring a casserole, salad, dessert or bread of some kind. Bring your own utensils, plates, cups and beverage other than coffee, which will be provided.

## My Big Year

Greg Miller, along with Sandy Konito and Al Levantin spent 1998 in a contest to set a new record for a North American Big Year. That competition became the subject of a book *The Big Year: A Tale of Man, Nature, and Fowl Obsession* by Mark

Obmascik. The North American Big Year is a year-long birding competition to spot and document the 675 species of birds that call North America home as well as birds that are blown off course while migrating.

Experience the amazing story of this year-long, continent-wide quest for birds. Greg Miller traveled over 130,000 miles chasing over 700 species of birds by car, boat, bicycle, on foot, and even by helicopter. Hear the triumphs and the failures, walking stupidly into totally good luck and also doing all the right things and coming up short.

Live the joys of birding vicariously and laugh at the many mishaps while crisscrossing the continent from the swamps of Southern Florida to the subtropical climate of the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas, the arid mountains of Southeastern Arizona, the many habitats of California, the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, searching for owls in Minnesota, New England, and even the westernmost Aleutian Island, Attu.

## CA Nature Program

March Program

Ohio's Friendly Herps

Tuesday, March 22, 2005

7:00 p.m. social time, 7:30 p.m. presentation

Innis House at Inniswood Metro Gardens

From the time of my earliest childhood days reptiles and amphibians captured my imagination. I still recall with fond memories the small "frog pond" located in a neighboring pasture field. This small wet area was hardly more than a puddle and yet it swarmed with frog and toad tadpoles. We spent endless spring and summer days sloshing through the muddy water in search of tadpoles and other fascinating aquatic creatures. I still recall the old Maxwell House coffee can that we used to house our treasured pollywogs.

Another childhood experience that is imprinted in my memory was the capture and housing of a small garter snake. My mother was sympathetic toward snakes and allowed me to cage it in my bedroom.

Fed earth worms and minnows this beloved small pet put on appreciable growth in its several years of captivity.

There is no question in my mind that these early childhood experiences were responsible for my career as a naturalist.

Soon after graduation from Ohio State University in 1956 I became employed at the Aullwood Audubon Center as an interpretive naturalist, a position I held for 35 years.

The March 22 slide program, Ohio's Friendly Herps, will feature Ohio reptiles and amphibians – their habitat, mating behavior and general life history facts.

Also stressed will be the importance role these small vertebrates play in local ecosystems and how we can help to preserve them. I promise an informative and entertaining program.

*Paul E. Knoop Jr. is one of Ohio's best known naturalists. For over 35 years Paul worked as a naturalist at the Aullwood Audubon Center and Farm near Dayton, Ohio. Knoop lives in the Hocking Hills region.*

## Take note:

### Delaware County Bird Club slates programs

Meetings will be in the new science building on the Ohio Wesleyan University Campus, north side of the atrium, Room 163 at 7 p.m. **Directions:** U.S. Route 23 north to the Williams Street exit, turn left and then left again on S. Henry Street. Turn right before the tunnel. *For details, contact Edward H. Burt, Jr. at (740) 368-3886 or [ehburt@owu.edu](mailto:ehburt@owu.edu).* Programs for February and March are: Dick Tuttle of the DCBC will speak on Feb. 28 and Donna Daniel of ODNR will speak on Mar. 28.

### Opportunities in Ornithology

Opportunities in Ornithology, sponsored by the Delaware County Bird Club is a series of winter and spring ornithology field trips. The tentative schedule is: Killdeer Plains on Feb. 20; Blendon Woods on Mar 20 and Magee Marsh on May 5-6.

All interested birders at any skill level are welcome to join us on any or all trips. *For more information call Dr. Jed Burt at (740) 368-3886.*

### Ohio Ornithological Society Inaugural Conference

The Inaugural Conference of the Ohio Ornithological Society will be held Friday, April 29 through Sunday, May 1 at Shawnee Resort and Conference Center. For more information on the Conference, go to [www.ohiobirds.org/](http://www.ohiobirds.org/).

### Shreve Migration Sensation is April 2

Plan now to attend the fourth annual Shreve Migration Sensation at Shreve Elementary School in Shreve, Ohio. The event provides an opportunity for outdoor enthusiasts to come to a full day of activities in Killbuck Creek Valley, during the peak of spring migration. The cost is \$15 per person or \$25 per family. For more information go to <http://www.shreveohio.com>.

### OWC slates gala event

The Ohio Wildlife Center will be hosting "Tavern Goes Wild" Dinner/Comedy Gala Event, March 13 from 5-9 p.m. at the Dublin Village Tavern. Proceeds from the event will benefit the Ohio Wildlife Center. Tickets are \$60 per person and must be reserved in advance. Call (614) 761-9223 for details.

## Conservation Corner

# Conservation Committee emphasizes IBAs

By Bruce Lindsay

An Important Bird Area (IBA) is a site where birds are frequently located because they easily find what they need to survive: food, water and a safe habitat. Birds utilize these areas to nest, to overwinter, or while migrating.

IBAs are identified through a scientifically-based nomination process. An area might qualify if a large number of birds are found or rare birds are periodically spotted. Also, rare natural habitats are considered, as are areas that have been historically important for the study of birds.

Designated Important Bird Areas in Central Ohio include: the North Hoover Reservoir--Hoover Nature Preserve, Blendon Woods--Big Walnut Creek, Clear Creek Metro Park, Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area, Big Island Wildlife Area, Pickerington Ponds Wetland Wildlife Area and the Scioto River, Greenlawn Dam & Cemetery.

### More information on IBAs: Audubon online

<http://www.audubon.org/chapter/oh/oh/bsc/ibas.html>

### The Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative

<http://www.obcinet.org>

### BirdLife International

<http://www.birdlife.net>

### North American Bird Conservation Initiative

<http://www.nabci.net>

The Conservation Committee of Columbus Audubon will be working with others to identify and raise public awareness of IBAs and to do whatever is necessary to maintain and improve such sites. We will cooperate with the Ohio Bird Conservation Initiative, a venture that brings together more than 100 organiza-

tions in Ohio that are united by their common interest in conserving birds.

We also wish to point out how critical MetroParks has been in providing habitat for birds in Central Ohio. 140 acres of grasslands have recently been created at Slate Run, Prairie Oaks and Glacier Ridge. As a result, Least Bitterns and Virginia and Sora Rails have nested at Slate Run, while King Rails have nested at Prairie Oaks. Glacier Ridge supports habitat for Henslow Sparrows, Bobolinks and Dickcissels. 700 acres of wetlands have been restored by Metro Parks, with 370 at Pickerington Ponds. Coots and Hooded Mergansers have nested there and a Black-necked Stilt has been spotted. In all, Metro Parks controls 22,500 acres, with over 40 miles of stream corridors.

*Bruce Lindsay is a long-standing Columbus Audubon member who has recently rejoined our Conservation Committee after a few years away.*

## Ohio Wildlife Center KidsCAN! Conservation Action Network

The Ohio Wildlife Center has a large group of dedicated youth who work proactively as volunteers at OWC and in their communities as good stewards of the environment as well as to participate in conservation education projects and foster an appreciation of and a peaceful coexistence between humans and wildlife.

This year our youth will be gathering monthly as the "Critters CAN Club" at the outdoor nature education facility for fun and work activities from bird watching and hiking to nest box monitoring and wildlife biosurveying. Membership to Critters CAN requires a pledge to commit and document a recycling or other conservation project, read at least one wildlife or environmental publication or book and prepare a poster presentation for display in the community which will also appear at the OWC Fall Festival and then archived at OWC. Youth are encouraged to collect and recycle aluminum cans, the proceeds of which go toward the rehabilitation of injured Ohio wildlife.

Our young volunteers are also an integral part of the success of Wildlife Encounters Day Camp for 4- to-12-year-olds which runs from June 13-August 19, where they mentor and lead campers through a variety of conservation activities that they themselves are already experienced in doing.

Individual youth or school, scout and civic groups interested in becoming part of the KidsCAN! network and/or joining us at the Ohio Wildlife Center for Critters CAN Club may contact the OWC Education Department at 614-734-WILD or e-mail [brayowc@earthlink.net](mailto:brayowc@earthlink.net). More information about these programs may be found online at [www.ohiowildlifecenter.org](http://www.ohiowildlifecenter.org).

## 2005 Wildlife Diversity Conference BIG, Bold and Beautiful Wildlife

Please plan on attending the 2005 Wildlife Diversity Conference on March 9 at the Aladdin Shrine Complex. The theme this year is BIG, Bold and Beautiful Wildlife.

Ohio abounds with wildlife species and ventures that are big, bold and/or beautiful. The American bald eagle is certainly a big and beautiful raptor but it also commands a bold presence symbolizing freedom and power. On the other end of the scale, individual ants aren't large but their communities can be immense and awe-inspiring.

This year's Wildlife Diversity Conference will feature presentations involving wildlife issues and species that are either big, bold and/or beautiful. Our keynote speaker, Wildlife Biologist Mark Shieldcastle, will begin the day with a salute to the recovery of the American bald eagle in Ohio. Then, discover how extensive reclaimed surface-mined areas are benefiting birds.

Explore the bold behavior of the American bullfrog. Hear details of significant undercover law enforcement operations protecting native reptiles and amphibians from poachers. Another big comeback, find out the current status of Ohio's river otters.

Learn more about darters that call the Big and Little Darby Creeks home. What they lack in size, they make up for in color. You will be amazed at the industrious nature of Ohio's ants and gain insights to their vast underground communities. The day's presentations will wrap up with a stimulating revelation of the beauty of bird and other animal sounds. The conference will also provide opportunities to ask questions, share ideas and network with others interested in natural resource conservation and management. The Aladdin Shrine Complex is located at 3850 Stelzer Road just south of Morse Road. Cost for the conference is \$20 if paid before Feb. 21 and \$30 after that date. The registration fee includes all breaks and handout materials. Please make checks or money orders payable to Wildlife Diversity Fund. Call 1-800-WILDLIFE or go to [www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/](http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/) for details.

## Coming up

*Continued from page 4*

lot at state Route 104 just south of state Route 22 on the east side of the road. **Directions:** From I-71 south, take Rt. 104 south about 20 miles to 1/4 mile past where it crosses Rt. 22. *For more information, contact Darlene Sillick at (614) 761-3696 or [azure-trails@columbus.rr.com](mailto:azure-trails@columbus.rr.com).*

### **Spring Waterfowl at Alum Creek & Hoover Reservoirs**

*Saturday March 26, 8 a.m.*

**Leader:** Rob Thorn

**Skill level:** All

Migrating waterfowl will be the main focus of this dash around these two birding hotspots north of Columbus. If conditions are right, we should find flocks of diving ducks, grebes, and mergansers all raring for the northbound trip. There should also be plenty of migrating raptors, gulls, and other birds to fill out the card. We'll bird the lower reaches of Alum Creek Reservoir up to Berlin Station Road, then sweep over to the north end of Hoover Reservoir and Oxbow Island. Meet in the parking lot of the Westerville Municipal Building on North Cleveland Ave. Come dressed for unpredictable weather, and bring a snack to keep your energy up. *For more information, contact Rob Thorn at (614) 471-3051 or [robthorn@earthlink.net](mailto:robthorn@earthlink.net).*

### **Spring along the Scioto**

*Saturday April 9, 8 a.m.*

**Leader:** Rob Thorn

**Skill level:** All

Spring will be starting to erupt as we look for waterfowl, hawks, and early landbird migrants along the lower Scioto. The first waves of landbird migrants should be overlapping the last waves of migrant waterfowl as we journey along Columbus' main migrant corridor, so shake off those winter cobwebs and dust off those field guides. We'll hike around the Whittier peninsula, then journey to several nearby parks and ponds to look for hidden migrants. Meet at the parking area in the South Scioto boat launch. *For more information, contact Rob Thorn at (614) 471-3051 or [robthorn@earthlink.net](mailto:robthorn@earthlink.net).*

### **Farm Walk**

*April (Date and time TBD)*

**Leader:** Bob and Jane Evans

**Skill level:** All

*New!* Watch for more information about a delightful wandering around the Valhalla Acres Fiber Farm owned by Bob and Jane Evans in Muskingum County.

### **Avid Birders Field trips**

Go to <http://www.columbusaudubon.org/avids/avids.html> for more information.

### **Work trips**

Work trips provide an opportunity for members to learn a new skill while communing with nature. These trips provide opportunities to see areas in the state's nature preserves that the public does not often see. Participants get to go off trail to tour and learn about the area they will be helping to preserve with the preserve manager, who is often the trip leader on these outings. Tools and transportation are provided to adults at no cost. If a member chooses to bring their children, they must provide their own transportation.

*Continued on page 8*

## Your Bird Reports

By John Arnfield

We have two month's-worth of reports to cover here owing to the abbreviated nature of the last newsletter. Back in early November, Lynn Singleton observed Pine Siskins on thistle feeders at her home on North Broadway on more than one occasion. More recently, siskins showed up at the feeding station of Lucy and Jeff Caswell in the Webster Park area.

These delightful finches are somewhat nomadic and have been observed at other locations in central Ohio this year. Keep your niger tubes filled and keep an eye out for a streaky bird with a slender pointed bill and yellow wing markings, often flocking with American Goldfinches.

Lynn's yard also yielded a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in October and boasts a regular Red-shouldered Hawk. Also in Clintonville, Holly Pugh observed a Red-bellied Nuthatch at the end of November, enjoying the suet and seed at her feeders, and early Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows.

More on bird feeding: in the frigid weather just prior to Christmas, seed thrown casually on the snow and ice outside your recorder's apartment window at Olentangy Village yielded large mixed flocks of White-throated, White-crowned, Song and American Tree Sparrows, along with Dark-eyed Juncos, Northern Cardinals, House Finches, American Goldfinches and Common Grackles.

The flock disappeared periodically into shrubbery in the adjacent ravine as a Cooper's Hawk cruised the neighborhood. On Dec. 28, Paul Graham had a Northern Flicker on his peanut feeder outside the kitchen window of his Worthington home.

Now for the bigger birds seen at places other than feeders: Jenny Bowman reported a Bald Eagle at Indian Village Camp near Griggs Dam on Dec. 20.

An immature Tundra (Whistling) Swan showed up in a small pond in Sue Van Fossen's back yard, among the domestic ducks and Canada Geese, on Christmas Eve, but only remained for half an hour. Sue reports this was "quite a surprise": these birds breed in the subarctic and migrate through Ohio each year but are not common away from the Lake Erie shore.

Finally, a rare (for central Ohio) White-winged Scoter below Hoover Dam brought in the New Year for central Ohio birders and became my "official" first bird of 2005. ("Official" means that I studiously avoided looking at any other avifauna on my drive to the dam!) If you have bird sightings that you would like to share with readers of this newsletter, send your reports to [bird\\_reports@columbusaudubon.org](mailto:bird_reports@columbusaudubon.org) or phone them in to the Columbus Audubon phone line at 740-549-0333. As always, please give your name and the date and location of your sighting. As always, good birding!

### **Entertainment Book sale successful**

Audubon's annual holiday fund-raiser was once again a great success. 207 Entertainment Books books were sold raising \$1242 for Columbus Audubon. Many thanks are due to our retail partners: Accent on Wild Birds, Better Earth, Backyard Experience, Wild Bird Supplies & Gifts, Wild Birds Unlimited Riverside, Wild Birds Unlimited East, Wild Birds Unlimited Westerville and the Wild Bird Center of Dublin. We also thank Dave Horn for doing all the behind-the-scenes running around and organizing required to make the sale a success. Proceeds from the sale go toward supporting our education programs.

# The Great Backyard Bird Count is back!

8th annual count needs YOU to go out and count birds in America's great backyard

During the weekend of Feb. 18 through 21, people across the North American continent are encouraged to count the birds in their backyards and report them over the Internet, as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), one of the world's largest volunteer efforts of its kind. In addition to its value as a research study, the GBBC allows people of all ages and backgrounds to celebrate birds and provide vital information about North America's birds.

This is the eighth year of the popular event, developed and managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society, with sponsorship from Wild Birds Unlimited store owners. This year's theme, "North America's Great Backyard," was chosen as a way to celebrate the beauty of birds found across the continent. People are encouraged to enjoy the birds around them by going out into the "Great Backyard" during any or all of the count days and keeping track of the highest numbers of each bird species they see. People then report their sightings over the Internet at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc).

"We call it the Great Backyard Bird Count to make the point that anyone can participate," says John Fitzpatrick, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. "But really, a 'backyard' can be anywhere you happen to be, a schoolyard, a local park, the balcony of a high rise apartment, a wildlife refuge. No matter where you go in this 'Great Backyard,' you're almost certain to find birds in all their beauty. By participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count, you can help researchers better understand bird population numbers and distribution across the continent."

An important part of North America's Great Backyard is the 730 million acres of land (around one-third of the land area of the United States) held in trust by federal agencies. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Parks Service, Department of Defense, and Bureau of Reclamation are among the stewards of lands that support significant populations of wild birds. For this year's Great Backyard Bird Count, Cornell and Audubon, along with these federal agencies, are encouraging families and individuals to visit their local national wildlife refuge, national forest, national park, and other federal wild lands, in addition to reporting the birds they see in their own backyard.

"In addition to counting the birds in your own backyard, this remarkable event gives you the opportunity to visit some of our most special places and wild lands," says Bob Perciasepe, Audubon's chief operating officer. "In this way, the Great Backyard Bird Count reminds us that North America's birds consider the whole continent to be one great big backyard; and in a

## 2004 GBBC statistics:

Total checklists submitted: 42,509

Total species observed: 554

Total individual birds counted: 4,305,109

sense, it is our backyard as well."

The Great Backyard Bird Count helps everyone prepare for their trip to the backyard, whether they choose to watch birds only around their home or make the effort to see which birds are using public lands. The web site is full of tips of all kinds, including information on bird feeding; how to use binoculars; how to make your yard bird-friendly; and how to identify birds, especially those tricky, similar-looking species. There are even tips on how to be a bird-friendly family.

"Kids are the future caretakers of the environment upon which we all depend," says Fitzpatrick. "The Great Backyard Bird Count is a terrific way to nurture their inborn curiosity about birds and nature." Educators and parents alike will find the bibliography, vocabulary, and geography sections useful and handy, and there are suggestions on how to conduct the count with groups of children.

Researchers hope that by learning more about the birds and habitats in their own backyards, families will decide to become part of Project FeederWatch, a winterlong survey of birds that visit feeders. FeederWatch data have been instrumental in our scientific analyses of winter finch movements and Varied Thrush cycles, and have even helped researchers discover a new avian disease, mycoplasmal conjunctivitis, or House Finch eye disease. These findings were possible thanks to dedicated FeederWatchers.

"Taking part in the Great Backyard Bird Count takes as little or as much time as participants wish," said Audubon's director of citizen science Paul Green. "The important thing is to just take part, count for the birds, and enjoy North America's Great Backyard."

Instructions for participating can be found at [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc). There's no fee or registration. Those who would like to participate but who aren't online can try their local library, and many Wild Birds Unlimited store owners who are online will be accepting observations made by their customers. Libraries, businesses, nature clubs, Scout troops, and other community organizations interested in promoting the GBBC or getting involved can contact the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at 800- 843-2473 or the National Audubon Society at [citizenscience@audubon.org](mailto:citizenscience@audubon.org) or (215) 355-9588, Ext 16.

-From [www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc).

## Coming up

*Continued from page 7*

For both trips listed below meet at building E at Ohio Department Natural Resources Complex, 1889 Fountain Square (off Morse Road). For details, call Sharon Treaster at (614) 292-1395.

### Building Bonds at Blackhand Gorge

Saturday February 5, 7:45 a.m.

Leader: Greg Seymour

Visit this geologically spectacular gorge in Licking County and assist east central preserve manager Greg Seymour in constructing a 30-to-40-foot fence along the remnants of the Ohio-Erie Canal. The geologic features are strikingly visible during this leafless

season. Call Roger Barber (614) 265-6467 to sign up and determine tool requirements.

### Treading prehistoric landforms

Saturday March 5, 2005 7:45 a.m.

Leader: Herb Lean

Join Herb Lean, western district preserve manager, at the sinuous Siegenthaler-Kaestner esker in Champaign County. Volunteers will remove brush from the south esker refining the glacial landform for visitor observation. Eskers, kames, an outwash valley and several kettle ponds created during the Wisconsinan glacier (11,000 - 25,000 years ago) dot the area. The rolling topography provides excellent vistas of these glacial influenced landforms. Call Roger Barber (614) 265-6467 (DNA&P worktrip coordinator) by noon Feb. 28 to sign up, reserve space for transportation and determine tool requirements.



# Creature feature: Northern Cardinal

*Continued from page 1*

‘whirrrrr’. Adding to their charm is that cardinals start singing early in the Spring, often starting in March or early April. They also are one of the first birds to sing in the morning chorus. As reported by many early-risers, cardinals around houses start singing before sunrise for much of the Spring. We’ve had such a cardinal around our house for several years now who favors a perch a little too close to our bedroom window.

**Survival Strategies.** Cardinals are one of the few wild birds in Ohio that are adapting well to human habitats. Almost any walk through a Columbus neighborhood will produce many cardinals, in all but the most extremely urban neighborhoods. How do they do it? One helpful feature is that they’re not picky about what they eat. Cardinals’ large strong beaks allow them to break open the toughest seeds or buds, but they will also eat a wide variety of insects and fruits. Several guidebooks list in excess of 60 different food items for cardinals and the truth is likely broader than that. There’s an advantage to having those large beaks. A corollary to this is that cardinals can give a pretty good defensive nip to would-be attackers or handlers. Bird banders are especially cognizant of this, and most long-time banders have their share of cardinal ‘horror-stories’ along with the bite scars to verify them.

Another adaptable feature of cardinals is that they’re fast and prolific nesters. Cardinals begin nesting in March-April and don’t quit until August, usually producing 2-3 broods and sometimes more. Each consists of 2-5 eggs, and it only takes two weeks of incubation and another 10-12 days of feeding before the young fledge. Cardinal nests are nothing fancy, either; they’re sturdy cups fastened into the crotch of a bush, usually between 2-to-8-feet off the ground. Add in the fact that cardinals don’t migrate, so they know their territories and their mates intimately, and you have the recipe for ‘fledgling factories’. This is probably good, given the large numbers of nests parasitized by cowbirds and juveniles that fall prey to cats, squirrels, raccoons, and Cooper’s hawks. The perils of suburban neighborhoods for young cardinals are legion.

Finally, though, there appears to be an emerging bond between cardinals and humans. It’s more than that they hang around our yards. They seem able to learn our peculiarities. There are loads of reports, both anecdotal and scientific, of cardinals that know where to look for food around houses or ‘calling out’ humans to fill feeders. They nest in our hedges and rather than flush in our presence (like other birds) they often ‘freeze’ on the nest. Even more reports show that cardinals



Male Northern Cardinal.

teach their young how to forage at different feeders and how to be careful and comfortable around human yards. They’ve progressed along much the same path as House Sparrows and Rock Doves, but have done so in just 400-500 years. It would be fascinating to see what the next few centuries bring in this relationship.

In central Ohio, cardinals are ubiquitous virtually everywhere, even in winter, as befits our state bird. One of my fondest cardinal memories is a bleary Christmas Bird Count years ago, driving around Gahanna and Jefferson Township with the Columbus compiler CeCe Johnson.

Few birds were out on this snowy overcast day other than cardinals, but they more than made up for the weather and lack of birds, adding bright red accents to the most somber winter scenes. Perhaps because of the sere landscape, cardinals always seem at their brightest in the winter. Especially look for them around feeders, particularly those that contain large sunflower seeds or cracked corn. Feeders at many Metro Parks are excellent places to see them; I’ve had particular luck at the feeders around the nature centers at Blacklick and Blendon Woods, where cardinal numbers can reach into the 20s-30s, and occasionally more. But almost any backyard feeder is bound to attract some.

*The Columbus Dispatch* nature-writer Jim Fry has his readers make a feeder census for cardinals every January that is always interesting in the numbers of birds it uncovers.

But you don’t need an official census to enjoy these birds. Just look out at your feeders, and watch as another generation of cardinals learns to be a little more clever and resilient around our yards and homes.

## 101 class schedule

Columbus Audubon’s 101 classes are free and open to the public and there is no need to register unless otherwise stated in the class description.

### Back by popular request: Astronomy 101 Series

*Wednesdays, April 6, 13 and 20 from 7-10 p.m.*

**Leader:** Jay Young

Jay has done a terrific job of teaching and motivating amateur astronomers the many aspects of observing the night skies. Each session will involve classroom and outdoor viewing time. Classes are designed for beginners and are guaranteed to leave you inspired and motivated to learn more of the wonders overhead. Classes will be held at Ohio Wildlife Center’s Cook Road site. You will receive a syllabus through email or snail mail

before the class begins.

You must register for the series, which has space for 25 participants, by contacting Jay Young at (614) 251-4565 or [young2@ohiodominican.edu](mailto:young2@ohiodominican.edu).

### Other April 101 classes:

Thursday April 7, Early Migrants held at 7p.m. at Highbanks Metro Park Nature Center.

Thursday April 21, Warblers 101 held at 7p.m. at Highbanks Metro Park Nature Center.

## Memberships

Memberships in Audubon and Columbus Audubon and gift memberships are available through

### Audubon Membership

Includes membership in the national organization and Columbus Audubon; includes 4 issues of Audubon magazine and 5 issues of the chapter newsletter, local activities, and when submitted with our chapter code helps fund our programs. The rates below are available to NEW subscribers.

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## Columbus Audubon

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**Officers:** President: Dave Horn, 262-0312  
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Newsletter and Website Editor: Stefanie Hauck,  
(740) 972-1680  
Treasurer: John Wilson, 481-8872

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Conservation: Dave Horn, 262-0312  
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Calamus Committee: Kylene Kruse, 262-0375  
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